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*UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME*

BY

MRS. COWDEN CLARKE,

**THE GIRLHOOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES.**

—  
**SECOND SERIES.**  
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CONTAINING THE FOLLOWING TALES:

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THE  
GIRLHOOD  
OF  
SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES;

IN  
A SERIES OF TALES

BY  
MARY COWDEN CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF THE CONCORDANCE TO SHAKESPEARE.

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FIRST SERIES.

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NEW YORK  
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
182 FIFTH AVENUE  
1878

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## P R E F A C E .

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If ever Preface were especially needful, it is surely so in the present instance, to state an explanatory word concerning the design of the work, and an exculpatory word touching the choice of its subject.

The design has been, to trace the probable antecedents in the history of some of Shakespeare's women; to imagine the possible circumstances and influences of scene, event, and associate, surrounding the infant life of his heroines, which might have conduced to originate and foster those germs of character recognized in their maturity, as by him developed; to conjecture what might have been the first imperfect dawnings of that which he has shown us in the meridian blaze of perfection: and it was believed that such a design would combine much matter of interesting speculation, afford scope for pleasant fancy, and be productive of entertainment in the various narratives.

Although little or no attempt will be found in these tales to give pictures of the times in which their chief actors may be supposed to have lived, yet it is hoped that no gross violation of probability in period, scene, or custom, has been committed. The development of character, not of history, has been the intention. In the case of the early historic personage who figures in these biographic tales—Lady Macbeth—names and facts have been used; but with as little regard to their strict place in history, as was paid by the poet himself, who took the story from the old chronicles, and modelled it after his own fashion.

If it be borne in mind that all *climax* in incident and sentiment was to be carefully avoided throughout these stories,—inasmuch as they are

merely preliminaries to catastrophes already ordained,—the obstacles in the way of giving them startling features of romance will be understood. The aim has been to invent such adventures as might be supposed to color the future lives; to place the heroines in such situations as should naturally lead up to, and account for, the known conclusion of their subsequent confirmed character and after-fate; in short, to invest each story with consistent and *appropriate* interest.

I would also remind my indulgent readers (and may mine be such!), when they find me venturing to make Shakespeare's people act and speak, that here, his women are in their *girlhood*,—these are their "sallet days," when they are "green in judgment,"—immature,—but the opening buds of the future "bright consummate flowers" which he has given to us in immortal bloom.

My exculpatory word—my word in extenuation—is this. I beseech my readers to believe that love, not presumption, prompted the subject of this series of stories:—

Not mine the sweetness or the skill,  
 But mine the love that will not tire;  
 And, born of love, the vague desire  
 That spurs an imitative will.

"*In Memoriam.*"

Shakespeare himself is my voucher that

Never any thing can be amiss  
 When simpleness and duty tender it;  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 And what poor duty cannot do,  
 Noble respect takes it in might, not merit.

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**PORTIA; THE HEIRESS OF BILMONT.**



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TALE I

PORTIA, THE HEIRESS OF BELMONT.

---

"If two gods should play some heavenly match,  
And on the wager lay two earthly women,  
And Portia one, there must be something else  
Pawn'd with the other; for the poor world  
Hath not her fellow."

*Merchant of Venice.*

---

IN the University of Padua were, once upon a time, two fellow-students, who entertained for each other a more than usually lively regard. This regard seemed to grow out of a peculiar sympathy of feeling, which sometimes exists between two lads of like age, though of dissimilar conditions; for one of these students was lively, ardent, and prosperous, while the other was calm, reserved, and very poor. But though Guido di Belmonte revelled in every good gift of fortune,—was the son of a rich Italian Count, and the indulged heir of a fond father, yet his prosperity, instead of injuring his nature and rendering him imperious and selfish, did but make him frank and generous, with a strong capability of enjoyment; while Bellario, the other student, the less favored of fortune,—being the child of a retired officer, possessed of little but his honorably acquired wounds and an unblemished name,—found cheerfulness in a sedate, reflective habit of mind, hope in the thought of achieving renown in the future employment of his talents, and enjoyment in the present epoch of study and intellectual culture. Thus it came that these two young men, each earnest in his enjoyment of

student-life, found sympathy exist between them, attachment arise and strengthen, and a warmth of friendship ensue, which burnt with a steady and kindly glow while life endured.

During this youthful period of his life, there was one point on which Bellario's well-ordered mind and careful study did not lead him to a true wisdom. They might have taught him that poverty was no shame, that the practice of frugality and self-denial was a virtue rather than a blemish in a young man's conduct, and that it was due to the nobility of friendship to have no reserves upon such matters; but the sensitive pride of the young collegian shrank from the avowal of his slender means, and the secrets of his penurious dwelling were coyly guarded from all eyes.

His friend Guido, in the plenitude of his own resources, had no suspicion of the real motive that held his fellow-student silent upon all that referred to home topics, and domestic relations; and it was rather from a desire to enjoy Bellario's society during the present season of holiday and relaxation, that he always invited him to spend the vacations at his father's seat at Belmont, than from any idea that he was thus procuring his friend an indulgence in luxury and refined entertainment, which he could never otherwise have an opportunity of enjoying. Delightful were the intervals thus spent together by the two young men. The sense of entire leisure, rendered doubly grateful by previous labor; the freedom of action and open-air sports, after a long course of sedentary pursuits; the repose of mind in contrast with its late strained exertion, —all these enjoyed amidst a scene of rural beauty, voluptuous retirement, and tasteful magnificence, pervading the domain and household of a wealthy nobleman, conspired to make these vacations seasons of unalloyed gratification to our two students. Arm-in-arm they would saunter up and down the avenue of lordly Belmont, whiling many an hour in eager converse. Here, beneath the cool umbrage of those thick-spreading trees, secure from the noontide blaze of even an Italian sun, they would discourse pleasantly of their books, their courses of study past and to come, their treasured lore, their increasing thirst for knowledge with every freshly-acquired draught, their present zest in seeking, their

future hope of profit. Here, too, in the scarce less radiant splendor of an Italian moonlight, would they speak confidently of heart-aspirations, of high-reaching schemes for distinguished manhood, virtuous life, rational happiness, and trusted immortality. The young Count, Guido, would dilate, in all the gay tenderness of an uncorrupted heart, upon the pure joys he proposed to himself, when he should at some future day bring a fair bride to share with him the beauties of his broad domain; when he should dwell in loving communion with a womanly heart; when he should emulate her in fostering kindness to the neighboring poor; when they should partake in the gentle duties of tending the helpless infancy, and implanting goodly principles in the youthful breasts of their offspring; and when together they should live and die in sweet mutual help.

And in his turn, Bellario would playfully declare that he would live and die a bachelor, wooing and wedding no other bride than Justice, who was his professed mistress. That he meant to win honor and renown at the bar, and that he intended to make his name famous among the lawyers of his time. That such a celebrity as he aimed at, was only to be attained by the devotion of a life-long assiduity to his task, and that he therefore must early resolve upon excluding all claims of love upon his thoughts, dedicating them wholly and undividedly to ambition.

Time wore on; the old Count of Belmont died, and young Guido inherited the paternal estate. Yet still he lingered at the University, unwilling to quit the sweets of study, and the associations of boyhood, or to curtail the season of youth by assuming the prerogative of manhood. In the academic shades of learned Padua he still tarried, well pleased to remain constantly with his friend Bellario, who studied unremittingly to qualify himself for his intended profession.

Shortly after the time when Guido di Belmonte wore mourning for his father, Bellario's suit bore sable marks that he also had to deplore the loss of some relation; but as he alluded in no way to the nature of his bereavement, so no allusion to the subject was ever made by his fellow-students; not even by his friend, who was accustomed to observe silence on those points on which Bellario did not speak first. There

was frank communion between the young men upon most themes of pleasant converse ; but, as before remarked, personal concerns and home relations were never referred to by the young law-student, being matter of his most scrupulous and proud reserve.

At length a season of vacation occurred, when, upon the young Count's usual invitation to Bellario, that he should accompany him to Belmont, the friend refused ; without, however, alleging any reason for this refusal beyond the bare fact of its being out of his power to indulge himself with the pleasure of going, on this occasion.

"But why not, caro mio !" urged Guido ; "you have surely no engagements so imperative as to interfere with the one so long understood between us,—that you should spend every vacation at Belmont, beautiful Belmont ; now all my own, but which will scarce seem so without my friend to share its beauties with me."

Bellario wrung his hand gratefully, for all reply, merely repeating—"I cannot ; do not urge me."

"But I must, I will. How is it that I, the lord of Belmont, am to be thwarted in my dearest wish ? Come, good Signor Avvocato, give me an infinity of reasons *why* you 'cannot.' Let us have some of your special pleading here, to satisfy me. I know not *why* I should be contented with your sovereign 'cannot' without farther explanation, any more than *why* you are prevented from coming to Belmont when we both wish it. Or do we indeed both wish it !" added he, smiling in his friend's face ; "are you tired of Belmont ? Confess, if you are ; and we will exchange the shady avenue and solitary terrace of our country life, for the gay revelry of Venice—her masques, her feastings, her torch-light merry-making."

Bellario met his friend's look with one as frank as his own ;—"Belmont is to me, as it has ever been—the scene of my best enjoyment. The disappointment is as great to me—nay, far greater—than it can be to you, my generous friend ; be assured, I need no urging, when my own desire to be with you pleads so powerfully ; but in this case, you yourself would be the first to——" then checking himself, he briefly added, "once more, I repeat ; believe me, I cannot."

"In *this* case!" quickly repeated Guido; in his eagerness forgetting how nearly he was transgressing the bounds of discretion in thus catechising his friend beyond what even such friendship as theirs might warrant:—"In *this* case? It is a point of honor, then! A quarrel? A duel?" But seeing Bellario shake his head, with a smile at his ardent questioning, he ran on with:—"No, no, of course not; had it been so, you would have had me for your second—but how then? No friend has so good a right as myself to engross your company, and to no friend will I yield you—mind, to no— But stay;" added he, interrupting himself, as a sudden thought struck him: "though to no friend, no man, can I give you up, yet it may be that——"

He stopped; and laying his hand on his friend's sleeve, laughed out—"Ah ah! Signor Avvocato, fairly caught! So then the stern anchorite, the bachelor student, the devoted bridegroom of the law, the destined spouse of Justice, is actually the thrall of some fair lady; and it is a mortal woman, after all, who has these claims upon your time, and prevents your going with me to Belmont. I cry you mercy, caro mio!"

Bellario's face flushed crimson to his very brow. He no longer met his friend's look as before, yet he still smiled, though gravely; and he grasped Guido's hand in a firm conclusive manner, as if he would close all further discussion. "Be satisfied, dear friend; it may not be."

Guido di Belmonte warmly returned the pressure; and his generous, frank nature permitted no wounded feeling at his friend's reserve, to mingle with the regret with which he now withdrew his suit, and bade him adieu until they should meet again next college term. But on the following morning, while pursuing his solitary way towards Belmont, accompanied solely by a faithful attendant, who followed him on horseback, he could not help giving way to a feeling of mortification akin to anger, at being deprived of the company of his beloved friend Bellario on a journey which had hitherto been so fruitful a source of delight to them both.

"It is some whim, some fancied necessity, that thus detains him," murmured the young Count to himself, as he rode onward; "Bellario

is so scrupulous when he conceives some point of right to be in question, that he is ever ready to sacrifice inclination to duty. I know his unselfish heart, and I'll be bound it is some vexatious claim or other upon his time and aid, which is thus permitted to interfere with our pleasant holiday! For after all, though he did change color at my words, I do not believe it was a woman that he stays for. Had he yielded his thoughts to love, and forsworn law, he could not have kept so great a revolution in his heart a secret from his friend Guido. No, he is still constant to his old adoration for musty precedents, yellow shrivelled parchments, and time-honored precepts of legislation, over which he will sit wrapt in enamored contemplation, hour by hour, forgetful of all this bright world contains. I'll wager now, that it is in order to waste no hour apart from the prosecution of this bewitching pursuit, that he has thought it right to deny himself and me this holiday. He dropped some words, not long since, to the effect that his progress did not keep pace with his desires. How came I to forget this, when I besought him yesterday? I did not urge him with sufficient warmth. I have a great mind to turn back, and see if I cannot plead with better effect. He must not, ought not to shut himself up during this charming time. He will be ill, or moped to death, with his absurd scruples and notions. Duty, indeed! It is his duty to enjoy his holiday—to come and pay reasonable homage to all-bounteous nature, to revel in her beauteous gifts, to inhale the pure free air, to bask in the glorious sunshine, to ride forth joyously—to come with me to Belmont, in short!—I will return, and entreat him once more to do himself and me that right!”

As he concluded his reverie, Guido turned his horse's head in the direction whence he had just come; but he now proceeded at a very different pace from the one which he had previously allowed the steed to take. Then it had been slow, and accordant with the rider's mind, all unwilling to pursue his solitary journey; now it was alert, eager, and bounding forward on the way to Padua—to his friend Bellario.

On reaching the University, he hastily dismounted, throwing the rein to his attendant, bidding him wait, while he went to seek one of the heads of the college, who might inform him where to seek his fel-

low-student, who by this time he knew would have returned home. The professor mused a moment, when the young nobleman made the inquiry; but presently said:—"Bellario has always made a secret of his abode, praying me not to let it be generally known; but this prohibition could not be meant to extend to you, Count Guido, who are, I know, his bosom friend. It is in the Strada del Popolo," added he, indicating a mean suburban street, leading out of the city, and describing accurately the house where Bellario dwelt. The young man paid little heed to the former portion of the professor's speech, in his eagerness to learn the main point, the direction of his friend's dwelling-place; having obtained which, he took a hasty leave, and set forth on his search, bidding his attendant, Balthazar, saddle another horse, and bring it round with his own, to a certain spot where he would meet him, and proceed thence to Belmont once more, in company with his friend, whose acquiescence in the plan he now felt confident he should gain. So sanguine is youth; so ardent in affection was Guido di Belmonte.

He readily found his way to the Strada del Popolo, and as readily distinguished the house indicated to him by the professor. He was slightly struck by its lowly appearance, but no otherwise than as unworthy to contain so noble a being as his friend, and merely as an additional reason for inducing him to exchange its unattractive precincts for a more congenial sojourn with himself at Belmont. He stepped forward to put aside the dark heavy curtain, which hung in the doorway, according to Italian custom, to exclude the noontide heat; but he paused on the threshold, struck with what he beheld. He saw his friend seated at a table strewn with books and papers, one of which he held in his hand, while over the back of his chair leaned a young girl of exquisite beauty; who, with one arm around Bellario's neck, in the other hand held a pen, with the feather of which she traced the lines on the paper he held, while her cheek closely touched that of the young law-student, as they together scanned the document. So engrossed were they with its perusal, that no idea of Guido's presence reached them; and so absorbed was he in the contemplation of this unexpected vision, that he allowed some minutes to elapse ere he became conscious of his intrusion,



or made any movement to announce his being there. Many conflicting feelings rushed through his heart as he stood gazing; the paramount one of which was admiration for the surpassing loveliness of the young girl whom he found in such close companionship with his friend. The arm which lay across Bellario's shoulders, was white and polished, with a rounded grace of outline that would have charmed a sculptor; the slender waist and bended figure were so harmoniously proportioned, that the garment of humblest stuff which she wore could nowise conceal their native elegance of beauty; the head was classically shaped, and compactly braided with smooth raven tresses, surmounting a brow lustrous with simple purity and intellectual dignity; while the face that so lovingly neighbored that of Bellario, could boast not only delicately-formed features, but an expression radiant with gentle goodness.

Amid the confusion of thoughts which held the young Count motionless, was one which prompted him to wonder how those downcast eyes,—now veiled with their rich lashes as they remained bent upon the paper,—would look when they were raised; and to speculate upon the appeal those lips would make when parted in speech, even now so eloquent in their rosy silence.

He was startled from his contemplation by the fulfilment of his wish. The eyes were suddenly raised; but he scarcely beheld their soft beauty, ere the look of surprise they wore recalled him to a sense of his embarrassing position as an unwarranted intruder.

The slight ejaculation of amazement that escaped her lips as she beheld the stranger, caused Bellario to look up also, and in another instant the fellow-students stood confronting each other with mutual confusion and embarrassment.

Bellario's cheek glowed partly from surprise, partly from the stings of his old proud sensitiveness on the score of his poverty, now so completely and unexpectedly betrayed to the eyes of his friend, and he stood without power to utter a word; while Guido, in the perplexity of contending emotions, muttered a few half-articulate expressions of having returned to ask for some book he had forgotten, a few more of apology for having unwittingly infringed their privacy, and then hastily withdrew.

He hurried to the spot where he had appointed Balthazar to meet him; and flinging himself on horseback, he pursued his way to Belmont in a perturbation of mind he had rarely before experienced.

His ardent nature suffered much beneath the check its affections had received. His generosity would not suffer him to reflect upon his friend for having withheld this secret from him; but a sense of disappointment and chilled hope keenly beset him, and a painful surmise of his own unworthiness to inspire Bellario with as strong an attachment as his own, agitated his mind, and took the place of the blessed unmis-trustful serenity of friendship which had till now formed his chief happiness.

“He is so infinitely my superior,” thought Guido, in the more than candor of a generous heart, ever ready to exalt the beloved object even at the expense of self-humiliation and blame, “that it is perhaps presumptuous to hope he could share his every thought with me, as I would with him. Entire confidence subsists between congenial minds—and I know well how unequal ours are in native power and intellectual wealth. But a loving appreciation of his high qualities might have substituted my own deficiency in the like endowments; and my zeal should have supplied my lack of merit. Had he but frankly told me that he was married! That he could not have his new-made wife to come with me to Belmont! How readily would my sympathy for him have admitted the plea! How ungrudgingly should I then have yielded his society! How my interest in his happiness would have prompted me to rejoice in this addition to his felicity—to congratulate him on this new joy! Had he but told me that he was married!”

This last aspiration was still the burthen of his thought. It haunted him with its perpetual recurrence, as he wandered along beneath the trees of that avenue where he had spent so many happy hours with his friend. Until at length the oft-recurring idea was followed by another—a question—that smote upon his heart strangely. “Had he indeed told me that he was married to that fair creature!—How then? Would this intelligence have really given me content? Could I have yielded my friend joyfully to her—she to him? Did not rather the few moments

in which I beheld her, serve but to fill me with unwonted emotion, to the nigh forgetfulness of my friend, and my errand to him ? Might not the too frequent contemplation of her beauty, and a near acquaintance with the gentle qualities that doubtless consort with such outward perfection, end by inspiring me with feelings no less treacherous to friendship, than destructive to my own peace ? Perhaps after all I should rejoice rather than regret that Bellario did not impart to me the existence of this tie, or own that wedded love had had power to win him from his old vows of lawyerly celibacy and devoted friendship. So that his happiness is secured, why should I repine ? ”

In such unselfish thoughts as these, did Guido di Belmonte seek to console himself for the interruption his course of friendship had sustained ; and it is not to be doubted but that he derived better comfort from such a train of reflection, than he could have done from an indulgence in resentment or unworthy suspicion. A noble heart finds no relief in reproach ; no solace in distrust or injurious belief of those it loves. And thus the impulses of a generous mind act in liberal reversion ; like the earth's moisture distilled by genial warmth, they redescend in wholesome showers, invigorating and refreshing the soil whence they originally emanate.

Not many hours had elapsed since the young Count's arrival at Belmont ; and he was still lingering in the avenue, wooing a sense of returning calm, that was beginning to steal over him, in place of his late agitation, when he was awakened from his reverie by a hasty footstep, and in a few moments more he found himself clasped in the arms of his friend.

“ Bellario ! ” he exclaimed in amazement.

“ Yes, Bellario ; ” returned the young law-student, “ Bellario, your unworthy friend, come to avow his error, and to solicit indulgence.”

He then made confession of his weakness. He owned how he had always shrunk from a betrayal of his poverty ; the foolish pride this had engendered ; the habit of reserve it had induced, so unjust to warmth of friendship such as theirs ; and the apparent unkindness it had beguiled him into, by the late refusal to accompany his friend to Belmont during the vacation.

"Any other but yourself, my dear Guido, might have taken offence at so pertinacious a refusal from so unexplained a cause. But knowing your generosity of character, I was sure that you yourself would be the first to yield the pleasure of our proposed holiday together, if you were aware that I gave up the indulgence, in order not to leave Portia in solitude. I overlook the circumstance, that the total ignorance of my home interests in which my own habitual reserve had suffered you to remain, did not admit of your sympathizing with the desire I have felt, ever since my father's death, of spending as much time as possible with her. It is lonely enough, poor thing, when I am at college; but my first vacation since his loss, I resolved should be devoted to her."

"You shall return to her at once! A horse shall be saddled to take you back to Padua immediately! I will not keep you another hour, my friend;" said the impatient Guido.

"I knew this would be your feeling," replied Bellario; "and yet my own folly might have occasioned me to lose the pleasure of hearing you express it. However, it is to Portia herself that I owe the present happiness of explanation. Her surprise this morning at your sudden appearance on our poor threshold, drew from me immediately after your abrupt departure, a full account of yourself, of the friendship that subsists between us, and the probable cause of your seeking me there. Her interest in the relation, her sympathy for your disappointment, and her admiration of your generosity in returning to seek the friend who by his want of frankness had risked offending you, opened my eyes to the dissimulation of my own conduct, and to the injustice into which I had been betrayed by the mere desire to keep a secret, which, after all, involved no shame or disgrace. Besides, the sudden revelation of a secret which we have long sedulously preserved, will sometimes at the same moment reveal to ourselves the real worthlessness of its tenure, and lead us to wonder how we could ever have attached importance to its preservation. And thus it was with me; I found myself amazed to think that I should have doubted for a moment whether the knowledge of our poverty could possibly diminish the warmth of your regard. I felt, too, that by the indulgence of my selfish pride in veiling from you

view the penury in which I lived, I at the same time withheld from you the pleasure of learning the sources of better happiness which that home has lately contained; and that, while I concealed from you the scantily-furnished dwelling, I also debarred you from knowing one who can make a palace of a hovel, a bower of bliss of a poor student's chamber—my dear and gentle Portia!

“Return to her, my friend; return to your lovely——” Poor Guido could not articulate the word wife, but he echoed her name—“your Portia!”

“But not till I can take back with me the assurance that I have not forfeited my friend's esteem. As I told you, it was Portia who occasioned my coming hither, for she would not let me rest until I had sought you, and expiated my past reserve by a full confession. She is tenacious of her brother's honor, I can tell you, and will not consent to Bellario's suffering an abatement of regard, even though his own conduct to his friend may have deserved so severe a penalty.”

“Your sister!” were the only words Guido could utter, in his amazement at finding the true identity of the beautiful girl whom he had taken for granted was his friend's bride.

“Portia—my sister. Let me return to her with the assurance that you have forgiven whatever pain my unexplained refusal may have given you; that you still hold me worthy of your esteem; that though you are content to give her my company, yet that we are as fast friends as ever.”

“For ever!” exclaimed Guido, ardently, as he threw himself into the arms of Bellario. “I will take you back to her myself! We return to Padua together!”

Then, springing up the steps of the terrace, which lay in front of the house, at the end of the avenue, he led his friend into the dining-saloon, where refreshment had been awaiting untouched and unthought of during the late tumult of the young Count's mind. Now, however, in his sudden joy, he felt the desire for food, and as he pledged his friend in wine, and urged him to eat, after his late journey, and before his coming one, he manifested by his own enjoyment of the good cheer before them how many hours had elapsed in fasting and in quietude.

Bellarïo felt the full force of this betrayal of his friend's previous suffering, and he inwardly resolved that no future reserve of his, should ever be permitted to risk estrangement, or to mar so perfect an attachment; while he gave himself up to the present delight of watching Guido's joy, and tasting with him the happiness of reconciliation.

The young Count's spirits rose high; he seemed incapable of remaining still, now and then starting up from table, giving orders to his attendants, and pacing up and down the apartment, as if action were a necessary relief to the ebullition of feeling within.

"Come, Bellario, one more cup to the health of the gentle being who has restored us to each other," he at length exclaimed, "and then we will set forth to Padua. I am impatient to be gone, impatient to be equal with her in the magnanimity of yielding you; impatient to relieve her sisterly suspense. Come, we shall find the coach awaiting us at the park gate, at the lower end of the avenue."

"Do we not ride as usual?" inquired Bellario.

"I have told them to prepare the coach, instead of saddling our horses," replied Guido; "for I have allowed myself to entertain a hope that we shall not have to stay long in Padua—that we shall even return to-night, and not alone."

"How mean you?" asked Bellario, smiling at the animated eagerness that shone in each feature of his friend's face; that danced in his eyes, and played in the flexure of his mouth.

"I mean, that I have formed the hope that your sister will be prevailed upon to accompany us back to Belmont, caro mio; and you must promise me to join your persuasion with mine to effect this. I shall think but poorly of il Signor Avvocato's eloquence in pleading, if we do not succeed."

"We will hear what the Counsel has to say on the other side;" answered Bellario. "Perhaps her prudence may suggest some obstacle to so sudden a scheme."

"But I do not admit her as Counsel against us," said Guido; "she shall be judge in this case."

"Then you consent to abide by her decision?" asked Bellario.

"Gladly," rejoined the young Count. "I have no hesitation in placing my cause in the hands of one, who——"

"You forget that you are now changing her character again from a Judge to that of an Advocate;" interrupted the young law-student, laughing.

"Well then,—I willingly refer my sentence to the judgment of one who has already given so generous an instance of consideration in my behalf, by sending me my friend," replied Guido.

"In betraying that there was originally a favorable leaning to one side, you impugn the strict uprightnes which ought to characterize a Judge," rejoined Bellario, "and thus invalidate the impartiality of the verdict you hope ultimately to obtain."

"So that the verdict be what I desire, I will commute for any amount of partiality to which it may be owing," said the young Count gayly; adding with a tender depth in his voice, which the gayety but half concealed, "the more I owe to the favor of my Judge, the more welcome will my hoped-for sentence be."

In such playful conversation did our two friends pass the time, until they reached the lowly dwelling in the Strada del Popolo. From its casement, the light of a lamp streamed forth, and showed Bellario that his sister was beguiling the time of his absence in copying for him. On alighting from the coach and entering the apartment, they accordingly found Portia seated at a table, busily engaged in writing; and as the rays of the lamp shed their reflection upon her glossy hair, and gently-inclined head, Guido thought she looked like the picture of some inspired sibyl irradiated by an intellectual glory, or halo of light.

The moment she perceived her brother, she arose, and flung herself into his arms to welcome him home. "Dear Bellario!" she exclaimed; then, perceiving his companion, she added in some surprise:—"Count Guido, too!" After a moment's modest pause, she thanked him in her own simple frank manner for thus proving how heartily he forgave the selfish brother and sister who wished to be together, regardless of the claims of friendship. "By permitting you to return to me

so soon, my Bellario, and by accompanying you home himself, your kind friend has indeed shown how nobly he can pardon an interference with his proposed pleasure," concluded she, turning to her brother.

"But I may still enjoy my proposed pleasure;" eagerly rejoined the young Count. "My holiday may yet be spent with far greater delight than even I had pictured to myself, when first I asked Bellario to share it with me."

He then, with his characteristic ardor, poured forth his petition that Portia would crown her former kindness in behalf of the friendship that subsisted between her brother and himself, by consenting to accompany them back to Belmont; that thus they need neither of them relinquish the society of Bellario, but, on the contrary, might enhance their respective pleasure by enjoying it in common. And when Portia, half yielding to his seductive arguments, offered a faint resistance by saying she ought to finish copying the paper she had in hand, he instantly overruled that plea with the reminder that her brother could now copy it for himself; that they could tumble whatever books and papers Bellario required into the coach, and take them to Belmont to be used at leisure.

Smiling at his impetuosity, and finding it more and more difficult to withstand his warmth of urgency, she looked appealingly at her brother, and said:—"If you do not think it too late, dear Bellario——"

Guido immediately burst in with a torrent of assurances that the evening was not far advanced—that the moonlight was as brilliant as noonday—that it was infinitely more agreeable travelling by night than in the heat of the sun—that it was but a two hours' drive to Belmont—that it was the pleasantest road in all Italy—that he had set his heart upon this little journey—that he was sure his friends would enjoy it as much as he should, and that he trusted they would not refuse so great a pleasure as it would be to them all.

The hearts of the brother and sister received almost as much delight in complying, as he felt in their compliance; and the three friends set



forth in all the happiness of youth and elastic spirits. These will derive pleasure from even every-day incidents, and commonplace occurrences; and truly, a moonlight drive, through a beautiful country, to a charming house, in the company of those we love best, at any period of life might be capable of inspiring enthusiastic enjoyment. What wonder, then, that Guido, Bellario, and Portia, thought they had never passed two hours so enchantingly, as those in the coach that took them to Belmont.

On arriving, they were received by an old lady, who acted somewhat in the capacity of housekeeper, but who had been no less a personage than companion, or duenna, to the late Countess di Belmonte, Guido's mother. This Madame Ursula was a most stately dame, who wore the stiffest of silks, held herself in the stiffest of attitudes, and entertained the stiffest of dragonian opinions. She was the ruling rigidity of the house—the tight hand over Casa Belmonte. From the late Countess, whose unaffected gentleness and easy suavity she chid as want of due regard to the dignity of her station, down to the female servants, whose sins of carelessness, idleness, boldness, or unthrift, she visited with the severest reprobation, all submitted to her sway, all trembled at her frown.

Strictly correct, even to austerity, in her own conduct, Madame Ursula could make no allowance for difference of temperament, admit of no excuse for a dereliction from duty. In her estimation, a fault was a sin; an error, a crime. She was sensitively alive to indecorum; and seemed almost to court impropriety, so anticipatively did she discern the very shadow of its approach. With her, the sight of smiles conveyed something of moral offence; gayety of speech was akin to depravity; and light-hearted merriment little short of abomination and wickedness. High spirits were, in her eyes, a heinous excess; laughter, an odious levity; and the mere fact of youth, a sort of vice in itself.

Madame Ursula was well-born, though the decayed fortunes of her family, and the sudden death of her parents, compelled her early to become a dependant. This circumstance she could never forget; and while it operated with the Count and Countess di Belmonte to make them treat her with the extreme of kindness, it urged her to take ad-

vantage of their toleration by indulging her pride of virtue and self-importance, until she became the imperious personage here described.

There was one individual, however, in this household, over whom the frowns of Madame Ursula failed in exercising their usual supremacy. The young Count Guido treated her with consideration, for the sake of her age, her misfortunes, her former attachment to his mother, and the services she had rendered, and still continued to render, in the family; for she was as conscientious in the discharge of her own duties, as she was exacting with regard to those of others: but he plainly showed that he thought the deference with which her opinions had been regarded was excessive, and that he was not inclined to observe the same obedience himself. He did not evince this by opposition, or the slightest discourtesy of any kind; he only let it be tacitly understood that his smiles were not to be controlled, his gayety not to be checked by any forbidding looks on her part, and she soon learned to curb all expression of reprobation, with the exception of a slight compression of the lips, and a little shrill hem, caught back, stifled, and swallowed up, as it were, ere it could reach his ears.

On the evening in question, when the young Count returned to Belmont, bringing with him Bellario and his sister, Madame Ursula received the young people with a lofty coldness intended to mark the disapprobation she felt at such a wild expedition as the moonlight drive, which wore rather the aspect of a juvenile frolic, than of a staid visit; but the pleasure and the novelty of the adventure occupied them wholly, and prevented their noting the old lady's frigid looks.

Neither did they perceive the supercilious glance she bestowed upon the plain attire of the young Count's guests, for it was almost immediately followed by a look of complacency at her own brocade; and a comforting reflection that she herself would never have dreamed of inviting persons to Belmont, whose dress bespoke their humble fortune, and whose gentle birth was no otherwise indicated than by their grace of person and elegance of demeanor.

"The Signorina Portia will doubtless like to retire early, after her journey;" said Guido, when they had partaken of a supper to which

gayety and pleasant conversation had given the air of a feast. "You, of course, took care to order the preparation of the chamber which I appointed for the lady's reception, Madame Ursula?"

"The blue chamber has been prepared, according to my lord's wishes," replied the stately dame. Then turning to one of the attendants, she added—"Rico, bid Lisetta come hither, that she may show the Signorina to her apartment."

The young Count, who had evidently expected that Madame Ursula herself would have paid his guest the respect of attending her to her room, rose hastily from his seat, saying:—"The Signorina's kind heart will excuse Madame from accompanying her; years claim the privilege of rest. I will myself show you and your sister whereabouts the rooms lie, Bellario."

Thus saying, Guido led his friends out, preceded by an attendant bearing a branch of wax-lights; leaving Madame Ursula with the vexatious consciousness that she had been the means of heightening the honor of Portia's escort, while her sense of propriety was outraged by the young Count wilfully playing groom of the chambers to guests of such evidently humble rank—one of them a female, too!

Her discomfiture vented itself in a shriller hem than usual, that quavered down into a groan, as she heard the gay voices of the trio echoing along the gallery that led from the saloon where she sat.

"That ungovernable young man will be more wild than ever, now he has those two foolish young persons to abet him in his ridiculous sallies of mirth," muttered the dame, as she sat starchy in her chair, still at the supper-table. "Very sad, very sad," added she, helping herself to a bumper of *Lachryma Christi*; "and the worst of these thoughtless gigglers, who chatter and laugh the whole of meal-time, is, that they totally neglect the duties of the table, and forget to see that one has one's glass filled as often as needful. The Count never perceived that I wished for more Montepulciano to-night at supper; I may as well take some now it is my favorite wine. Ah, very sad, very sad!" repeated she, touching the back of her chair with her perpendicular spine, which was the nearest approach to lounging in which she ever permitted herself to indulge.

"Sad indeed!" she ejaculated once more, with a virtuous sigh, as she set down the second empty glass, and looked again reprehensively towards the door through which the young Count and his friends had disappeared.

This kind of tacit superintendence and mute reproof maintained by Madame Ursula, during the visit of the young Count's guests, possessed a double advantage; it solaced her own conscientious notions of duennaship, and nowise interfered with the enjoyment of the young people.

Never had holiday been so full of delight for Guido as the present one; never had the period of vacation been so thoroughly enjoyed, or appeared to fleet away so rapidly. To the known and valued charms of Bellario's society, were now added the excitement and joy of each day discovering those contained in the character and person of his friend's sister. To mark her artless unspoiled simplicity, her native good sense, her warmth of heart, her modest deference to her brother's opinions, her high appreciation of his merits, her maidenly gentleness, yet unaffected ease, all united to a face and person of extreme beauty, now formed a daily source of study to the young nobleman, as new as it was interesting. Each unfolded page of Portia's mind revealed fresh wonders; he gazed on the attractive volume, and perused every lineament of this fair book, until its varied excellences seemed to comprise all the intelligence, all the fascination of his entire previous reading. What science could vie with a knowledge of those gentle thoughts? What learning outweigh the speaking earnestness of those persuasive eyes? What scholastic arguments exceed in eloquence the music of that soft voice? What erudition could exert so refining an influence as one of those appealing smiles? Or what store of acquirement be worthy of so zealous a toil and confer so glorious an empire, as the gain of that tender heart? There was a witchcraft in the present subject of the young student's contemplations, which seemed to absorb him wholly, and to cast into comparative disregard all other study, past or to come. He was like a man suddenly impressed with the belief that he has discovered a clue to the secret of transmuting metals; the absorbing pursuit withdraws him from all others, and henceforth alchemy is his engrossing thought, his sole study.

With characteristic ardor did Guido di Belmonte give himself up to the magic that enthralled him ; and the only discretion his enthusiasm knew, was in the refraining from any overt expression of his feelings, lest their too early or too eager avowal should dissolve the spell. He would not risk seeing the present ingenuous ease of her manner exchanged for conscious timidity. Portia now treated him as the intimate and cherished friend of her brother, and in that character, almost with the freedom and unrestraint of a second brother ; so Guido was well contented for the present to enjoy all the charm of frank communion which such a mode of treatment established between them. As a third in this pleasant friendship, therefore, the young girl joined in all their rambles through the park, visited their favorite haunts, beheld their most admired views, lingered in their choicest nooks and recesses, and not only accompanied them in their excursions, but showed by her active sympathy and earnest intelligence, that she enjoyed their conversation, shared in their aspirations, and partook of their enthusiasm. While the presence of Portia thus doubled and trebled all the previous delight that the two students had derived from these scenes, she herself tasted a pleasure she had never before known, and for the first time in her life, this hitherto solitary young creature might be said to learn the true happiness of existence. She had till lately lived in complete seclusion beneath her sole surviving parent's roof at Verona ; and it was only since the recent period of their father's death, that Bellario had brought her to Padua to share his humble dwelling.

Day after day the three friends wandered amid the woods and lawns of Belmont ; and unwitting time crept on.

One afternoon they had set forth to visit some ruins on a beautiful spot at the extreme verge of the estate, and the distance being farther than Guido had estimated, in his eagerness to take his friends thither, it came, that, on returning homeward, the shades of evening overtook them, ere they reached even the avenue that led to the house. The sudden darkness that succeeds to day, beneath an Italian sky, where there is short interval of deepening twilight, prevented the two young men from noting the palor that stole over the cheek of their companion, and

betrayed the fatigue that so long a walk had occasioned to a frame less calculated for exertion than theirs. Her bravery of heart, and ambition to prove herself a not unfitting companion, as well as a dread of the implied reproach to them if they discovered her fatigue, made her anxiously endeavor to conceal her lassitude by an effort to maintain her share in the animated conversation, which was as usual going on between them; but at length she involuntarily yielded to an overwhelming sense of weariness, and permitted herself to lapse into silence. Suddenly this was observed by Guido, who interrupted himself with an abrupt exclamation of self-reproach at the want of thought which had thus subjected his fair guest to so undue an exertion.

"We have been very thoughtless, I fear, Bellario;" said he; "or rather I have been culpably selfish to urge an expedition so far too long for her! No time allowed for repose, either! We were seated scarcely half an hour among the ruins! So long since our early meal, too! I neglected to bid Madame Ursula provide us with refreshment, though I ought to have known we should be detained beyond our usual hour of return! Unpardonable folly! You are ill, carina! You are pale, you tremble!"

The moon had now risen, and revealed to the young Count the gentle white face that leaned for a few moments against Bellario's shoulder; but her brother's affectionate support, and cheering words of encouragement, with, still more, the torrent of reproaches which Guido continued to pour forth upon his own heedlessness, enabled her to rally, and she assured them she was quite recovered, and equal to proceed.

"There is only the avenue to pass, and the terrace, and then you will have thorough rest, cara mia," said her brother; "you shall have the couch wheeled over to the supper-table, Guido and I will let you queen it as much as you please, the whole evening. Come, lean well upon my arm, and we shall soon reach Belmont!"

"Lean upon mine too; we will support you between us," said Guido: and thus linked in kindness, the three friends passed together beneath the shadow of the stately trees that formed the avenue to Belmont.

They had often walked arm-in-arm thus before, Portia between her

brother and his friend, during their wanderings through the grounds ; and yet how ~~was it, that now,~~ the familiarity and closeness of the proximity which it occasioned between them, struck her with a significance which it had never assumed before ? Was it that the low soft tones of Guido's voice, which only at intervals interrupted the cheerful strain of the remarks with which Bellario sought to divert her, addressed her with more tender solicitude than usual ? Was it that the arm of Guido, upon which her's rested, occasionally pressed the hand it sustained, against a heart that throbbed in unison with the tenderness of the speaker's tone, and gave eloquent meaning to his few murmured words ? Was it that though the deep shadow of the over-arching trees permitted her not to see his eyes, yet she felt those eyes to be bent upon her, as if they would fain pierce the gloom, and ascertain that the healthful color of her cheek was restored ?

Certain it is, that her recent pallor was now replaced by a rich carnation hue ; as certain that her heart had learnt responsive throbs from the one which vibrated against her hand ; and still, as certain that the languor of her frame was forgotten in the delicious thrill which crept over her senses. It seemed that she could have walked on ever, through that dim avenue, as if in a voluptuous dream, gliding onward without action or volition.

And thus they reached the end of the avenue ; and there, on the marble terrace, in the broad clear moonlight, stood the stiff figure of Madame Ursula, willing to show the young people, by her coming thus far to meet them, that they had considerably outstaid their usual period of return.

The length of time which had elapsed since the due hour of supper, and the protracted sufferings of her importunate appetite, had in all probability tended to sharpen her habitual acerbity, and to exasperate the dame's rigid observance of etiquette ; for she no sooner beheld Portia approach thus supported, than she cast a piercing glance of reproof upon the fair arm that hung with such unseemly confidence upon the young Count's, and hemmed so piercingly, that the terrace rang, as if a night-owl had suddenly shrieked.

The glance and the hem awakened the young girl from the trance in which her senses had been steeped, and she involuntarily quitted her hold of Guido's arm, and clung solely to that of her brother; while the young Count, biting his lip, hastily seized the pointed elbow of Madame Ursula, and placing Portia's hand upon the stately dame's arm, exclaimed:—"Ay, good Ursula; you assist the Signorina into the house, while I hasten to the saloon, and arrange the couch for her. We have overtired her with too long a walk." So saying, he sprang through one of the windows that opened on the terrace, and bade them follow at a pace suited to Portia's fatigue.

In their subsequent rambles, Guido found that by some strange chance, their old mode of progression was never resumed. They walked arm-in-arm, it is true, as they strolled through the grounds, or along the avenue; but it so happened that the young Count could never contrive to have Portia between her brother and himself. She invariably possessed herself of that arm of Bellario which was on the side farthest from Guido; and though he at first endeavored to frustrate this arrangement, yet when he found himself more than once foiled in his attempt to return to their old position, and regain her arm within his, he wanted courage to insist upon a point from which she seemed averse.

His want of courage arose from a doubt. He could not resolve the question he frequently asked himself; whether Portia herself shrank from a renewed avowal of that tenderness which his manner had betrayed on the evening when she had last permitted her arm to rest upon his, or whether it was merely a confused consciousness of Madame Ursula's rebuking glance, and the implied censure it conveyed, that caused the timid girl to withdraw from this sweet familiar contact.

When he was inclined to attribute the change to this latter cause, he could scarcely forbear visiting upon the stiff dame the chagrin and mortification he felt, and putting an end to it at once by a candid avowal of his love; but when he fancied that it arose from Portia's own coldness to his suit, and from an anxiety on her part to extinguish hope on his, without a more explicit declaration of their mutual feelings, which might only serve to disturb the serenity of the friendship which now united



the three, he felt his courage fail, and he submitted to see her maintain her station on the other side of her brother.

One morning they were threading the intricacies of a neighboring wood, where, deep in its recesses, a briery dell led to the foot of a waterfall. The inequality of the path they were pursuing, made the offer of his aid but a mere common courtesy, yet she evaded his proffered arm, though tacitly, and as if not perceiving his intention, in the eagerness of conversation. Even when Bellario interrupted himself to say:—“ You had better take Guido's arm as well as mine, Portia ; you will stumble, if you do not, this path is so rugged and steep,” she still paid no attention to the proposal, but chatted on as before.

So marked a rejection, could scarcely pass unnoticed ; and Guido in a half-hurt tone said :—“ Your sister is resolved to owe assistance to none but a brother's care.”

He had no sooner given way to this momentary pique, than he repented ; but he could not judge of the effect his effusion might have upon Portia, as her downcast eyes and averted countenance were partially hidden from him by Bellario, who was again between them. As for the latter, he did not perceive the vexation which embittered his friend's tone, and he merely simply replied :—“ She well knows how entirely she may trust that care, and with what fondness it will be devoted to her through life.”

The sister for an instant raised her loving eyes to meet those of the brother, which were bent proudly upon the beautiful young creature beside him ; and Guido, as he looked upon them, felt as if the love that aspired to assert its superior claim to that which existed between the two orphans, must needs be a presumption foredoomed to disappointment.

The profound feeling of regret and desolation of spirit into which such a reflection plunged the young Count, revealed to himself how far he had permitted his heart to indulge the hope of one day inducing Portia to own a preference even paramount to her affection for Bellario ; and he returned but mechanical answers to the animated dissertation upon some favorite topic, in which his friend was indulging. While the

young law-student eagerly pursued his theme, he perceived not the silence of his companions, and they emerged from the wood on their return, and had reached the avenue, without an idea having crossed his mind, that he had for some time been the sole speaker.

At length Guido was roused from his reverie, by a pause in his friend's speech, and by some remark that fell from him a moment after, touching the superlative beauty of Belmont, and his regret that this delicious holiday was drawing to a close. "But three days more," added he, "and we must return to Padua; to relinquish the delights of Belmont, for study, college discipline, and recluse assiduity. Farewell, beautiful Belmont!"

At this instant, Guido's ear caught the sound of a deep sigh from Portia's lips, as she murmured in echo of her brother's words:—"Farewell, beautiful Belmont, where we have all been so happy!"

The sigh, the mournful cadence of the voice, gave the young Count the encouragement that lovers invariably gather from a betrayal of emotion in the object beloved. Strength strangely generated of weakness! A look, too, a timid, hasty, involuntary look, met his eyes for one second, as they wandered for the hundredth time that morning towards the gentle face that had still bent drooping on the other side of Bellario, despite of all his vigilant endeavors to win a single responsive glance.

Now, however, in the look that met his, although it flashed upon him but instantaneously, he read a mute confession as ample as it was brief, as impassioned as it was modest, as unreserved as it was involuntary, and the blissful conviction that it carried in a tumultuous rush to his heart, sprang into words with all the impetuosity of his nature:—"We must not part! We will never leave Belmont! Give her to me, Bellario! Give me your sister for my wife!"

The young law-student paused in utter amazement. It seemed as if such an idea as the possibility of love growing out of friendship, had never suggested itself to his mind. He stood still, regarding them both with an air of perplexity that might have amused Guido upon any other occasion. At present, however, he did not even see it; his whole soul was in his eyes, and they were riveted upon Portia only, who remained rooted to the spot, and covered with innocent blushes.

At length Bellario said, smiling, as he beheld the truth in that crimson cheek :—" What does my sister herself say ?"

His sister said nothing ; but after a moment's pause, she drew her hand softly from the brotherly arm to which she had hitherto clung, and creeping round to his other side, she again placed one arm within his, and held forth the other with a faltering motion, as if it sought to resume its former resting-place upon that of Guido. The young Count needed no words to bid him construe aright her gentle action, so eloquent in its confiding sweetness, but as he caught the bounteous hand with transport to his lips, he repeated ;—" What does fairest Portia say ? Will she give herself to me ?"

" Her brother shall answer for her ;" said Bellario. " My own affection for the friend of my heart teaches me how surely his noble qualities have won my Portia's love ; and I ought perhaps to rejoice that an earlier suspicion of the truth did not awaken scruples which false delicacy might have suggested. Had I sooner surmised this, I might have thought it due to our own honor to avoid the seeming attempt to secure an alliance so far above our station ; but Portia's heart is now yours, and knowing (though but lately, in its full extent) the value of the treasure you have gained, no unworthy pride of mine shall withhold it from your possession. To show you how my friend's generosity, and my sister's simple integrity of mind, have wrought their due effect in eradicating my former prejudices, I will not say one word of the portionless condition of the bride you have chosen. I resign my Portia to your care, with the conviction that you will cherish her with no less regard than had she brought you millions for her dowry ; and for her, I place her in your arms, with as proud a joy, as if she were descended from a throne."

As Bellario concluded, he gently withdrew the trembling palm that clung to him, and placing it in that of his friend, who still retained the one she had first bestowed fast locked in his other hand, he left them together, that they might tell each other their full hearts.

The fond brother wandered apart for awhile, that, in devout thanksgiving, he might unburthen his own of the tide of gratitude that swelled it, for the blissful lot which was thus secured to his orphan

sister, and for the increased happiness this union promised, not only to his beloved friend, but to them all. After some time spent thus in grateful reflection, he was ascending the terrace by another approach than the flight of steps leading from the avenue, in order that he might still leave the lovers undisturbed, when he met Madame Ursula, just as she was emerging from one of the windows that opened down to the ground on to the terrace.

"Alone, Signor Bellario! Where is your sister? Where is Count Guido?" exclaimed the dame, aghast at this instance of what she thought the young law-student's plebeian ignorance of propriety. "Misericordia, I think I see them yonder in the avenue together! Is it possible you can permit—Santa Diana! If my eyes do not deceive me, his arm is round her waist! Santissima Madonna! He stoops his face towards her's—I do believe——"

She paused and gasped.

"I should not wonder," said Bellario with malicious calmness, "if Guido is actually giving my sister a kiss."

"Hold, Signor!" shrieked the Duenna, "don't utter the filthy word!" So saying, she hurried down the marble steps with all the speed the stiffness of her dignity would allow, and bustled along the avenue like an enraged goose, fluttering, and sputtering, and screaming.

When she reached the lovers, who, seeing and hearing this discordant approach, came towards her, to discover its meaning, she could scarcely articulate a word, but panted out:—"I am surprised, Signorina, that——" "Stay, Madame Ursula;" interrupted Guido, smiling. "Give me leave to surprise you still more, by informing you that henceforth you are to address this lady as Countess di Belmonte."

The return to Padua was of course deferred; Bellario remaining at Belmont to behold the happiness of his friend and sister confirmed in marriage. But after the wedding, the young law-student pleaded his anxiety to resume those labors that were to insure him future independence and renown.

When the young Count would fain have urged him to stay with them ever, saying how little need there was now to endure the pain of

separation, since his possessions sufficed for a purse in common between them, Bellario ingenuously acknowledged that even could the generosity of his friend reconcile him to such a proposal, his own ambition to create for himself a name among the eminent lawyers of his country, would not permit him to exchange so proud a hope for a life of inaction and inutility.

Guido yielded to this argument with involuntary approval and esteem, that counterbalanced the regret he felt in parting with his old fellow-student ; and the two friends separated with the understanding that all Bellario's vacation time was in future to be devoted to Belmont.

Years thus happily rolled on. The young student spent his time in alternate labor at learned Padua, and relaxation at lovely Belmont ; until he rose to the attainment of the position in society, which had so long been the object of his ambition. While still young, he was old in fame and reputed ability ; and few lawyers of the time ranked in public estimation with the learned Doctor Bellario.

Count Guido and his fair wife dwelt in uninterrupted happiness on their estate, carrying out the youthful visions of the former, by a life of peaceful virtue and benevolent utility. The only drawback to their felicity, was their remaining unblest by offspring ; but after they had been married twelve years, and had relinquished all hope of beholding a child of their own, Portia confided to her husband the prospect she had of presenting him with an heir.

When Bellario next visited Belmont, he was apprised by the happy parents of their new cause of joy, and he, with them, awaited the advent of the expected stranger with scarcely less delight than their own. He did not fail to rally his sister on the confirmed manner with which she always spoke of the expected little one as a boy ; and bade her remember, that as Guido and himself would both prefer to possess a miniature copy of herself, there were two to one in favor of the accomplishment of their wish instead of hers. In the midst of their gay anticipations, came an express from Padua to summon Bellario thither, as his presence was required during the decision of an important case that was about to be tried.

As he mounted his horse to depart, he waved his hand to Guido and Portia, who stood on the terrace to bid him farewell. "God bless you, my sister!" he cried. "No son, mind! Give Belmont an heiress, as you value my brotherly love!"

He rode off hastily, lest he might not be able to preserve the cheerful tone he had assumed in addressing her; for he felt reluctant to quit this beloved sister ere her hour of peril had passed. Still, no foreboding whispered that the farewell had been for ever; no thought that he had looked upon her face for the last time; and he was totally unprepared for the blow that smote him some days after, in receiving this terrible letter:—

"Our angel is now an angel indeed. Come and behold what lives to prove her earthly sojourn. An infant Portia is all that is left of our lost one, whose image alone rests in the heart of her miserable husband.

"The most unhappy

"GUIDO."

The almost equally-afflicted Bellario lost no time in hastening to his friend; but when he arrived at Belmont, he found even the sad hope of bringing comfort by his presence was denied. As Madame Ursula placed the infant Portia in his arms, she informed him that since the hour when the remains of the Countess had been consigned to the grave, her unhappy husband had been seen by no one. He seemed suddenly to have vanished from the face of the earth with her whom he mourned. How or when he had disappeared was a mystery, and Bellario could hardly doubt that he had for ever lost a brother as well as a sister. The last person who had beheld him, was his faithful attendant, Balthazar, who told Bellario, that on the evening of his lady's funeral, he was crossed in the avenue by a dark figure, which had at first startled him with its muffled spectral appearance; but that on taking courage to look at it again, he was almost convinced it was his poor master. This belief made him turn, and follow it; but it fled faster than he could pursue, and soon vanished entirely among the trees in the distance.

There was one slight circumstance, which alone permitted Bellario

to hope that his friend had not madly destroyed himself. In Guido's study, he found a fragment of a paper, apparently addressed to himself, though it was incoherent, abrupt, and written in evident distraction.

\* \* \* "She will be your care, I know. All I have is hers—your justice and tenderness will be her best safeguard—should I ever return, she may——" \* \* \* \*

It was on these few last words, that Bellario founded his hope. They were all that remained to dispel his apprehensions that his infant charge might be wholly orphaned; and he took a solemn vow as he bent over the sleeping babe, that he would devote himself to her welfare, in the fervent trust that he might one day be permitted to replace her in the arms of a living father. Meanwhile, having learned of Madame Ursula in as explicit terms as her prudish lips could muster, that a healthful wet-nurse had been provided in the person of one of the Belmont tenantry; and having ascertained that the affairs of the estate were placed in an advantageous condition for the future benefit of the infant heiress; he returned to the duties of his profession at Padua, until such time as she could profit by his presence and immediate superintendence.

Letters from Madame Ursula brought him continued intelligence of the babe's thriving, and he would frequently steal a day from his labors to ride over to Belmont, that he might indulge himself with a sight of the child. For in the small unformed features, and diminutive limbs, the force of affection taught him to find traces of his lost sister and friend; in the mite of a nose, and the wondering eyes, he thought he could read the animation and intelligent fire of Guido's expression; in the little dimpled hands, he fancied he discovered the slender fingers of Portia; and even in the fair golden curls of the little one, he dreamed he beheld the raven tresses of her mother. So whimsical is the sweet blindness of love! Such tricks of imagination were the senses of the bachelor lawyer accustomed to play, while, spell-bound by loving memories, he held the child in his arms, and pored over its baby lineaments.

Soon, it learned to know the face that hung so tenderly over its own; and almost its first look of intelligence was given to him. It would

row and coo in answer to his caresses ; it would learn to hold up its fairy finger while hearkening to the sound of his horse's feet, and clap its hands when it saw him approach.

Once, as he was galloping up the avenue, he saw the nurse and her charge playing on the grass ; and suddenly, to his great delight, he beheld the little creature bundle itself up from its squatting position on the turf, and come toddling towards him ; it had learned to run alone, since his last visit !

Then—in a visit or two after that one—a new pleasure ; the child could welcome him with a few prattling words ; and as she sat on his knee, she could beguile his solitary breakfast with her pretty voice, and lisp out her newly-mastered phrases.

In the course of some months more, a period of vacation occurred, and the bachelor-uncle looked forward with absolute pleasure to the thought of spending some time with a mere child ; the grave lawyer had learned to love nothing in the world so well as his little Portia. She was now not merely the child of his sister and friend, she had become a joy in herself.

And the little creature repaid his love with a fondness singularly intense in one so young. She seemed to have inherited her father's ardor of disposition, with much of her mother's gentle sweetness. She never tired of being with him ; and even showed none of the usual restlessness of children, when his serious occupations demanded his attention. She would sit quietly on the ground, amusing herself with the pictures or toys that he had given her ; and seemed to be aware that by silence she preserved the privilege of remaining in the room with him. When Madame Ursula would appear at the door of the library, where he usually sat, and offer to take away the child lest she should disturb il Signor Dottore, little Portia would cast beseeching eyes up to her uncle's face, and say :—" I'll be so good, if you'll let me stay." And she always kept her word ; sitting sometimes for hours on the floor, and only varying her position by creeping like a little mouse to a low drawer which was considered hers, where her toys were stored, or by kneeling before a chair upon which she might range her pictures side by side.



Once Bellario observed her put her finger on her lip and glance timidly towards him, as she checked herself in some little nursery-tune which she was unconsciously beginning to murmur to herself. "I mustn't sing," he heard her whisper. "Yes you may, if you sing very softly," said her uncle; and thenceforth he accustomed himself to hear the little undersong going on while he was writing, till at length, had it ceased, he would have well-nigh missed the pretty music of its humming.

But these hours of needful stillness, were delightfully compensated by the games of romps, the races on the greensward of the avenue, the rides on the shoulder, and the scampers on horseback, that the fond uncle indulged her with, when he had concluded his day's avocations. Indeed, it is a question whether the indulgence was not as great on one side as the other; whether, in fact, the learned man did not as fully enjoy these innocent gambols as much as the frolicsome child did. To judge by the facility with which he accommodated himself to her infantine ways, the unreserve with which he abandoned himself to her disposal, and the happy ease of his manner while devoting himself to sport with her, this companionship was now his chief delight, as it evidently was hers.

A look more bright than any that had beamed in his eyes since his sister's death, would dwell there now as he tossed her baby-daughter high in his arms towards the ceiling of the saloon, and watched the ecstasy with which she found herself so near its glittering gilded fret-work; a gentle smile round the grave lawyer's lips, as he suffered himself to be harnessed and driven along the avenue as the little girl's mimic steed; but some of their happiest times of all, were when he placed her on horseback before him, and rode through the glades, and shadowy woodlands, telling her many a pleasant tale of wonder and delight. Sometimes the learned head, so well stored with weighty precedents, that directed senates with its judgment, and swayed princes with its counsel, would rack its memory for fairy legends or gay stories for the sole delight of a little girl; at others, the lips that poured forth eloquence and erudition commanding the plaudits of his fellow-men, and influencing the destinies of the human race, would frame simple precepts

of goodness and loveliness fitted for the comprehension of the fair-haired child that sat upon his saddle-bow. But in this single, childish audacity, a world of sympathy, intelligence, and sensibility had their being, which found expression in the absorbed and enchanted gaze with which she fixed her eyes intently on his face while he spoke.

A favorite theme with them both, was the excellence of the parents she had lost. He was never tired of telling, or she of hearing, about the beautiful gentle mother who was now an angel in heaven; who dwelt in the clear blue sky, and watched her little girl when the stars were shining, and the moon was peeping in at her chamber-window, while she was fast asleep; who loved to see her little Portia good and happy; and hoped to have her one day in the blue and glorious heaven with her. And then he told her of the kind handsome father; of the loving friend he had been; of how dear they had been to each other; of how he had grieved to lose the beautiful mother, who had gone to be an angel; and how, in impatience that he could not yet go with her to be one also, he had wandered away no one knew whither, but might perhaps one day return to see his little Portia if she continued good and gentle.

And then the child would put up her rosy mouth for a kiss, and tell her uncle she "meant to be so good—O, so good—and always good." And then they would ride home cheerfully and happily; and patting the horse's neck, would think no time so pleasant as that spent on his back, when he carried them far and wide through the broad domains of Belmont.

One morning, after breakfast, there happened to be fewer law papers than usual to examine, and Bellario told his little Portia that if she would be quite quiet for an hour, he would then be ready to take her out for a long, long ride; and he asked Madame Ursula to be so good as to let them have a little basket with something nice to eat while they were out, in case they were away some hours.

The dame made a curtsey of acquiescence; then turning to the child she added:—"Now, Contessina, come with me."

The little girl arose, and followed her half-way towards the door, then stopped.

Madame Ursula looked back, and seeing the fixed attitude in which the child stood, in the middle of the room, frowned heavily, saying.—  
 “Did you hear me? Come!”

Bellarion quietly watched this scene, though his head was bent over his papers; and he observed an obstinate inflexibility take possession of the little girl's face and figure, as she replied:—“Not unless you promise that I shall come back in time for the ride.”

“I shall promise nothing. Come this instant!” said Madame Ursula; then, glancing at Bellarion, and seeing, as she thought, that he was absorbed in his occupation, she added in a stern low tone:—  
 “Remember!”

Portia's face flashed scarlet, and she moved forwards a step or two; but presently she stopped again, and said:—“No, if you beat me, I don't care; I won't go till you promise.”

Bellarion was just going to exclaim:—“Beat!” but he checked himself, resolved to satisfy himself further, while they still thought themselves unobserved.

“Promise a chit like you, indeed! A fine pass things have come to, truly!” exclaimed Madame Ursula. “I insist upon your coming to your tasks, when I bid you.”

“But I'm not a chit—I'm heiress of Belmont—Lisetta told me so, and she said I needn't learn my letters if I didn't like—and I don't like. Besides, I want to ride with cugino mio; and I won't say my letters till you promise I shall have done in time to come back for my ride. Nasty letters! I hate them.” And the child uttered the last words with flashing eyes, and an insolent lip.

Madame Ursula stalked back, and seized the little rebel whom her own injudicious unrelenting had created. As she clutched Portia's wrist, the child uttered a piercing scream; but the next instant she seemed to remember her promise not to disturb Bellarion, for she looked towards him hastily, and then, checking herself, writhed and struggled mutely in the housekeeper's grasp.

Bellarion now thought it time to interfere. “Madame Ursula,” said he, “why do you wish the Contessina Portia to go with you? May she not stay here, as usual?”

"I need hardly tell il Signore Dottore," replied the dame, "that it would be disgraceful for a young lady of the Contessina's distinguished station to be brought up in ignorance. I have therefore thought it my duty to teach her her letters, that she may one day know how to read. I presume so illustrious and learned a gentleman as yourself knows the importance of early tuition?"

"But did I not hear something about 'beating,' Madame? Surely that is not a part of your system?" said Bellario.

"Oh, a birch-rod, merely hung up in my room by way of a threat, signor. We all know that a threat is sometimes as effectual as a punishment," replied she; "and the Contessina's pride makes her dread the shame of a whipping, as much as the rod itself."

"Do you know, I am not a great advocate for either shame, or the rod, Madame, in teaching." Bellario saw the scarlet mount to the child's brow again, at the mention of the birch-rod; but he saw also a look of triumph, as if she understood that Madame was being rebuked instead of herself. He was vexed at being thus compelled to discuss the matter in her presence at all, but as it was hardly to be avoided after what had passed, he added:—"If you please, we will for the present allow this little lady to go on in her ignorance. She will one day find what a pleasure it is to read, and will wish to learn, and be grateful to those who will take the trouble to teach her. Allow me to thank you for that which you have already taken, Madame Ursula; although I request you will indulge me by letting the lessons cease, until Portia is wise enough to wish for them herself."

Madame Ursula curtsied stiffly, and withdrew; muttering to herself that the illustrissime Dottore was a fine person, forsooth, to be a judge; when he did not know how to manage a little child better than by letting her have her own way.

The ride that day was not so pleasant as usual. Portia, young as she was, could understand that what had made her uncle ride on so thoughtfully and so silently, was the scene that had taken place that morning. After peering up in his face several times in the vain hope of meeting the fond smile that generally answered her's, she felt the rebuke

contained in that sad abstracted look, and at length said :—" Are you angry with me, cugino mio?"

" I am sorry, very sorry, that my little Portia was so naughty, this morning ; I do not like to see her so unlike the little girl I love."

" I'll say my letters, if you'll love me still ; I'll never be naughty about reading again."

" It was not your naughtiness about saying your letters, that made me sorry, carina ; it was to see my little girl behave so rudely to Madame—to seek her look so insolent and proud—and to hear her talk of being heiress of Belmont, as a reason for not learning to read."

" Lisetta said so—she said I should be a great lady by and by, and need only do what I like ; and needn't take any trouble to learn."

" Lisetta should have told you that a great lady would never like to be ignorant ; that you would be more to be pitied if you were a countess who did not know how to read, than if you were a poor peasant ; and that the heiress of Belmont ought to be gentle and kind, not wilful and rude, if she ever expects to be respected and obeyed in her turn. Besides, though you will one day be lady of Belmont, you are now only a poor little weak child, who ought to be very thankful and obedient to those who are so good as to take care of you, and do many things for you which you are not able to do for yourself."

The child laid her head meekly against his breast, and whispered :—" I'll try and be good, if cugino will love me." And when his arms softly pressed round her, she felt that she was forgiven ; and they could again enjoy the beauty of the ride, and laugh, and chat, as gaily and happily as ever.

Next morning after breakfast, the papers and law-books were again speedily despatched, and Portia started up from her toys, expecting to be summoned for a ride ; but she saw her uncle take down a book from one of the shelves of the library (which was the room in which they usually sat), and placing it upon a low desk by the side of his easy-chair, he lolled back, and began to read.

Now Portia, though so young a child, had already found out the difference between business-reading and pleasure-reading ; for she knew

that when her uncle was leaning over those yellow papers, crackling parchments, and plain-looking books, while his eyes were intently fixed, and his pen occasionally dipped in the ink, and he wrote a few words, and his lips looked grave and unmoved,—he was on no account to be disturbed, and that was the time for her to remain perfectly still ; but when she saw him draw the reading-desk to the side of his easy chair, and stretch his legs carelessly out, and lean back comfortably, and place his elbow on the arm of his chair, and prop his chin with his closed hand, and look at his book with happy eyes and smiling mouth, she knew then that she might creep to his side, scramble on to one of his knees, nestle her cheek against his bosom, and thus sit on his lap and play with her doll without interrupting him. Nay, at such times of idle reading, she might feel that she was welcome ; for the arm that supported her on his knee, would now and then give her a hug, or the head that bent over hers would press its lips upon her hair, when the leaf of the book wanted turning over.

She looked at him now, as he sat there reading, and wondered that he preferred sitting still, and gazing at those lines, and turning page after page, and reading on and on, instead of going out for a ride, or a race in the avenue, or a frolic on the lawn, or some other pleasant amusement. “ I suppose he finds reading very pleasant too ; I suppose he likes reading as well as I like playing.” Some such thoughts as these doubtless passed through little Portia’s mind ; she went close up to Bellario, and leaned her two elbows on his knee, and gazed steadily up into the face that was looking as steadily into the open book ; and she presently said abruptly :—“ I wish you would teach me my letters ; I want to read with *cugino mio*.”

Her uncle,—or cousin as she called him,—caught her up in his arms with delight at finding that his hope was fulfilled ; the sight of the pleasure derived from reading, had inspired the voluntary desire to taste that pleasure ; of her own accord she wished to learn.

From that time forth, the hours devoted to pleasure-reading were partly spent in pointing out the big letters in each page to the little girl upon his knee. First their forms were pointed out, and pretty

storic were invented, to fix their different shapes and names in the child's memory; then came the amusement of finding out the shortest words in each line, that the little one might spell them, and find out the sound the letters made, when put together in words. For this purpose, any book that happened to lie upon the desk to charm the grave lawyer in his hours of poetic recreation, would serve equally well to display the alphabetic symbols, and mere first syllables, to the infant student. To him, the magic page might often conjure up visions of the proud Æneas, and forsaken Dido; of meek-hearted Griselda, or wandering Constance; of the pale pair of lovers, swept upon the whirlwind of the hell-storm; of the docile giant Morgante; of Orlando, Rinaldo, handsome Astolfo, the daring Englishman, mounted on his hippogriff, and the lovely Angelica, with her beauteous boy-lover, Medoro; of the noble amazon, Clorinda, with her dying face irradiated by immortal hope; of all these poetic images might Bellario in turn behold traces in the opened page, while to his neophyte it merely bore elemental figures and hieroglyphic shapes—but in which nevertheless lay a hidden world of future intelligence and beauty. To endow his tender scholar with the power to seek this enchanted region, to render her worthy of its attainment, and to gift her with the right of participation in its happy possession, became Bellario's chief delight; and in order that he might devote as much time as possible to his little Portia, he thenceforth had all writings and papers brought over to Belmont, and contrived to conduct every case, and to transact all business there, that did not absolutely require his presence in Padua, Venice, or elsewhere.

Thus they became closer companions than ever; and while Bellario beheld the happy looks, and gay smiles of the little creature, he could scarcely regret that she had no fitter playmate than a grave bachelor-uncle,—a learned doctor of law.

From the day when she had besought him to teach her, Portia had learned to love her lessons as much as she had formerly dreaded them. They were never after that time called "nasty letters"—but were "pretty letters," and "dear pretty books," and now no longer thought of as a dreary task, but as a pleasant play—nearly the pleasantest play she had.

Now, she would follow the pointer with unwearied interest as it traced the curves of the letters, and indicated their combination and succession in the formation of syllables and words; sometimes she would guide her own baby finger along the line in pointing mimicry, sometimes she would pat with her spread hands upon the lower part of the page, as in childish impatience, or in sportive concealment of what was to come, and sometimes she would lean her folded chubby arms upon the ledge of the desk that supported the book, and listen earnestly to the recited story, or gaze at the wondrous picture.

There was one picture, an especial favorite. It was very large, and folded up into a book, that it belonged to, in several folds. As these folds were successively and carefully undone, and spread forth (for Portia was taught to respect books, and to handle their leaves very gently lest they should be injured), she loved to watch the gradual appearance of the different portions of the curious scene, which, though she knew so well, she was never tired of looking at. There was a wild mountainous district towards one end of the long picture; and here she beheld a singular building, that looked half like a house and half like a ship, near which stood a venerable old man, and two or three younger ones, with some women, who were watching the approach of a vast train of animals, that walked two and two, and formed a strange procession, extending and diminishing away into the distance, where might be seen a tumult of troubled waters, and the dark clouds of a threatening storm.

It was these numberless animals that riveted the attention of the little picture-gazer; and she would coax from her indulgent teacher an endless repetition of histories descriptive of the tawny lion, with his majestic roar that echoes through the forests as he stalks along; of the velvet-striped tiger, with his cruel eyes; of the stately elephant; the swift and noble horse; the faithful dog; the graceful stag; and the nimble squirrel. He would tell her of the humble little mouse, whose gratitude lent it patience and perseverance to nibble through the bonds that held captive the king of beasts; of the fox that used its cunning wits to get out of the well, at the expense of the silly credulous goat; and of the wise young kid, who, in remembering her mother's advice to keep



she flew fast, saved herself from being eaten up by the treacherous wasp. He would tell her how the eagle's strong eyes can boldly stare into the sun, his powerful beak can cleave the skull-bone of his prey, and his firm wing upbear him towards the sky ; how the bee-like humming-bird can creep into the cup of a flower ; and how the winged creatures of the air, from the crested vulture to the diminutive wren, know how to construct their curious nests, and build them warm, snug, close, and cleverly, of mere bits of twig, and straw, and moss.

While these things were telling, the rides and out-of-door pastimes would be well-nigh forgotten ; but the prudent monitor would let neither his pupil's eagerness nor his own, detain them too long from the pure breath of heaven, or the due exchange of mental exertion for physical exercise ; and so the books were laid aside, and out the two would sally, through the window that opened on to the terrace, and down the steps (Portia clinging to her cousin's hand, as she tottered from one marble stair to the other, bringing each foot safely down at a time), till they reached the shady avenue, the scene of most of their open-air sports.

But though the child and the bachelor-lawyer sufficed thus for each other's happy companionship, there were times when Bellario thought it might have been better, could his little Portia have had the society of other children. As it was, she was too much the object of exclusive attention to people all older than herself, and this tended to foster the idea that she was a personage of vast importance, which, her position in life, as well as the remarks of injudicious dependents, were calculated to engender. He thought that, had she some young associate, this impression might be weakened by the equality that naturally establishes itself between children, who know little of forms and observances, and are apt to play together, asserting their individual opinions and wishes, regardless of difference in rank or station. He thought, too, that with one younger than herself, the sense of power, almost inseparable from her condition, might assume the form of benevolence and kindness ; and that in lieu of the imperious insolence which too often accompanies the command of those older than the mistress herself, she might learn to rule with bounteous consideration, and affectionate protective care. He

wished that the future lady of Belmont should be beloved, as well as obeyed, by her dependents.

An opportunity offered shortly after, for carrying out his desired experiment. Madame Ursula confided to him a grievous trouble respecting a sister of hers, who had some time since degraded herself, and committed the honor of her family, by marrying a small tradesman in Venice. "The miserable girl too late found out her mistake," said the dame; "for I can in no other way account for her death, which happened soon after giving birth to a little girl. As for the poor wretch, who dared to marry her, he doubtless awoke to a sense of his presumption, although, also, too late; for he is just dead, and has left his child without a single bagattino\* to bless herself with. She must go into service, of course; but she must wait till she is grown up, for that. Though I took Bianca's folly deeply to heart, and vowed never to forgive the injury she had done our family, yet I hope I know my duty better than to let her wretched offspring starve. I thought, therefore, I would consult you, Signor Dottore, upon the propriety of letting the child come here and stay at Belmont, until she is old enough to become cameriera to the Contessina Portia. I will promise that the miserable little creature shall be kept strictly within the precincts of the house-keeper's apartments, and shall not be permitted to intrude upon the presence of either yourself or the Contessina."

"Let her come to Belmont by all means, Madame," answered Bellario; "and pray do not restrict the children from playing together as much as they please. Your little darling will make a charming companion for mine, I doubt not."

"My 'little darling,' Signor! She is none of mine! Nerissa is none of my child!" exclaimed Madame Ursula with a chaste shiver; "but as my sister's child, I thank you for the permission that she may come here."

The faithful Balthazar was dispatched to Venice to fetch the little Nerissa to her future home; and Bellario told Portia of the new play-fellow who was coming to be with her at Belmont. She answered that

\* A small copper coin, formerly current in Venice

she wanted no one to play with her but her own cugino ; nevertheless, he could perceive that as the time drew near for the expected arrival, Portia's eyes were often directed towards the door of the saloon, where they were dining ; Madame, as usual, presiding at the head of the table.

At length they heard a horse's feet coming up the avenue, and Portia slid down from her chair, to peep out of the window at the new-comer. Presently, they heard a child's voice, and then a peal of joyous laughter ; the door opened, and Balthazar, who had used his best exertions to entertain his young fellow-traveller during their journey, brought the child in, in his arms, while she was still shouting with merriment at some droll story he had been telling her.

This indecorous entry scandalized Madame, and she frowned appallingly.

The little Nerissa, placed suddenly upon her feet in the midst of strangers, stood transfixed, gazing at them ; and as she scanned these new faces, the smiles faded from her lips, which she began to pull poutingly with one finger, eyeing the group askance.

"Take your fingers out of your mouth, do, child ; and come here," said Madame Ursula.

It seemed that the uninviting tone had more force than the words, for the child said shortly :—"No."

"Come here when I bid you ; come to me ;" repeated Madame with a still more forbidding look and tone than before.

"No ;" again replied the little one. Then, turning to Balthazar, and clutching his skirts, she added :—"I'll come to you ; take me on the horse again."

Bellario had purposely said nothing, that he might see what Portia would do of her own accord. She now took a cake and some sweetmeats off the dinner-table and went towards the little stranger, holding them out to her, and said :—"Won't you have some?"

Nerissa looked at Portia for a moment, then took one of the offered sweets, and next held out her rosy mouth, as she had been taught to do, that she might kiss her thanks ; but she still maintained her grasp of Balthazar's skirt.

Portia went back to the table for a nectarine, and returning again, stuffed that also into the child's hand, then holding out her own, she said:—"Won't you come with me to cugino?"

The little hand dropped its hold of the attendant's coat, and was given confidently to this new friend, who led her in a sort of triumph to Bellario.

The acquaintance thus begun, went on prosperously. Nerissa looked up to Portia as her abettor and protectress in all her encounters with her awful aunt; while the encouragement and patronage which the little lady of Belmont accorded to her new playmate, was accompanied by a gentle feeling of care and tenderness for one younger and more helpless than herself.

It is true that there was but a year's difference between them; but at their age a few months make a prodigious disparity; besides, the little lady had not only constantly associated with her grave cousin, but was of a naturally intelligent reflective mind, whereas the humble damsel was one of the most thoughtless, gay, giggling, sportive, merry little rogues in the whole world.

This temperament of Nerissa's caused Bellario to rejoice more than ever at the fortunate chance which had brought the two children together; for he felt that it acted as an antidote to the too grave society in which his beloved Portia would otherwise have exclusively passed her youth. Now, he had the delight of hearing the two merry voices constantly echoing through the halls and woods of Belmont in sportive gladness; and the laugh of Nerissa herself could scarcely ring more clearly and happily than that of his gifted but cheerful-hearted Portia. In playing together, the two children seemed animated by one spirit; equally buoyant, active, mirthful, nay wild in their gayety of heart while sporting about; but in one point they differed materially. Nerissa was the veriest little dunce that ever was; neither frowns and threats from dame Ursula, nor coaxings and rallyings, and pettings and teasings from Portia, could induce the little damsel ever to look into a volume; whilst, on the contrary, Portia's chief delight continued to be the hours she spent with Bellario and his books. She was gay with Nerissa, but she was happy with him.

It was perhaps fortunate for Portia that her young companion was thus indifferent to study; it made the hours spent with her, the more completely a relaxation, and by forming a wholesome contrast, invigorated and refreshed her mind for new culture. With the giddy little madcap Nerissa, the freedom and elation of spirit which characterized Portia, no less than her mental endowments and superiority of intellect, found full scope; and childhood sped merrily away.

Even the austere supervision of Madame Ursula was withdrawn; for not many months after Nerissa's introduction to Belmont, the house-keeper died. The stern dame was stricken into the eternal rigidity of death; and the waiting-woman Lisetta was heard to observe in her hard way, that "the old lady looked scarcely more stiff, as a corpse, than she had done when alive."

As years went on, Bellario's hope of beholding his friend, grew fainter and fainter; and yet, in proportion as his hope waned, his desire increased. Besides the yearning wish to look upon his face, he longed for Guido's return with strengthening intensity, as he beheld the still-improving graces of the daughter so rashly quitted. He longed to show him the worth of the treasure he had relinquished; to unfold to him the sources of consolation he had abandoned, in the person of this dear being, so worthy a representative of the sainted angel they had lost. As he dwelt with rapture on the beautiful form and face of his darling, and watched the expanding of her noble nature and capacious mind, he pined to share so dear a privilege with the friend of his heart—the being in the world best fitted to receive and enjoy delight from such a source. Still Guido returned not; and Bellario was fain to beguile himself with the fancy that he cherished even a remote hope of the reward he had once proposed to himself for his devotion to his friend's child. Had he allowed himself honestly to question his reason, he would have found how little faith he had left, that the delight of ever placing Portia in a father's arms was yet in store for him; but he continued his zealous culture of her moral and mental excellences, as if to strengthen the delusion he hugged the closer for its very instability.

Relieved, by the companionship of Nerissa, from any dread that

Portia might become too exclusively absorbed in serious trains of thought, he could now freely permit her to indulge their mutual and increasing taste for study together; and he would often laughingly tell her, that though she had no regular schooling, no masters, no accomplishments, no womanly teaching,—no set education in short, yet that he should in time make her an excellent scholar, and a most capital lawyer.

Bellario was an enthusiast in his profession; and Portia loved to hear him dwell at length upon its attributes, its privileges, its powers, and its value. He would descant upon his favorite theme; and she, well pleased to listen, would often introduce the subject, and urge and induce him to continue its disquisition.

Then would he tell her of the divine origin of Law; and dilate upon its universal existence and influence. "It is an emulation of God's own wisdom," he would say, "who appointed laws unto himself as Creator of the universe. The system of planets, the courses of stars, the processes of vegetation and reproduction are all so many applications of force and power, and ordained forms and measures of carrying out His will—and are His manifest laws. The obedience of these Natural agents to the laws of the Creator, set a sublime lesson to us voluntary agents, that we may meekly conform to those Human Laws which have been the inspiration of His Wisdom, and are the instruments of His Will upon earth. Law acts as a perpetual memorial to man; Divine and Natural laws remind him of his duty to God; Moral laws of his duty to himself; and Human laws of his duty to his fellow-creatures. See," he continued, "how the heathens themselves exalted Law—naming her Themis, and deriving her from both heaven and earth, by making her the daughter of Coelus and Terra; one of their historians declaring her to be 'queen of gods and men.' Law unites mankind in a universal bond of fellowship, gathering the human brotherhood beneath its wings; teaching them the wisdom of mutual regard and support, instead of leaving them to wander in primeval and savage individuality of interest—each man's hand against his brother. Men, by agreeing to conform to appointed laws, yield individual judgment to the matured wisdom of the many; and by consenting to abide by such decrees, show that they prefer the common good to a private indulgence—general order to single satisfaction."

"By taking the law in our own hands, we but perpetuate evil in the world; dealing a private revenge, instead of awarding a publicly sanctioned punishment. Constituted law revenges not; it chastises. Law, after its first universal love for the good of the human race, abjures passion; and rewards or punishes, knowing neither love nor hate. Law shows tenderness, only in the protection it affords to the weak against the strong; when it substitutes justice for the right of might."

"Law ascertains men's dues by no capricious standard; it acts from virtuous principle, not from impulse. It promotes social order, and diffuses harmonious concord. Men who will not act equitably and in accordance with duty at a friend's suggestion, will often submit to the same intimation from the Law, which they know to be indifferent, impartial, and nowise personal in its dictates; and inasmuch as Reason is insufficient to bind some men, Law was instituted to constrain and enforce universal obedience. Would men but live honestly, hurt nobody, and render to every one his due, the necessity of Law would cease, for in those three precepts are contained the essence of what Law exacts. Law but seeks to establish man's true and substantial happiness. It sets forth man's duties, and the penalties of transgressing them, for his timely instruction and warning. Laws are the result of public approbation and consent; the act of the whole body politic, and not the edict of one despotic mind. Law is one of the monuments of man's accumulated wisdom; like a vast intellectual temple, its range of columns stretch through successive ages, ever receiving renewal and addition, without destruction to the harmony of the universal edifice."

At another time he would tell her that Human Law, like all mortal systems, was subject to error, both in its ordinance and dispensation. "But law," said Bellario, "should ever err rather on the side of leniency and mildness, than severity. Where laws are enacted of too stringent a nature, and where the penalties inflicted are too rigorous in proportion with the transgression they retaliate, an evasion of the due action of the law frequently ensues, and thus the ends of justice are frustrated, by an escape of punishment altogether. The object of correction is reform; and the penalty enforced should be so appropriate to the crime committed,

as to excite universal acquiescence in its award. In passing sentence, clemency should ever take the precedence; for better that many guilty should escape, than one innocent suffer. A culprit may be reclaimed; but what too-tardy justice, however simple, may redress an undeserved condemnation? Mercy in all her aspects is the fairest sister of Justice. She bestows on the crown its dearest prerogative—a privilege akin to that of Heaven itself—when she reserves to the king the power of reversing doom, and granting ultimate pardon.”

“The practice of Law,” he would say, “induces magnanimity. It teaches us tolerance towards the infirmities of our fellow-beings; seeing how the best natures may be warped by unkindness, ingratitude, or injury. It engenders compassion for human frailty; forbearance on account of man’s prejudices, mistakes, and ignorance; pity for his imperfections, and desire for his enlightenment. It inculcates benevolence, patience, consideration. It bids us grieve over the evil we discover, and wonder at the good we find hidden beneath rage, neglect, and destitution. It helps us to mature and chasten our judgment. It instructs us to command our temper, and guard against the heat of feeling, to moderate suspicion, and to avoid misconstruction. It reminds us that to be just we must be calm, and that the faculties should be held clear, collected, and alert. We should be ready to consider not only facts, but the times and circumstances of facts. We should cultivate a retentive memory, a patient and attentive habit of listening, acuteness of penetration in observing, and an appreciation of physiognomy, expression, and character. We should aim at general acquisition, as well as at peculiar study; and endeavor to enlarge the mind upon various subjects, rather than narrow it by a too exclusive store of mere cases and precedents, so as to be enabled to decide in matters that befall otherwise than consistently with recorded experience, and so as not to be taken wholly by surprise when a totally new and original set of circumstances arise and invest a case. Accomplishment in oratory as well as soundness of judgment is essentially valuable, that you may not only carry conviction by the train of your reasoning, and the strength of your arguments, but that you may secure the attention, and win the favor of



the more superficial among your auditors, so as at once to prepossess them in favor of your cause."

" Might not we women make good advocates, then, cugino mio?" Portia would playfully ask; " you know we are apt to speak eloquently when our hearts are in a cause, and when we desire to win favor in its decision."

" It is because your hearts generally take too active a part in any cause you desire to win, that your sex would make but poor lawyers, carina. Besides, women, though shrewd and quick judging, are apt to jump too rapidly at conclusions, and mar the power of their understanding by its too vivacious action. They are liable to decide upon delusive inferences, and to arrive at false convictions. In the exercise of their discernment, they will frequently triumph too early in the discovery of an advantage; and it is the part of a clever lawyer not to betray his own strength and his adversary's weakness to soon. To skilfully treasure up each point successively gained, and by a tardy unmasking of your own plan of action, to lead your opponent on to other and more sure committals of himself, is more consonant with the operation of a man's mind, than suited to the eager, impulsive nature of woman. Her wit is more keen, than her understanding is sedate."

" Well, one day or other you may be brought to acknowledge that I could make a profound lawyer," replied the smiling Portia; " am I not your disciple? and must not the pupil of the learned Doctor Bellario needs become so if she choose?"

" My Portia will become quite as proficient as I could wish her, if she know enough of law to manage worthily and justly her own estate by and by," answered he; " and it is with the thought that she will hereafter be called upon as lady of Belmont, to rule her tenantry, to adjust their rights, to settle their differences, to decide their claims, and to secure their welfare, that I allow her to cross-question me upon the mysteries of law as she has done. And so now, that I may not make an absolute pedant of you, a jurisconsult in petticoats, a lawyer in a girl's white dress instead of a sober silk gown, go call Nerissa to have a game at ball with you in the avenue, till I come and join you, that we may take a long walk together."

And still time crept on, and the young girl grew almost into the beautiful woman. Her slight childish figure had rounded into graceful proportions; her deportment had assumed more high-bred ease and polish; her countenance shone with brighter intelligence; and her voice and manner, without losing their native sweetness, had acquired a tone of command and dignity well suited to the lady of Belmont. But the profusion of golden locks which waved upon her shoulders, and the unclouded spirits that bounded in her elastic step, and sparkled in her lips and eyes, bespoke her youth, and her happy innocent nature. She looked still the child, in some things.

It was the morning on which she completed her seventeenth year. She entered the library where Bellario sat, and as she stepped forward to present him with a rare old volume of poetry and a heap of blushing dew covered flowers which she had just gathered as a birthday token, she looked so radiant with happiness and beauty, that he involuntarily gazed at her as he would have done at a beautiful vision—an impersonation of childhood on the verge of womanhood. Her fair hair, partly disordered by the eagerness with which she had collected her flowers regardless of thorns, spray, drooping leaves, or sweeping branches; her cheeks glowing with morning air and exercise; her April eyes, bright with mingled smiles and tears, as she greeted him who had been father and brother both in one to her infancy and girlhood; her tender looks, her gentle sweetness, her loving manner, half lavish, half timid, while contending with all the strong emotion that filled her heart towards him, as she knelt upon the cushion at his feet, and laid her head caressingly upon his knee, all made him fancy her a little fondling child again. But when, some minutes after, she stood at his side, discussing with enthusiasm the beauties of the poet whose richly-emblazoned volume she held in her hand; when her eyes beamed with intelligence, her figure dilated with the energy of her appreciation of lofty sentiment and daring imagination, her tone thrilled with admiration and awe, and her whole appearance was instinct with elevation and sublimity of thought, Bellario felt that he gazed upon a sentient, high-minded woman—one capable of bearing her part in the great drama of life, and of influencing the destinies of others by her intellect, her sentiment, her actions.

In acknowledging her birthday-gift, Bellario told Portia that he had chosen this occasion for the fulfilment of a desire she had expressed, that a band of household musicians might be added to the retainers of Belmont. He said, they had been appointed to come from Venice on this very day, in honor of the event, and he felt somewhat surprised that they had not already arrived.

"But we will contrive to spend the day happily, notwithstanding," added he; "we will forego the pleasure of music for one day more; and meantime we will order the horses and take one of our long rambles together. You cannot remember the time, my Portia, when one horse served well for us both, and you needed no other seat than my saddle-bow?"

"It seems as though that, and all other particulars of the season when your arms were my only support, even from the very moment when I first was placed a mere infant within them, lived in my memory, as truly as it does in my heart's core," replied she.

They rode that day, far and wide through the domains of Belmont. They visited the waterfall, deep in the recesses of the wood, and as they guided their horses down the steep path of the briery dell, and listened to the soft rustling of the leaves, the warbled song of birds, the hum of insects, and the murmur of the cascade, Bellario's voice would subduedly chime in with those sounds of Nature, telling her of the growth of her parent's love, of their noble qualities, of their worthiness of each other, and of the happy pride with which he himself had shared in the friendship which united the three.

They lingered beneath the group of ruins, which had once formed the object of a memorable walk, and Bellario told her of the unselfish fortitude with which her mother had sought to conceal her fatigue, of her generous impetuous father, of the feelings which he had since detected were lingering in the hearts of each, and of his own complete blindness to the lovers' increasing passion for each other.

"I have often wondered since, how I could have failed to note what was passing beneath my very eyes, so closely concerning two beings whom I loved so well," said Bellario; "and two beings, also, who were

singularly transparent and unreserved. My sister's nature was pure, ingenuous, and simple, and her every thought seemed unveiled, as you looked into her clear eyes; your father's ardent sensibility glowed in every expression of his look and voice, and perfect candor dwelt upon his brow. Every emotion of that noble heart seemed written in his countenance; and never had generous impulses fairer and truer transcript than in the manly beauty of my friend's face."

"I feel as if I should know that face, meet it how or where I might," said Portia, in a low voice.

"God grant that we may one day behold it," replied Bellario; "but it must needs be strangely changed. Suffering, grief, wanderings, years of absence;—perhaps even I might not now know my Guido."

That evening, while the two cousins were pacing the moonlit avenue together, Nerissa's blithe voice was heard from the terrace, announcing the arrival of the expected musicians.

"Come in, madam," cried she in high glee, "come in quickly, for the love of laughter! If these same players have as ill-favored fingers as features, if their instruments yield a sound as coarse as their suits, if they have no better sets of tunes than teeth, or no tones less sharp than their noses, we are like to have but sorry music. But come and see them, and tell me if you have ever seen a more wry-necked, ill-dressed, ugly set of grotesque figures than your ladyship's musicians elect. There is one fellow's crooked nose, puckered eyes, puffed cheeks, and pinched lips, that make him look for all the world like a head on the rainspout of a church."

The girl hurried back, as she spoke; and Bellario leading Portia to the terrace-steps, kissed her hand, and told her he would join her in a few moments to try whether they might not forget the plain persons of the musicians in the music they played. Meanwhile, he paced the avenue, full of a thought which had that day pressed heavily upon him. His first perception that now his charge was no longer a child, his conviction that she had actually grown into a lovely woman, was accompanied with the thought that he had no right to detain her in solitude, apart from that world where she might shine, imparting and receiving a

more extended happiness. He felt that he ought not to confine her sphere of existence to so limited a range as that which had hitherto formed the boundaries of Portia's experience. He knew that the heiress of Belmont should now be introduced into a wider circle than she had hitherto known, that she might form her judgment of mankind itself, while she matured and enlarged the store of knowledge she had hitherto reaped from books alone.

"Were her father but here to aid me with his counsel," thought he. "Who so qualified to decide a daughter's conduct? Who so proper to lead her among her fit associates? Who so meet to assist her in their selection, and to guide her in a still more important choice? For she will marry—she ought—she must;—so fair, so gifted a creature will one day bless and be blest by a man worthy of her. But how to dis-cover him?"

In a deep reverie, Bellario threw himself upon a low grassy bank that swelled from the turf of the avenue. The bank itself was in the full light of the moon; but it was near to the trees, which cast a deep shadow within a few yards of where he sat.

As the thought of his beloved friend again vibrated through his heart with a passionate yearning, he almost articulated the name of Guido in the deep sigh he breathed.

A sigh still more profound responded to his own. He started up in surprise, that any one should be so near; when a figure emerged from the dark shadow of the trees, and stood mutely before him. Bellario gazed strangely upon the countenance he beheld; for in no lineament of that pale, haggard face,—neither in the flattened temple, the sunken cheek, the contracted mouth, or in the dull and wistful eyes, could he trace any memorial of the youthful image that dwelt in his heart's remembrance.

But when the stranger staggered forward, and putting one hand upon his shoulder, muttered huskily "Bellario!" the voice revealed all; and with the rapturous conviction that it was Guido indeed returned, he strained his long-lost friend in his arms, and felt the terrible thirst of years appeased.

A few hasty words sufficed to tell the story of his absence ; for Guido cared not to dwell upon the circumstances of that dark period of exile and anguish. In the transports of his despair, he had fled from the scenes of his buried happiness, and wandering away to the coast, had embarked and set sail for the East, where, amid rocky deserts and sandy plains, he had dragged on a weary existence, in ascetic solitude, unable to endure the sight of his fellow-men. In latter years the first torture of his grief had yielded to a craving desire to behold the child, whom he still could not help regarding in the light of one who had been the destruction of his earthly happiness—of one whose birth had caused the death of her whom he loved better than life. And still his anxiety to look upon this innocent murderer grew stronger and stronger ; and at length it arose to a strange fascination, and had determined him to endure all,—to brave the torment of revived sorrows, that he might satisfy this burning wish.

“ I long, yet dread to see this child,” he concluded, with a wild sadness in his manner, which had something almost fierce in its eagerness ; “ show it to me, give it me, Bellario ! I will not injure it, I will not harm a hair of its young head ! Though it killed her, yet it is her child ! Where is it, Bellario ? ”

“ She left me but now,” replied Bellario calmly, trying to soothe his friend’s perturbation ; “ you think of her as a child, forgetful that seventeen years have elapsed. She is now a beautiful woman ; she quitted me but a few moments before I beheld you.”

“ That fair creature whom you led to the terrace, then, was—— Gracious heaven ! I have seen her ! My child ! I fancied that fair being by your side was your own, your wife ! A second such delusion ! And are you indeed destined to bestow upon me another Portia ? ”

A strain of music arose at this moment. Solemn, sweet, and exquisitely tender was the melody that came wafted towards them upon the night air ; it seemed vouchsafed, consolingly ministrant to the wounded spirit of Guido, that his long-pent heart might find relief in the tears which flowed responsive to these appealing sounds.

Bellario hailed the benign influence ; but suddenly he laid his hand

upon his friend's arm, and pointing towards the terrace, he whispered :—“ She comes ; control your own agitation, my friend, that you may spare hers.”

Guido gazed in the direction indicated ; he beheld one of the windows that opened on to the ground, thrown back, and a flood of light from the saloon, together with a swelling burst of the harmony, accompanied forth a radiant figure that stepped out upon the terrace, and took its way towards them. The white raiment, the floating golden hair, the graceful mien, the spiritual look, as she approached bathed in the full glory of the moonbeams, made her seem a seraph sent by pitying Heaven, and Guido stretched forth his arms, as towards a celestial harbinger of happiness.

As she reached the spot where they stood, Bellario took her hand, and said in his calm impressive voice :—“ Remember your words of this morning, my Portia. Does your heart tell you whose is the face you look upon ?”

“ My father !” she exclaimed ; and the parent and child savored the ineffable transport of a first embrace.

Guido thus restored to them, the happiness of Portia and Bellario seemed now complete ; while the Count, in discovering the fruitful source of comfort and joy existing for him in the person of his child, wondered how he could have voluntarily remained dead to its enjoyment during that long and dreary period of self-imposed banishment. Thus blindly does mortal judgment err in its choice of what may constitute its own felicity ; casting forth its trust in Providential care, forsaking appointed consolation, and dully embracing woe for its portion. But now, his eagerness to duly estimate the treasure he possessed, partook of all the characteristic ardor of his nature. His love for this new-found daughter amounted to idolatry ; and in the passionate desire he felt to retain her ever in his sight, it seemed as though he sought to indemnify himself for the years of separation already suffered to elapse. In his craving wish to behold her unceasingly, to enjoy her presence exclusively, he would fain have engrossed her thoughts as she absorbed his, and he almost jealously beheld her eyes, her words, her attention

directed to any other object but himself. There was a kind of dread, a misgiving that he could not occupy her heart as she did his; and in the humiliating consciousness that if this were the case, he could alone blame his own rash exile from the child whose love he might have secured, a feverish inquietude mingled with his present happiness, and threatened to embitter its fruition.

Bellarion noted the struggle existing in his friend's mind, and well knew how to deal tenderly with such a mood of affection. He could compassionate its sufferings, forgive its involuntary injustice, and minister to its relief. Accordingly he determined to quit them for a time, that the father and daughter might be thrown solely upon each other's resources; and, by being constantly and uninterruptedly together, they might thus learn to find their mutual happiness in one another alone.

A cause imperatively requiring his personal presence formed sufficient pretext for his absence; and after confiding to his friend the anxiety he felt respecting Portia's future introduction into more general society, when they should have enjoyed a sufficient period of tranquil seclusion together, Bellario left Belmont, and retired to Padua, where he had always maintained a modest establishment of his own, for the reception of clients, and in transacting the business of his profession; as well as that he might indulge the old love of independence which had ever characterized him.

Here, he had the delight of learning from Portia the complete success of his scheme. In the frequent correspondence she maintained with her beloved cousin, the restored serenity of her father, the affection that reigned between them, the happiness of their present existence, which knew no abatement to the fulness of its perfection save the want of Bellario's presence, formed the constant theme of her pen, and caused him to rejoice that he had acted as he had done. He knew, too, that this bond of mutual affection, thus daily knit and strengthened, would cause them only the more to depend upon each other, when they should come to encounter the world, and be surrounded by indifferent people; and he could now await with security the period of Portia's presentation under a father's auspices.



Meantime, Guido's confidence in the love existing between his daughter and himself had also acquired firmness. He could no longer entertain a misgiving of the fondness that dwelt in every look, that prompted every action, that lent sweetness to every tone, and dictated every word, as she hovered perpetually near him, evidently drawing as much delight from his vicinity as he from hers. He could not doubt the interpretation of the joy that played in her smiles when she saw him approach, the eagerness that impelled her towards him, the beaming eyes that met his in soft response, or the warmth with which his paternal caresses were welcomed, and returned by her filial ones. He felt that his Portia was indeed fully and entirely his own ; and his satisfied heart flowed in rapturous thanksgiving to the Almighty, for so gracious a boon.

As his faith in her love became assured, he called to mind what Belario had said respecting her introduction in life, and he felt that he had now courage to risk the intrusion of other objects upon her time and attention, secure that he himself was paramount in her regard.

He accordingly consulted with her upon the appointment of a day when he should invite all the families with whom his own had formerly held intercourse and intimacy, to meet at Belmont in celebration of his return, and thus to renew those connections which had been broken by his absence.

"In presenting my Portia to the noble ladies of the houses of Manfredini and Barberigo ; to the several families of Montenegri, Sforza, Foscarini, and others of my friends and kindred, I shall offer my best apology for venturing to ask a renewal of what I forfeited by my own neglect ; and they will readily accede to a reconciliation with the father for the sake of his daughter, that they may obtain her society."

"If my father flatter his daughter thus," said Portia gayly. "she need fear no spoiling from flatterers abroad. The veriest courtier of them all could scarce find prettier speeches than Count Guido, when he chooses to praise his Portia."

"It is in order that her giddy head may be steadied betimes," replied he in the same tone. "and learn to bear all the flood of nonsense that will be poured into her ears by and by, without being turned ever after."

"And so, to prevent me from wearing my head like a weathercock or a mill-wheel by and by, you'll risk stuffing it with vanity now. This is willing me to be presently vain, lest I become a vane; and leads me into the sin of vain talking."

"Then leave vain talking, and hearken seriously to a story I have to tell thee touching a member of one of those noble families, whom I mean to be among our guests at our approaching festival. The young Marquis of Montferrat is able to tell a witching tale in a fair lady's ear, I doubt not, like one of those flatterers we spoke of but now; for he is a likely gallant, handsome, brave, and courteous."

"A good beginning to your story, padre mio; 'handsome, brave, and courteous!' What follows? Generous, accomplished, witty, perhaps? What is your sequel?"

"This gentleman is the sole surviving representative of the rich and noble house of Montferrat, famed for the splendor of their taste at home, and for the renown of their arms abroad. The young Marquis, some months since, happened to be indulging his Venetian predilection for the Adriatic, by coasting along her shores with some young friends in the pleasure-galley he has for such marine excursions. One day the party had landed to enjoy the beauty of the scenery, and had caused their noontide repast to be brought from the vessel by their attendants, and spread beneath the shade of some trees that formed a group round a spot of attractive coolness. They drooped over a spring of fresh water, which welled and bubbled forth like Galatea's transformed love, taking its pellucid way in meandering streams across the plains towards the sea, as if it sought to join its white mistress once again and for ever."

"The young gallants had finished their repast," continued Guido, "and had most of them wandered away in different directions amid the neighboring woods in search of sport, or led by curiosity; only two or three attendants remained near the spot to collect the plate and various utensils before returning to the ship. But the fulfilment of this duty was postponed, and the men were indulging in a game of Mora, carried on somewhat apart, and in as subdued a key as the excitement of play would permit (gradually arising from sotto voce to eager crescendo

and sforzando), under pretence of being unwilling to disturb their young master with the clatter of the glass and silver during his slumber; for the Marquis had fallen back upon the soft grass, and had yielded to the soothing influence of the scene and the combined geniality of the late feast, in a siesta."

"At this moment, three or four brigands, belonging to a band that infested this quarter, and had their lurking-place in the adjoining woods, rushed forwards in hope of making an easy spoil of the gold and silver plate which lay spread around, and had doubtless lured them to the spot. The scared domestics fled; and the ruffians were about to make sure of the sleeping nobleman, by stabbing him at once, when a travel-worn stranger suddenly came up, and by opposing the cowardly attack, roused the Marquis, who was thus enabled to draw his sword, and assist the traveller in their joint defence."

"The noise of the affray soon recalled the dispersed company; and as the gentlemen of the party successively hurried to the spot to the rescue of their friend, the brigands fled before this reinforcement."

"The Marquis and his company now surrounded the traveller, and offered him their thanks for his timely succour, with an earnestness more the result of their own courtesy, than due to the service rendered, which was no more than an act of common christian charity."

"You tell me who was the traveller, in thus underrating the gallantry of his behaviour, padre mio," interrupted Portia; "nobody but Guido di Belmonte himself, would thus talk of the act that saved a man's life."

"The Marquis more than requited the service, in his profuse acknowledgments, his generous treatment of a stranger, and the kindness and zeal with which he sought to promote his wishes when he found that the traveller was eager to proceed on his journey, which had been delayed by an adverse accident that had compelled him to land, a day or two before, from the vessel, in which he had been sailing from the East, and which was bound to Venice. He entreated him to use his galley, to direct its course whithersoever he might desire; and said that he and his company would proudly escort him to his destination. They accordingly set sail for Venice immediately, entertaining him as an honored

guest during their course thither; and when they discovered that a profound sorrow which possessed him wholly prevented the stranger from participating in their revelry, these gentlemen discreetly forbore to intrude upon his grief, leaving him to indulge his solitude undisturbed and respected."

"When, however, the galley made the port of Venice, and the stranger and his entertainers were about to take leave, the Marquis begged to know the name of the man to whom he felt himself obliged; and he, in his turn, feeling that a mere cold adieu was but poor requital for the courtesy and kindness he had received at the hands of the generous young nobleman, confided to him the sorrowful story of his life, and told him that should he ever know a period of restored tranquility and peace of mind, he would entreat him to come and see if Casa Belmonte could yield as pleasant entertainment and welcome, as he had met with on board the galley 'Aglaiia.' With this compact we parted; and now that I have indeed found greater happiness than I ever dared to hope for again, I mean to invite my noble young friend hither, that he may behold its existence and its source. So good a heart as his, will not fail to rejoice in my joy; so high a taste as his for all that is rare and beautiful, must needs be struck with the cause of that joy—my child, my Portia. I would now, methinks, have all my friends behold her father's treasure; and see how bounteous Heaven, in her, repays him for all sorrows past."

As Guido finished speaking, his faithful servant Balthazar came to apprise him that his steward was awaiting an audience in the library, with some papers relative to the estate, which required inspection and signature.

The Count withdrew to the library, bidding his daughter join him there as soon as the steward should have retired, that they might write the invitations for the approaching festival, and despatch messengers with them to the several families in Venice and elsewhere.

Portia remained bending over her work, lost in thought, but Nerissa, who was seated at the embroidery-frame, assisting her lady, yet maintaining a discreet silence in the presence of the Count, now gave free

course to her usual liveliness of speech. The circumstances of their early companionship, the unrestrained intercourse of the South between mistress and attendant, the gay pleasant nature of Nerissa herself, as well as the happy spirits of Portia, all tended to preserve their freedom and ease of intimacy little less than that which had subsisted between the two, when children together.

“What think you, madam, of your father’s story?”

“That it shows him, as I have known him ever, through my cousin Bellario’s knowledge;” answered Portia. “The facts of the tale showed him to be, what his modesty in the telling would fain have hidden—ardent, brave, and generous.”

“Ay, that is what he would fain have had you believe the Marquis to be,” said Nerissa. “And yet from the story I could find no such thing. The gallant was asleep when he should have been awake, which tells not much for his ardor; he drew his sword, indeed, but we heard not that he used it—or if he did, it was to save his own life when it was hard beset, which is no great argument of his bravery—surely, any common sworder would do as much; then as for his courtesy and generosity, a galley that follows no course but pleasure, has no appointed haven but amusement, its master makes no wonderful sacrifice in letting its sailing-orders be at another man’s bidding; and though my lord the Count talked of the Marquis and his friend’s discretion in respecting his grief by leaving him in solitude, it seems they had no thought of moderating their own gayety and revelry.”

“The hero of the story seems to have won no favor of you, Nerissa,” said her mistress.

“None, lady; and yet I fancy your father intended that his hero should seem one in your eyes, whatever he might in mine. But we shall see what he is like, when the festival brings the Marquis of Montferrat, with the rest, to Belmont.”

And now the thought of this approaching festival engaged every member of the household, that due splendor and effect might preside in all its arrangements to do honor to two such interesting occasions, as the return of Count Guido to his patrimony of Belmont, and the presenta-

tion of his beautiful daughter to the ancient friends of the family. Bellario was entreated to be present, that they might have the delight of seeing him lend weight and honor to the reception of the guests, by the illustrious and learned reputation of his name.

It may well be believed that this tender friend himself eagerly seized this occasion of beholding his Portia's first entrance upon the arena of life ; of marking how she should put into practice those maxims he had instilled, how remember those precepts he had inculcated, how act upon those principles he had implanted. He longed to see how her native dignity would support her through such a trial to her modesty as the first introduction to so large an assemblage of distinguished persons would needs be ; he longed to see her courtesy have wide field, her wit free play, her beauty extended admiration, her graces universal acknowledgment.

His love was no less ardent than her father's ; for while Guido's was a sort of rapturous fondness towards this child of affection, Bellario's partook of esteem and regard for those intrinsic qualities which he knew her to possess, and which he had watched and cherished from their earliest germ to their fullest development. It was with almost equal pride and delight therefore, that these two loving guardians beheld the object of their tenderest thoughts fulfil all that even they could have anticipated of excellence in her own person and demeanor, while she won universal homage from those around. The ladies commended her modest dignity and self-possession, expressing their hope that it would not be long ere they drew amongst them so bright an ornament as she would prove to their Venetian circle ; the noblemen, one and all congratulated the happy father of so fair and accomplished a maiden ; and the young gallants vied with each other in adulation, compliments, attentions, and endeavors to attract her regard.

Among these latter, the foremost was the Marquis of Montferrat. He at once placed himself among the rank of her avowed admirers ; and from the marked courtesy and warmth of the reception with which her father had welcomed him, he seemed to have already gained a priority of claim and advantage above his fellows. Of this superiority he seemed

fully conscious, from the air of triumph and assured success that sparkled in his eyes when he addressed her, and which pervaded his manner towards them. It shone insinuatingly and languishingly in his looks to her ; it flashed haughtily and defyingly upon them.

Nerissa, who leaned upon the back of her lady's seat (which was in one of the alcoves in the grounds, and formed a sort of sylvan throne for her to receive her train of admirers, anxious to tender their homage to her charms, and pay their court to her good graces), found early occasion to whisper :—" Your father's report of the handsome looks of the hero of his story, is as false as his estimation of his other qualities. The Marquis is scarce better looking than your ladyship's musicians ; who, like their brethren, the singing-birds, have the plainer the exterior, the better their song."

" Nay," returned Portia in the same tone, " the prejudice you took, even ere you saw the Marquis, lets you render him but scant justice. He is handsome, but he knows it too well. His vanity mars his straight nose, his arrogance blurs his smooth complexion, his conceit puts out his eyes, and I can hardly see his good looks for his assurance."

" There is one among the company, who surpasses him in good looks a hundredfold, to my thinking," said Nerissa ; " the young cavalier in the murrey doublet, yonder, who is listening to something that the Marquis is telling. Do you see him whom I mean, Madam ? Such eyes as those are worthy a lady's look, and the mouth seems as if it could say something worth her hearing ; which I'm sure is more than can be said for my lord Marquis's eyes and mouth."

Portia answered not, but Nerissa could see that her mistress had distinguished the gentleman, for she was looking steadily upon his face, which was slightly averted, and presented only its profile to her gaze.

Nerissa tripped away from her lady, to try and learn who he was ; and soon heard that he was the Lord Bassanio, one of the friends and associates of the Marquis of Montferrat.

" They are two foolish young men," continued her informant, who was a grey-headed old gentleman, one of the guests ; " they try who can spend their money fastest and least wisely. Even the princely for-

tune which the Marquis inherited from his worthy father, is speedily dwindling; and as for the young Lord Bassanio, it is whispered that he must shortly be ruined by such a perpetual round of extravagance as he indulges in, to please this friend of his, whom he emulates in all his follies though not in his vices. Bassanio bears an unblemished reputation for honor and integrity, while the Marquis——”

The old gentleman paused, and Nerissa could extract no further information from him, respecting the objects of her curiosity. But this was now thoroughly roused; and she determined to spare no pains to satisfy it entirely. The more she saw of the Marquis of Montferrat, the more did she find the prejudice she had originally conceived against him, strengthen and increase; and the more she saw of the Count di Belmonte's conduct towards this young nobleman, the more did she feel confirmed in the surmise she had at first formed, that he intended him to win his way to the good graces of Portia, and to become eventually his son-in-law. She resolved to communicate her suspicions to Doctor Bellario, that his wiser counsel might decide.

She found that his observation had led him to much the same conclusions with her own; but, merely commending her vigilance and prudence, and cautioning her against speaking farther on the matter to any one beside himself, he bade her rely upon him for the necessary inquiries, and for an ultimate satisfactory termination.

Before he quitted Belmont, Bellario took occasion to speak to his friend upon the subject of this new acquaintance, the Marquis of Montferrat.

Guido, with his usual warmth of manner, dwelt upon the many excellencies that distinguished this young gentleman; repeated the origin of their acquaintance in testimony of the bravery and generosity of his character; and said that all he had since seen of him confirmed his admiration of his personal qualities.

“Be quite sure, my dear friend, that these personal qualities are not the only ones that distinguish him;” replied Bellario; “ascertain that his handsome face and figure be not his only graces; and that the extent of his worth exists not solely in your generosity of imagination—which has faith for every excellence in others.”



“And are not you lawyers apt to be too skeptical in the existence of human goodness?” asked Guido, smiling. “Do you not too often imagine every stranger an enemy till you know him?”

“On the contrary, we would have every man believed innocent, till he prove guilty;” replied Bellario in the same manner. “But,” resumed he in his original graver tone, “for Portia’s sake, be quite sure he is worthy her regard, before you introduce him too frequently or too encouragingly to her notice.”

“He is to be here again in a few days by my invitation;” replied Guido. “I asked him to spend some time with us. He is the son of a most worthy father, a scion of a most noble and honorable family, and he himself is an accomplished and right gallant gentleman. You surely do him wrong, to misdoubt that he is all he seems; and if he be all he seems, he would form no unfitting match, even for our Portia.”

“He must be worthy indeed, who deserves her;” was all Bellario’s reply; for he resolved to say no more, till he could speak with better knowledge. He therefore bade his friends adieu, and took his departure, determined to lose no time in obtaining accurate information relative to the character and habits of the Marquis of Montferrat.

Belmont had scarcely time to recover its wonted serenity of aspect, after the departure of the bevy of visitors who had attended the late festival, when the young Marquis and his train returned, and by their arrival again thronged its tranquil precincts with gay equipages, horses, hounds, hawks, and troops of liveried attendants.

His retinue was so numerous, and its appointments so costly, that it showed like that of a sovereign prince, rather than that of a private gentleman. But in this profusion, the Count beheld only evidences of a magnificent taste on the part of the Marquis de Montferrat, and an additional instance of the refinement and luxury which directed the expenditure of a rich young nobleman.

On Portia, all this display seemed to produce little effect; any more than the flattering importunities, compliments, and assiduous attentions with which he personally besieged her. She received all his admiring speeches with either a lofty acquiescence, as if homage were a part of

her birthright; or with a sportive gaiety, as if they were mere idle galantry and matter of trivial unconcern. She heard all eulogy on her beauty with sovereign indifference, and treated all compliments to her wit, as a challenge to exercise its least merciful powers on the adulator himself. Portia, ever distinguished for courtesy and true dignity, would have treated a less confident suitor with no such haughtiness; but the pertinacity and assurance of this Marquis left her scarcely any other alternative. He seemed determined not to be repelled; while he contrived that it should appear as if the strength of his passion alone induced him to yield such implicit submission to the caprice he deplored.

This was the light in which his behavior appeared to the Count; who believed him to have conceived an ardent and sincere love for his Portia.

Not so Nerissa; who, in witnessing any of these instances of the suitor's paraded deference, would not fail to remark, that where a man accepted with undue passiveness the tyranny of his mistress, he not unfrequently did so with the view of securing a slave in his future wife.

But at length the increasing scorn with which Portia treated the distasteful assiduity of the Marquis, struck her father as being beyond the gay disdain which ladies are sometimes accustomed to affect towards their wooers; and he was one evening walking in the avenue, his thoughts employed with this subject, when a messenger approached at a smart gallop, and seeing the Count, placed a letter in his hands, and rode on.

Guido read as follows:

“ Dear friend and brother,

I possess undoubted proofs that the Marquis is a notorious and confirmed gambler, and an unscrupulous libertine. Until I can myself bring you these proofs, believe that this accusation is not made lightly, or without sufficient warrant. Suffer not such a presence longer to sully the pure atmosphere of Belmont; nor let a too late heed of my intelligence injure our Portia to the latest term of her life.

Your faithfully devoted

BELLARIO.”

Guido remained for a moment as if stunned ; then recovering himself, he was hastening to the house with the thought of rescuing his child instantly from the contamination of such a guest's presence ; when he heard voices near which convinced him that the Marquis was not then with Portia. There was one department of the gardens of Belmont which ran parallel with the avenue, and which was divided from it only by a thick hedge of myrtle. From immediately the other side of this hedge the voices proceeded, and the Count at once discovered that they were those of the Marquis and Nerissa.

"Do not detain me, my lord ;" he heard the latter say, "my lady sent me for these roses, and she will be impatient at my delay."

"Nay, fairest of waiting-maids," replied the voice of the Marquis, whose accents betrayed that he was flushed with wine, "do not imitate the airs of that dignified piece of frost-work, your mistress, but listen while I tell you how far you transcend her in beauty. By heaven ! were she not heiress of Belmont, she would seem but a paltry weed to you, my flower of loveliness !"

"Good my lord gardener, let both the weed and the flower alone ; they neither of them seek to be your prize-blossoms, I'll warrant you ;" replied Nerissa, with her usual vivacity ; but the next moment she added in increasing alarm, "let go my hands, my lord !"

"Not till I have gathered some of the flower's fragrance from its blooming cup,—those rosy lips," he cried ; "not till I have said——"

"Say what you please, my lord Marquis, but do not hold me ; let me go !"

"Hear me say this, then ;" he suddenly stooped, and whispered in her ear.

"Foul villain lord !" she exclaimed vehemently ; and the next instant uttered a piercing scream.

The Count flung open a small wicket gate that led through the myrtle hedge, and stood before them

The Marquis quitted his grasp of Nerissa, and made a faint attempt at some laughing excuse ; but he read in the stern countenance of the father, that the gross insult of his behavior was discovered.

"Return to the house, Nerissa," said the Count after a pause, "and desire the Marquis of Montferrat's servants to assemble their master's retinue, and prepare his equipage, as he intends quitting Belmont immediately. Your lordship will excuse this abrupt leave-taking," added he, "when I inform you that I have overheard your late conversation with my daughter's waiting-maid, and that I have good authority for believing that to the arts of a seducer, the Marquis of Montferrat adds other accomplishments equally opposed to the qualifications I require in a friend or guest."

He bowed haughtily, turning on his heel, as he concluded; while the Marquis returned his bow as haughtily, in silence, and, hastening away, in less than half an hour had quitted Belmont for ever.

Count Guido remained in bitter reverie. "So much for my perspicacity," thought he, "in judging of the qualities of the man I chose for a friend, and whom I might have gone on to wish should be my son-in-law,—my Portia's husband! And to a mere trick of fancy, to a poor credulity, which Bellario would fain call generosity, and faith in goodness, because it characterizes me,—to this miserable blindness of mine, might my child have been sacrificed! It was just such blinded judgment that led me to cast away the means of consolation vouchsafed by Heaven, and fly from the fresh well-spring of joy contained in my infant daughter, to bury myself in arid oriental solitude. Little has my own poor judgment bested me in my course through life. Better to refer all things to chance, even things of greatest moment, than decide them by so erring, so worthless a guide, as judgment of mine. Chance once befriended me beyond all the judgment I ever exercised. It was chance that determined my return, and led me to the first beholding of my love, my sainted Portia. And shall not chance prove a better trust than judgment?"

He lingered in such dark thoughts of bitterness and self-reproach, until at length his daughter came to seek him, wooing him to return with her to the house, lest too late wandering beneath the trees in the night air should injure his health, which had never been strong since the period of his absence. Long fasts, neglect, gnawing sorrow, during

his sojourn in the desert, with, latterly, a restless desire for return thence, had totally undermined his constitution, rendering him the wasted, worn, altered being, whom his friend had failed to recognize on his return home, for the once blooming, animated Guido di Belmonte. The reaction of delight, in discovering his daughter to be so fertile a source of happiness, had at first exercised a salutary effect; but now his slowly-engendered malady assumed a more decided form, and his health and strength were evidently failing.

He was perfectly aware of his own declining state; but his chief anxiety was to prevent it from being perceived by his daughter; he carefully withheld from her his sleepless nights, his unequal pulse, and the constant fever that consumed him. He made ceaseless pretenses to veil his loss of appetite, his varying spirits, his parching thirst, from her observation; and when he noted her affectionate eye dwelling upon the wan and wasted cheek, when he felt her fresh palm linger inquiringly upon his thin burning hand, or with fond solicitude her look would minutely question the tokens she dared not believe she saw of illness and decay, he would rouse himself to evade her suspicions; to dissipate her fears.

In order the more effectually to do this, he made a strong effort to carry out a resolution he had for some time entertained, of taking her himself to Venice, to introduce her to the several families of distinction, who had urged Portia and himself to return the visit paid to Belmont on the occasion of the festival there. He was desirous that she should form some valuable friendships, which might support her in that sad period when he himself should be compelled to quit her. He knew that she would always possess a father in Bellario; but he was anxious to smooth the way for that generous friend himself, by establishing those relations, which he would best wish her to form in the world.

He felt, too, that this would afford him an opportunity of accomplishing a project which had occurred to him in that self-communing he had lately held with regard to chance and judgment. Impetuous ever, in his nature, his sensitive conscience had lately yielded to feverish promptings and rash fancies, and he now conceived a scheme as eccen-

tric in its aim, as his former exercise of judgment had been hasty and defective.

He determined that while he was in Venice he would order to be constructed three caskets, severally made of gold, silver, and lead; and that on the choice of these caskets should rest a decision of dearest moment. In one of them he resolved to inclose the portrait of his daughter, and whosoever of her suitors should choose the casket containing her picture, should be her appointed husband. In devising this mode of election, he seemed to give chance the full weight of the decision; but in the carrying out of his plan, it will hereafter be seen that judgment on the part of him who should choose from the caskets was involved in the election itself.

An early day was appointed for their departure from Belmont. Portia, delighted to find her father in sufficient health and spirits for such a visit, anticipated her introduction to Venice, with all the pleasure and eagerness usual to a young mind about to enter for the first time upon so new and brilliant a scene. Their noble friends vied with each other, who best should contribute to render the welcome of the Count di Belmonte and his daughter gay and attractive; and all exhibited rival splendor and variety of amusement to entertain such honored guests. Each day some new pastime was proposed; each day some diversity of sport, some ingenuity of device, some reunion of illustrious people, some gay masking, some daylight excursion, or nightly revelry.

On one occasion, the grand canal presented a scene of unsurpassed brilliancy and animation; a boat-race was to take place, a distance was appointed, prizes were instituted, and all Venice thronged to behold the issue of the contention. Boats of all sizes and descriptions crowded hither; craft of every kind pushed and jostled; gondolas glided to and fro; boatmen shouted and called; gayly-dressed ladies and gallants smiled and flirted; draperies of every vivid color depended from windows; balconies were filled with gazers; steps and doorways, like the entrances to beehives, supported their clusters, and swarmed with living creatures.

The appointed boats that were to engage in the race, were of peculiarly small plain construction, well built for making their way over the water, and each occupied by two men only, who impelled them in the manner peculiar to the Venetian boatmen—pushing rather than rowing.

These contesting boats were singularly in contrast with others of a larger size, which were hung with silken festoons, and glittered with gold and silver fringe, waved with crested plumes, and were richly adorned and emblazoned with the arms of the several families to whom they belonged. The rowers or gondoliers in each, varied in number, but were dressed in livery of a superb though singular kind ; being of variegated and fantastically assorted colors ; oddly fancied stuffs, and forming quaint devices ; sometimes a set of husbandmen with straw hats, flowers, floating ribbons, and rustic attire ; sometimes a band of green foresters ; and sometimes a row of nondescript beings with red arms, yellow bodies, and blue legs.

In some of these decorated vessels (which generally contained the patrons and abettors of the race) might be seen lounging at the prow, extended on cushions, some representative of a noble house, who by his negligent attitude, and affectedly abstracted look, seemed willing to afford others the gratification of contemplating his fine person and studied dress. Many of these gallants indulged in only a furtive glance at the beauty that surrounded them, and it seemed to be a sort of fashion among them to affect being the admired instead of the admirers on this occasion.

In one of these boats, there reclined a young Venetian, who was remarkable, even among so much surrounding brightness, for the splendor of his dress, the costliness of his boat-decorations, the whimsicality of his men's attire, and the gravity with which he observed the affected fashion alluded to just now. He maintained an air of profound abstraction, as if noways concerned in the busy scene around him, and looked like a recumbent statue rather than a living man. As one in the procession of boats which glided idly backwards and forwards in mid-stream before the race began, his vessel passed and repassed the galley in which

the Count di Belmonte and his daughter sat with their friends to behold the pageant; and in the downcast eyes and listless figure of this young gallant, Portia recognized the young gentleman pointed out by Nerissa among the company at the Belmont festival as being so superlatively handsome.

"His affectation would spoil him altogether, but that it seems merely assumed in conformity with the prevailing mode here," thought she. "I will look at him once more, when his vessel comes round again."

She was so intently watching his return, that she paid little heed to an old lady, a member of the house of Manfrini, who had taken a great fancy to her, and who was endeavoring to entertain her with a description of the various persons she recognized. "Yonder is Signor Luigi and his three fair daughters," said the old lady; "they are saluting that grave gentleman in the sober suit, who is no less a personage than Signor Antonio, whom my lord calls the 'royal merchant.' He is as worthy as he is wealthy, and does a world of good with his riches. They say he is very generous to poor struggling tradesmen, and tender to unfortunate debtors. Moreover he has good blood in his veins, and is of gentle birth. There goes that pleasant scapegrace, Signor Gratiano; and in the farther boat is young Signor Lorenzo, with two of his friends. Yonder is the galley of his highness the prince of Morocco, who has lately arrived in this city with his train, and who, I understand, is so courteous and pleasant-spoken, that you forget he is black. But for my part, I can't fancy a black man could be so agreeable as a white man; I own I have prejudices, and that's one of mine,—I hate people of color. Talking of prejudices, there's that detestable old Jew! How dare he come among us, I should like to know? But that's one of the drawbacks on such an occasion as this. It allows of so mixed an assemblage. A paltry trafficker may elbow a magnifico, or a Jew usurer associate with us Christians! They say the villanous dog has a pretty black-eyed daughter whom he keeps shut up in his miserable den of a house, instead of bringing the poor thing out to have a peep at such a sight as this! Ah, here comes young Lord Bassanio again; he is a true gentleman; and my lord says, a brave soldier, and an excellent scholar, for all he is playing off



such coxcombical airs to-day. I am sorry to hear that he is ruining his fortune with the extravagant course he is running. Why, the equipment of that vessel, I should say, never cost him less than——”

What the gossip-loving old lady might have gone on farther to say, Portia knew not, for at this moment, her father leaned forward to accost the young gentleman, who, starting from his abstracted condition, and seeing who spoke to him, recognized the Count with a respectful earnestness and a lively warmth of manner that offered a remarkable contrast with his previous apathy. As the young man stood there with his hat courteously removed, and his attitude full of grace and deference, replying to her father's salutation, Portia thought Nerissa's estimate was certainly correct; and when, a moment after, the young Venetian happened to raise his eyes to hers, he found them fixed upon him with the complacency inspired by such a thought. Several times again in the course of the day he met that look; and when, at the conclusion of the race, he retired from the contention as one of the losers, he felt consoled by the sympathetic glance of interest that once more flashed upon him from those expressive eyes. A thought for the first time thrilled through the heart of Bassanio, that had he not injured his fortune by a hitherto idle and spendthrift course, he might have aspired to obtain a far more glorious prize than the one awarded to the winning boat.

“What if I consult with my friend and kinsman, Antonio, upon the means of repairing my fortunes?” thought he. “Even were I to entreat of his generosity to bestow upon me a fitting sum to equip me for entering the lists that I might contend for her favor—his kindness hath that extent, I am certain. I will think of it; meantime, I vow to undertake a pilgrimage to Belmont, at some not very distant day.”

After a gay and pleasant interval spent at Venice, the father and daughter prepared to return; and Portia had the satisfaction of remarking, that instead of the injurious effects which might perhaps have been dreaded from such unusual excitement and exertion upon the weakened frame of her father, the change seemed, on the contrary, to have been beneficial. As they proceeded homewards in their coach, which met them on the mainland, after ferrying across, the Count spoke playfully

with his daughter of their late scenes of gayety ; and in his sprightly tone and cheerful glance, Portia read more healthful symptoms than she had noted for many a day.

“ And of all those stores of splendor, of all those bright gayeties, I have brought you away no richer token than this slight bauble,” said he, placing a ruby ring upon her finger, “ but it will serve to remind my Portia of a pleasant holiday with her loving father ; and such thoughts I know she prizes above jewels the most rare and precious that might be found in all Venice.”

His daughter kissed it fondly, as well as the hand that placed it on hers, and said :—“ It shall never quit my finger, dear father.”

“ Nay, you shall give it some day to him, who shall possess the hand itself—to your husband, my Portia.” And the father unconsciously sighed.

Portia looked brightly in his face, and said, till she met with one she could love and honor as she did her father and cousin, she cared not to behold the man who was to claim the ring ; but that as it was not likely she should ever encounter such a being, she might safely engage to endow him with the ring, with herself, and with all she possessed, whenever so superlative a knight should appear.

Her father pressed the hand that lay in his, and looked proudly into the beaming countenance that was raised to his own. He seemed about to say something earnestly to her, when he perceived that the carriage was approaching a group of ruins which lay on the confines of the Belmont domain, and he leaned from the window to regard them. Portia, observing the look, called softly to the attendants to pause ; and they remained a few moments in contemplation of a scene as lovely as it was replete with gentle memories for those two who now gazed upon its beauty.

The spot was bathed in the gorgeous light of the setting sun, and the stillness of the evening was so profound that the beating of their hearts might almost have been heard, as the father and daughter sat there in silent yet perfect sympathy.

Suddenly, a groan, as of one in pain, reached their ear. They listen-

ed. Another; and then another. "Open the door, Stephano!" called the voice of Portia to one of the attendants. "Let me get out of the coach. I will see who this sufferer is, dear father, and return to you immediately," added she; and scarcely waiting for his reply, she bounded from the carriage-step.

"Follow your young mistress, Stephano; and you, Rico;" said the Count. "Balthazar, and the rest, may remain here." And he watched the light figure of his child, as Portia, intent upon her charitable quest, pressed eagerly forward in the direction whence the sound had seemed to proceed.

At the foot of an aged tree that cast its broad shadows among the broken columns and fractured arches of the ruins, which formed the remains of some antique temple, and lay scattered in classic fragments around, she found a man stretched upon the grass, apparently in the last stage of exhaustion. He wore the coarse and travel-stained garb of a pilgrim; and by his side lay the staff, and hat sewn with cockle-shells, that bespoke his being one of those pious wayfarers.

Portia addressed herself to the succor of this unfortunate; bidding one of the attendants, who had been sent after her, return quickly that he might relieve her father's suspense, and bring back some of the restoratives that had been placed in the coach for the Count's use. She then desired Stephano to place himself beside the apparently dying man, and to raise his head upon his knee, while she herself fanned the sufferer's brow, and chafed his horny sun-burnt hands with her own delicate palms.

As she gazed upon the wan lips, closed eyes, and contracted brow of this poor creature, she could not but call to mind the sufferings of her own father, when he too had been an unhappy wanderer upon the earth; and her charitable anxiety to restore him became even more strenuous. Presently Rico arrived, bearing with him such remedies, as were not long in restoring the pilgrim to himself; for it appeared that he had fainted from want, fatigue, and exhaustion; but was so far from being in a dying state, that, with the aid of the two attendants, he was shortly able to raise himself, and pour forth fervent thanks to the fair being who had bestowed such timely succor.

"Do not exhaust yourself with speaking, good father," said Portia, "but lean upon Rico and Stephano, and they will support you as far as my coach, which will carry us to Belmont, where we shall find food and repose."

In this manner they contrived to reach the spot where she had left the Count; who, assisting his daughter to place her charge within the carriage, bade the attendants proceed at a pace accommodated to the wanderer's aching limbs. In the course of the drive home, they learned that he was a poor pilgrim, returning from the Holy Land; that he had been endeavoring to reach a neighboring monastery, which lay two miles from Belmont, where he might obtain hospitality, but had travelled so far in the heat during that and the preceding day, without having been able to procure food, that he had at length sunk fainting upon the grass beneath the ruins, where he might have perished, but for Portia's seasonable aid.

"And now, methinks, I could ask no better fate of Heaven, than to spend the remainder of my days on that spot where my opening eyes beheld that ministering angel of bounty;" concluded the pilgrim. "In such a hermitage, I might calmly and peacefully pass the remnant of my life in heavenly contemplation, in lauding His mercy who sent her thither, and in beseeching Him to grant her the happiness she so richly merits."

"And you will let me plan this hermitage, and provide all the arrangements of the cell, will you not, padre mio?" asked Portia, with all the elation of a young heart enjoying the pleasure of a kindly deed,—and which elation of spirit was peculiarly hers. "You will allow me to install this holy man in the spot he has himself chosen for his pious retirement, will you not, my dear father?"

"My Portia knows I can refuse her nothing," replied the Count; "more especially when she seeks to secure for us so holy a neighbor as yourself, good father."

Accordingly, when a day or two had elapsed, and the worthy pilgrim had sufficiently recovered his strength, he removed to the hermit's cell, which was provided for him among the ruins by the permission of the

Count, and under the immediate superintendence of his daughter; and so eagerly, so indefatigably, did Portia work at these arrangements, that Nerissa bantered her upon all this zeal and ardor in behalf of a poor old hermit and his cell, when she had not found time for one single hour's gossip, to tell her about Venice, its revelries, its gallants, its rival beauties, its braveries of attire, its thousand attractions, or the millions of broken-hearted suitors, whom she must have left with no other resource than to throw themselves headlong into the lagoon.

But Portia's ardor was not of that kind which burns itself out in the first glow of emotion, upon the performance of a good deed; she was as steady as she was warm-hearted, as firm and consistent as gentle and benign. She not only established this venerable man in his chosen retreat; but she ceased not to cheer and delight its solitude by her occasional visits and kindly presence, receiving in return pious instruction, and interesting narratives of his former wandering life, in his own person furnishing meek and consoling example of patience, faith, and peace.

Soon, she had need indeed of consolation. One morning, she was sitting by her father's side in the library, reading to him from one of his favorite volumes, when she suddenly felt his hand, in which hers was locked twitch convulsively, while his head, a moment afterwards, dropped powerless upon the back of the chair in which he sat. She leaned towards him—he was speechless; but he gave her one of those mute yet eloquent looks, in which the soul speaks through the eyes.

"My dear, dear father!" With her disengaged hand, she hastily bared his throat, drew his hair back from his temples, and bathed them with some essence which happened to stand upon the library-table within reach

Her first anxiety was to still the fears that throbbed at her heart, lest they might agitate her father, and render herself less capable of commanding thought and energy for his assistance; her next, that she might be able to reach the bell to summon help, for she found she could not withdraw her hand from her father's strict grasp, which seemed rigid and involuntary.

After one cautious effort, without being able to succeed in stretching her disengaged arm so far, she leaned towards his ear, and said in a low voice, which she endeavored to render steady and calm:—"I am about to call aloud, dear father; do not be alarmed at the noise." And then she called in a clear ringing tone:—"Balthazar! Balthazar!" But at this period of the morning, few of the servants were in that portion of the house; most of them being busy in the offices, and dispersed elsewhere, knowing that this was the hour when the Count and his daughter usually sat quietly reading in the library, not requiring their attendance.

All this passed through Portia's brain, in a strange reasoning and of calmness, as she stood there, vainly endeavoring to make her voice bring other response than its own echoes. Between every call, she held her breath, that she might catch the most distant sound of approaching help; but nothing could she hear, save these vain echoes as they travelled fruitlessly through the long galleries, alternated by the fearful pauses, and the beating of her own heart.

Her father seemed to comprehend her position, for he continued to cast those expressive looks upon her; though he could articulate no sound, nor unclasp his fingers from the strict grasp they maintained round those of his daughter.

She gazed into those speaking eyes which seemed striving to convey some injunction to her, that she might try to read their meaning; and she once saw him attempt to raise his other hand, as if in the languid endeavor to make some signal, but she could not divine its import.

She whispered words of tenderness, beseeching him not to exhaust his strength by such efforts, while she continued to bathe his temples, and renewed her own attempts to summon help.

At length she heard a sound, at once discordant with her present feelings, and welcome from its assurance of aid—Nerissa's merry laugh! Clearly and imperatively once again Portia called. Nerissa hastened towards her lady's voice; but the mirthful look and tone with which she entered, were stricken into dismay by what she beheld.

Portia, by a steadfast effort, controlled her emotion, while she desired Nerissa to speed for Balthazar and other attendants, to dispatch a messenger for medical assistance, and another to Padua to summon Bellario to Belmont.

With the mastery of a well-disciplined mind, and the fortitude of a firm, loving, unselfish heart, she compelled herself to issue these orders in a calm, almost unfaltering tone, and to assist Balthazar in his attempts to alleviate his master's condition. The faithful servitor wished to persuade his master to be supported to his own apartment, but at this proposal for removing him, the features of the Count expressed so visible a repugnance, that Portia would not permit it to be urged.

"If we could but get my lord to lie down, Madam," whispered the weeping Balthazar, "I feel sure that he would be easier. My lord the Count had one of these seizures before—a night or two before you went to Venice; but he would not permit your ladyship to be informed of it, because it went off by the dawn of morning, and he said it was nothing, and you should not be made uneasy about such a trifle."

Portia repressed the bitter words that arose to her lips, with which she felt inclined to reprove Balthazar for having concealed from her so vital a secret; but she would not permit herself to give one thought to regret, while she could devote them to the present succor of her father. She knelt by his side, and murmured softly:—"Will my father try if lying down may relieve him?"

There was a look of acquiescence.

But when Balthazar and another attendant advanced to support him away, the same expression of denial crossed his features as before.

"Will you not let us place you in bed, dearest father?"

The expression remained unchanged.

"We think if you were reclining, it would be a better position than as you are now, dear father. Will you not try to lie down?"

His eyes resumed their eager look.

"I think my father objects to remove from this room, Balthazar, and that he would lie down, if a couch were made for him here." Portia fixed her eyes upon her father's, as she uttered these words, and perceived unequivocal tokens that she had interpreted his wishes aright.

The thought that the love between them enabled her thus to read his unspoken desires, caused tears to spring from sudden joy, which had been forbidden to the pangs of grief. A sorrow may sometimes be wrestled with, and denied the indulgence of expression, when a tender transport over-masters resolution and will have vent in sobs.

As his daughter thus hung over him, yielding to the emotions of her heart for the first time since his attack, her father seemed equally clearly to read the interpretation of his Portia's feelings; and thus did true and perfect love reveal to each, the silent articulation of their mutual thought.

The attendants speedily arranged one of the library couches for the reception of the Count, and they laid him softly down in a recumbent position; his daughter still with her hand fast locked in his, which could not unclench its grasp.

She bade them lower the dark green draperies of the nearest window still more, over the blinds that excluded the glare of the noontide sun, and desired Balthazar alone to remain in the room, as she hoped her father might sleep.

Portia sat gazing upon that beloved face, listening to the low, irregular breathings, and striving to hush the forebodings that appalled her with the thought that she might behold him die there, before the physician and surgeon could arrive.

She struggled hard with the terrible fear, and dropped softly to her knees by her father's side, that she might beseech strength and comfort of her Father in Heaven. As she knelt meekly there, pouring out her soul in prayer to the Almighty Parent in behalf of the earthly one, she felt the hand that still held hers, slightly relax its grasp; and a moment afterwards, that deep, tender tone she knew so well, and which she had almost despaired of ever hearing again, murmured the words:—"My Portia!"



She arose hastily but quietly, and bent over the couch.

"Are we alone, my Portia?" he said.

Portia bade Balthazar retire to the ante-room, but to wait within call, and not to fail letting her know when the medical men should arrive.

"We are alone now, dearest father," said she.

"I have no moment to lose," said the Count. "This interval of speech and strength is mercifully lent to me, but it may not last long, and I dread lest I once more behold myself reduced to my late torture of impotency in speech and action, while so much remains to be said and done for the welfare of my Portia."

She strove to tranquillize him ; and besought him not to let anxiety for her, risk fresh exertion, which might occasion relapse.

He regarded not her words, but proceeded with an eagerness that partook of his old spirit:—"Unlock yonder cabinet, my Portia, and bring me the three caskets, with the fold of sealed parchment which you will find beside them."

She obeyed his directions; fearful lest in endeavoring to dissuade him from the exertion, opposition to his wishes might produce worse effects than submission.

"Tell me what words are engraven upon the lid of each of these caskets, my Portia."

"Upon the golden one is inscribed, 'Who chooseth me, shall gain what many men desire;' upon the silver one 'Who chooseth me, shall get as much as he deserves;' and upon the leaden one, 'Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath,'" replied she.

"By this parchment deed, which is a will I executed when in Venice, my child, feeling even then convinced that I might shortly expect this fatal summons—I have provided that on the choice of these caskets shall depend your destiny in marriage. In one of these caskets is locked your picture; you will find the three corresponding keys of gold, silver and lead, in the right-hand drawer of the cabinet. Of these keys take charge yourself; you will find specified in the will, on what occasions you are to deliver them up. My original aim in devising this scheme, on which I have rested the decision of my Portia's fate, has been some

what modified ; but my wish is still that she promise to abide by the terms of my will. Yes," continued he, as if to himself, and with a wild earnestness that lighted his fast-dimming eyes, and lent a momentary energy to his half-extinct voice, "I have learned to think that thus chance and judgment may be made to aid each other, and wisely combine to decide what else might never justly be awarded. For who shall deserve her? Bellario truly said it." He paused an instant; but meeting the eye of his Portia, and reading there her terror at his wandering words, he strove to recall what he wished especially to say to her. "'Tis for your sake, my Portia; 'tis best thus, believe it. Will you give me your promise? Do you pledge your word to dispose of yourself according to the plan set forth in my will?"

"I vow solemnly to obey your will in all things, my father;" exclaimed Portia.

A serene peace dwelt upon his features at her words, and he feebly stretched his arms towards her. She flung herself upon the bed beside him, and tenderly straining him in the embrace he sought, she heard him murmur: "Now happily I go to await with *her* the future coming of our child—our Portia."

When Balthazar came in with the doctors, they found the father and daughter clasped thus in each other's arms; both profoundly still. But the daughter's was the stillness of a death-like swoon—the father's, that of death itself!

When Portia recovered from the fainting-fit in which her senses lay steeped, during so lengthened a period that it alarmed Nerissa for her life, the first object that met her eyes was Bellario. That dear and tender friend, that devoted cousin, was there watching over her; to hail the first look of returning consciousness; to assist in reconciling her to meet the light of existence, now so shorn of its beams for that loving daughter. He was there to temper the first shock which the restored sense of her loss would surely bring; he was close beside her, to lighten her grief by sharing it, to console her by his sympathy, to strengthen her by his help, and to afford her comfort and hope by his love, his tenderness, his true affection.

Between them there had ever been perfect understanding and intimate knowledge ; and she had scarcely lost a truer father, than the one she possessed in Bellario.

In his society she learned to encounter the blow which had befallen her, to endure the daily sense of her bereavement, and, in time, to convert its remembrance into a source of hallowed memories rather than of bitter regrets. For, once again, did this devoted friend make his other duties subservient to the exigencies of his Portia's welfare ; once again, did he dedicate his time and thoughts to Belmont and to her ; once again did he constitute himself a father to this father-left young creature. During the whole time of her mourning, he never quitted her ; consecrating himself entirely to the task of affording comfort and consolation by his presence, and of cheering and strengthening her in that period of seclusion and retirement.

But when more than a twelvemonth had elapsed, and he had beheld sorrow succeed to despondency, resignation to sorrow, and cheerful hope of one day rejoining her parents to resignation, he felt that she ought no longer to indulge in so strict a privacy ; but that the time had now arrived for the fulfilment of her father's will.

The terms of this will, as regarded the heiress of Belmont, were generally known ; and it was only in accordance with the respect due to the period of her mourning, which she desired to pass in complete seclusion, that the host of suitors, attracted by the hope of winning so rich a prize, had hitherto refrained from entering the lists, and seeking to ascertain their fortune by the decision of the fateful caskets. The reputation of her wealth and beauty had extended far and wide ; and Bellario knew that it sufficed but to proclaim the period of Portia's season of mourning and retirement to be at an end, in order that suitors without number would flock to the gates of Belmont. He was well aware of her determination to abide scrupulously by the dictates of her father's will ; and however he might secretly doubt the merits of the prescribed plan, which assigned so important a point of decision to a trial for the most part of chance, he respected the daughter's pious obedience too much, to utter a single word subversive of her resolution.

When therefore Bellario announced to her that he thought it now behooved her to deny herself a longer indulgence in solitude, and to throw open the gates of Belmont for the advent of visitors, she, with her usual good sense and dignity, sought not to delay an inevitable consequence; but told him that however she might have of herself desired to live still to themselves, seeking no other companionship, no better friendship, no dearer love, she yet perceived the wisdom of his counsel, and was prepared to conform to his suggestion.

“And that you may now appear in your true and exclusive right as mistress of Belmont, my Portia,” said he, “I shall now withdraw myself to my quiet bachelor house at Padua, and leave you to receive these visitors, unsupported, save by your own dignity and noble discretion.” Then seeing her about to remonstrate at losing him just when his presence was most desired, he went on to say:—“It will be wiser for you to accustom yourself henceforth to rely firmly upon your own conduct, my Portia, and to relinquish the society of one, who, though most dear to you, I know, is yet one to whom you have been habituated to look for counsel and assistance. For these you may still apply, by letter; we have long had the custom of corresponding with each other. Fail not therefore to inform me of yourself constantly, and above all, to send for my help whenever it may avail you in aught of exigence or emergency; but in conduct, in action, learn to depend upon yourself, and determine to hazard rather some mistake, so that you may rely upon your own understanding, your own powers. You know, my Portia, that I have never flattered you; I have even preferred over-sedulous watching and reforming your errors, to remarking upon your merits. But I have discerned those merits none the less clearly from my having noted them silently instead of lauding them; and it is now an occasion when I may honestly speak of their existence, and tell you that I think their nature and number are such, that they serve to make you one of the noblest and worthiest of your sex. You have reached an age when a woman is at her brightest, her most attractive period of life. You have youth, beauty, wealth, virtue, native intellect, a cultivated understanding, and a generous, innocent, happy heart. Your attractions, affluence, and

rank, will command attention ; your courtesy and dignity will insure respect ; your talents and virtues will win esteem and attachment ; and your loving nature will be a source of happiness to yourself and others. Your generosity and beneficence will prevent your riches from exciting envy ; and it will be only those men who cannot bear that woman should be the bestowing party, who will be mean enough to impute pride to one who has so much in her gift yet who bestows it so liberally. Your intellectual accomplishments will draw the accusation of pedantry and unfeminine pre-eminence, from the ignorant and consciously-inferior alone, among men ; when it is seen how modestly and wisely you exercise your faculties. It is merely because I know that the most perfect of human beings never yet entirely escaped censure, that I point out whence it may reach you ; but with the good, the gifted, the refined and exact in judgment, Portia of Belmont must ever be loved and admired as the exemplar of all that is worthiest in woman. Feeling and knowing this, as I do, your faithful friend and cousin commits you unfearing to your own guidance, to your own undirected course, secure that it will be one of unblemished beauty, of distinguished excellence. God bless and protect you, my dearest Portia ; omit not to write of all you think, say, or do, to your own true Bellario."

Thus proudly confiding, thus tenderly yet wisely, did Bellario quit her ; and it required all Portia's judgment and prudence, to bid her acquiesce in a measure which deprived her of so beloved a friend—who to his self-denying discretion joined so fond a partiality, so perfect and devoted an attachment.

In less than a week after his departure, Belmont was once more thronged with visitors. Not only the nobles and magnificos of Venice, with their families, crowded to offer their congratulations to their fair friend, the heiress of Belmont ; but suitors of every country, renowned in fame, and illustrious in birth, poured from all quarters, and sought the adventure of the caskets, contesting for the glorious prize therein at issue.

As the successive competitors tried their fate, and withdrew, one after the other equally unprosperous in their selection, Portia half un-

consciously indulged a sanguine thought that the right choice might perhaps be reserved by destiny for one whom she could prefer, and she each day learned less and less to dread the decision, seeing it so often deferred. But she would now and then playfully complain to Nerissa of the waywardness of her fate, which placed her disposal at the mercy of a lottery. Nerissa would laughingly attempt to console her by assurances that she would make her own marriage depend on the same chance.

"I know," said she, "that whenever I may think of a husband, I shall make a quick choice; I'm very sure I shan't be long making up my mind whether I could like a man well enough to take him for good and all; and, who knows? perhaps when the right suitor to your ladyship shall select the right casket, the right lover for me may present himself at the right same moment, and so the rites of marriage may give both the gallants a right over us at once from that day forward, and every thing may end rightly and happily after all."

Sometimes, Nerissa would think of that young lord whom she had thought so handsome, so graceful, and so seeming-worthy of her lady at the Belmont festival; and allowed herself to indulge a secret hope that he might some day or other present himself at Belmont among other suitors, with better success than they.

And in fact, he, like every one else, had heard of the heiress of Belmont; of the adventure of the caskets, and of how it was to decide of her disposal in marriage. His former thought recurred, which had lain dormant during the period of her mourning and seclusion; and he now resolved that he would seek advice and assistance of his friend Antonio, and would try his fate at Belmont, where he would commence his suit to Portia by a frank disclosure of the state of his ruined fortunes, and his desire to owe all things to her bounty and her love—could he once obtain confirmation of his hope that he was not wholly indifferent to her.

Bassanio's spendthrift course had been rather the result of youth, and exuberance of spirits, than arisen from a native tendency to foppery and extravagance. He was possessed of high qualities, as well as of a handsome person. His love for his friend Antonio was warm, sincere,

and fervent; and the sense he entertained of the many benefits he had received at the hands of this munificent kinsman, which in a baser nature might have degenerated into humiliating consciousness and consequent dislike, in Bassanio's took the shape of gratitude, respect, and indestructible attachment. He had also an exalted sense of honor, a refined appreciation of goodness and beauty, and entertained an utter scorn of falsehood in word or deed.

But to return to Belmont—to Portia—to Nerissa.

One day, when there had been as usual a numerous arrival of suitors during the preceding week, and there were then abiding in the house no fewer than six gentlemen,—a Neapolitan prince, a County Palatine, a French lord, an English baron, a Scotch earl, and a German duke's nephew,—all attracted hither by the fame of the rich heiress, Portia and Nerissa sat at their embroidery frame in the library. Portia loved this room for the sake of her father, whom she had here beheld for the last time, and for the sake of Bellario, with whom she had here spent some of the happiest hours of her existence. She made it her own peculiar sitting-room, therefore; and here she sat on the morning in question, chatting gayly with Nerissa in their usual free, pleasant, light-hearted manner.

And so, in the pretended pouting of a favorite of fortune, Portia said:—“*By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is weary of this great world.*”

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What Nerissa answered, we all know—or ought to know. Her words are to be found in the second scene of a certain play; where, “my master desires to speak with you.”

FINIS.

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**THE THANE'S DAUGHTER**



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TALE II

THE THANE'S DAUGHTER.

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"I would not have such a heart in my bosom, for the dignity of the whole body."

*Macbeth.*

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THE night-wind howled and swept over the heathy plains that surrounded the castle. It drove on shriekingly; then paused; and then the sharp lashings of the rain-storm pelted onward before its fierce will. The distant hills were hung with mist; and when the flashes of lightning darted a momentary glare upon all around, they served but to illumine the dense dank veil that shrouded castle, hill, and valley.

Dismally and wailingly the gust panted on, lamenting; and but held in its mighty breath to take fresh force for the next burst of rage. Moaning and plaintive, it lulled and halted; then screaming and hurling wildly on, it poured forth its fury, aloud, abroad, aloft, scattering clouds and mists, wrenching trees from their rooted firmness, dashing the waters of stream, lake, and torrent, and filling the sky with uproar and tempest.

Round the walls and battlements of the castle it beat, and tore, and raved; the rain whirled its sheeted drifts against the stony security, as if mad with impotent endeavours to penetrate the building, and whelm all beneath its washing inundation; the lightning darted fiery threats amid turret and tower, in vivid, sudden, quick-succeeding flashes; while the deep-rolling thunder mingled its awful menaces with the howls and

complaining of the wind. The wrath of nature seemed striving to find voice in the tumult of the vengeful elements; as these storm-ministers still beat, and tore, and raved round the castle walls.

For within these walls—in one of the upper chambers of the castle—lay one in the pangs of travail; and that night a child was born into the world, destined to read a world-wide lesson, how unhallowed desires and towering ambition can deface the image of virtue in a human heart, and teach it to spurn and outrage the dictates of nature herself.

The lights in the chamber were screened and dimmed, that they might not disturb the sufferer. The voices of the attendant women were suppressed, as they muttered among themselves; and their step was cautious, as they occasionally moved about in obedience to the behests of an aged woman, who seemed to preside over the sick-room, officiating as midwife, and directing all things according as her skill prompted, to alleviate her lady's sufferings. Nought was heard in the chamber but the lowered voices of the attendants; the slight clicking of the wood-embers that lay between the pair of iron dogs upon the hearth; a few stifled moans from the bed of pain; a word or two in reply, of support and comfort from the aged nurse-ministrant; while amidst all these hushed sounds within, mingled the howlings of the storm from without, which still beat, and tore, and raved round the castle walls.

“It is a wild night, Bethoc, is it not?” murmured the sick lady to her faithful nurse.

“It is, my lady,” replied old Bethoc. “But you will think the rays of the blessed sun are shining, when you behold the light of your child's face. Bear ye bravely, my lady, and think of the morning that will dawn upon you then, to console you for the sore dark night ye're passing through.”

In the hall below there is a meal toward. Tables are spreading for a second supper; for the lord of the castle cannot retire to rest while his lady lies in perilous strait; and as it is many hours since the evening-meal, he orders another, as much that he may have some object which may serve to make the time seem to lag less heavily, as because he

feels aught of hunger or thirst. The seeing his attendants bustle to and fro in active preparation, is something too, in that season of suspense; and the old thane sits half watching them, half gazing into the cheerful fire that roars upon the huge hearth, as his hand rests upon the neck of one of a leash of tall deer-hounds that stand at his knee, while its companions lie at his feet, and regard their master's face with that sagacious look of sympathy with his anxious expression of countenance, which seems akin to rational intelligence.

But through all the setting of tables, and ranging of stools and benches, and jingling of cans, and bringing in of dishes, and wine-flasks and ale-flaggons; and through all the hurry of serving-men, and shuffling of feet, and calling of voices, and opening and shutting of doors—through all, and above all, is heard the howling of the storm from without, that still beats, and tears, and raves round the castle walls.

“Go, one of you, and enquire how my lady doth now,” said the thane; “bid Bethoc send me word how she fares; and not to fail to let me have good news as soon as may be—of a boy, if it please Heaven;—for *her* sake!”

There was a parley among the attendants; a pause, a consultation, as if hesitating who should fulfil the bidding of their master, which spoke a tale of neglectful and too-easy rule, on his part, with correspondent carelessness, and tardiness of obedience on theirs.

“Let Ivan go—”

“No, no, let Fergus go—”

“Indeed, I am not going, just as the meat is serving in; send young Culen; let Culen go. Here, Culen, my lad, take a torch, and away with you to my lady's chamber, and bring my lord word how it fares with her now. If it be your luck to bring back tidings of an heir, who knows but the news may be worth promotion to thee; for my lord's coffers are too ill provided, I fear, to let him give thee any thing else. Had there been likelihood of a broad piece, now, I might have gone myself.”

These words were spoken aside, among the serving-men; with but half-suppressed chuckling, for the good old thane's well-known slender

means, as well as easy disposition, caused him to be held in slight respect by his retainers, whose hireling natures would have paid more servile deference to affluent tyranny.

Ceaseless wars, with their concomitant evils of ruinous exactions, scanty tillage, unproductive harvests, and the impossibility of domestic improvement, had entirely drained this formerly-wealthy thane's resources; and he was now an impoverished old man, with little beside his patrimonial castle and title, to prevent him from being nominally, as well as actually, a beggar.

The little page, Culen, left the hall as he was bid; bearing with him a torch to guide him through the long dark galleries and corridors, and winding stairs, and many chambers, which he had to traverse ere he could reach the one where his lady-mistress lay. The lad screened the light he bore, as well as he could, from the strong draughts of air that came streaming through the stone passages, and met him at the opening of doors, and threatened to extinguish the flame of his torch. His heart sank as he thought of being left in darkness all alone in those dreary vaulted spaces, and the boy muttered a pater-noster, as he listened to the roaring of the wind, and fixed his eyes steadily upon the flickering light, scarcely daring to glance round, lest he might see something terrible in the gloom.

"Pshaw, what should I be afraid of?" thought he. "I a soldier (as I hope to be some day), and afraid! Still, it is well that good Grym taught me that prayer, which he learned when he used to serve mass when he was himself a little chap, over there at the abbey. '*Fiat voluntas tua.*' I think it must be because I'm sent of this errand to the dark lady at night; for I ain't at all afraid of her by day-time, any more than I am of these long galleries, then. It's a terrible night! The wind screams like an owlet! '*Dimittite nobis debito nostra.*' It's strange that we should call my lady 'the dark lady,' and not by her name. I'll think to ask Grym about that, bytheby. I wonder whether the baby is born!"

At this instant, a peal of thunder so loud and so immediate that it seemed to shake the stony walls of the castle, and cause them to vibrate to their very foundation, appalled the heart of the page, Culen

and he sank involuntarily to his knee, with a trembling "*Libera nos a malo!*" Then, during the silence that ensued, the childish voice might be heard steadily and devoutly repeating the beautiful prayer to our Almighty Father. Strengthened and encouraged, the boy arose, and once more proceeded on his way to the chamber of his mistress; where he knocked at the door, and delivered his message to one of the attendant women, who was sent out to him by old Bethoc, the nurse.

The waiting-woman stepped forth into the ante-room where the page stood, and drawing the door close behind her, she whispered to him that he might tell his lord that my lady was better, and that a little daughter was born.

"Bethoc has not dared to tell my lady yet, that the child is a girl," added the waiting-woman; "we all know she will be so grieved with the news. She set her heart upon a son; and if what the dark lady sets her heart upon, come not about, why then ——"

She paused; the page nodded as if he understood what she would say of the violence of their lady's disappointment, and the two attendants parted; the one to bear the news back to his master, the other to return to the sick-room.

On her couch lay the dark lady. Her eyes were closed—but she did not sleep. The lids veiled them, and the long jet lashes lay upon the marble cheek; but beneath the lids the restless eye-balls quivered, and the fringed lashes were not still; while the pale lips trembled and twitched with emotion that was strong and wakeful.

The new-born babe was on the knee of one of the attendants, close by the fire, where it lay basking and burgeoning, and stretching its limbs towards the welcome glow, like a butterfly fresh-emerged from its chrysalis enfoldings, sunning its wings in the genial warmth of noon.

The waiting-women crept quietly to and fro; ever and anon coming to kneel softly down, and bend over the newly-born little one, to scan its infant features, and press its fairy feet to their lips, and let it curl its miniature fingers round one of theirs, in caressing womanly wont.

Bethoc hovered near her mistress, mutely sympathising with the

thoughts which she knew agitated her heart, and caused those sleepless eyes to quiver and tremble.

The dark eyes open, and meet those of the aged nurse. They are eager, and fraught with solicitude and enquiry of somewhat the lips dare not frame into a question.

The nurse, to evade seeming to comprehend what she understands but too well, affects to be busied with the pillows, and to imagine that their better arrangement is the object of the lady's wish.

A little cry reaches the bed. The eyes flash open once again, in still more peremptory interrogation; and the dark lady fixing them on Bethoc with a stern resolution not to be withstood, mutters:—"You know what I would ask!"

Bethoc answered:—"I will bring the babe, and lay her to your breast, my lady."

"Dare not to say '*her*.'"

'Madam, the bairn's just a lassie; I'd ha' told ye of a man-child, if I could.'

A groan burst from the lips of the dark lady; and the teeth were ground, with what sounded a curse!

The lady Gruoch, descended of one of the noblest Scottish houses, by orphanhood in her minority, became a ward of the crown; which at that early period in Scotland, had feudal power over the lands and possessions of all minors thus left, together with the disposal of their hand in marriage. Royal expediency saw fit to bestow her as a wife upon Kenneth, thane of Moray; who, old enough to be her father, had yet not sufficient experience to be able to win the love of the young beauty who had thus become bound to him for life. Not only had the lady no inclination for a man so much her senior, whom she had scarcely ever seen, ere she became indissolubly united to him; but their dispositions, tempers, opinions, tastes, were so utterly at variance, that it was not to be expected that the original indifference of the bride would ever warm into the affection of a wife—all that could be hoped was, that it might not be converted into repugnance by a constant association with one so entirely opposed to her in thought, word, and deed.

But though the thane of Moray was little calculated to inspire love in her whom he had married, he was almost as little formed to excite so active a feeling as dislike, for he was bland, kind, and gentle to a fault—at least in those times, when hardihood, courage, fortitude, activity, and the austerer virtues more advantageously adorned a man than such qualities as distinguished the mild and benevolent Kenneth.

It was the very excess of these amiable qualities in her lord, which were destructive to the growth of a warmer liking for him in the heart of the lady Gruoch, and were so peculiarly opposed to her own character. His bland manners she thought misplaced in a man whose station made him the chieftain of a band of men who should be trained to arms and warlike deeds, and disciplined to strict obedience. His kindness and benevolence she thought weakness; his love of quiet and peaceful occupations, which led him to submit to all exactions rather than engage in contention with his neighbours, or in warfare for his sovereign, unless peremptorily summoned to the field, she looked upon as unmanly lack of spirit, and want of honourable ambition; his serene temper was a sore trial to her's; and his gentleness a perpetual thorn in her peace.

For her own heart beat high and proud, as she thought of the renown to be won in the tented field,—of the added glories that might be set beside those descended to her and her husband from a noble race of ancestors,—of the honors that might heighten those already the inheritance of their respective houses. Her own pride of blood, the daring aspiration of her nature, caused her to scorn such qualities as she discovered in her husband, as so many obstacles in the way of her ambition. When first she had married, the high rank of her destined husband, the knowledge that even royal blood ran in his veins, had gone far to reconcile her to the difference of years that existed between them; for she hoped to find consolation in the grandeur and power of rank and wealth, for the want of that happiness which she expected not to derive from love. But she soon discovered that the thane's rank and descent were counterbalanced by a tranquil nature that cared not to purchase dignity and elevation at the price of happiness and peace; that his claims would never be supported, if they could only be maintained by strife



and bloodshed; that his possessions were fast dwindling beneath the demands of an exacting and despotic monarchy, which extorted fines and levied contributions from such of its subjects as preferred the sacrifice of their revenues to seditious resistance, and a settlement of mutual claims in the open field; and that, in short, her ambition had as little prospect of satisfaction from wedlock, as her affections.

After the first disappointment of her hopes, they had suddenly revived at the prospect of a son. A year after her marriage, she had given birth to a boy, and in this son she soon learned to centre all those yearnings of ambition, those daring aspirations which she had just taught herself to fear must be for ever crushed.

But scarcely had she permitted herself to indulge this fond renewal of hope, before it was suddenly withdrawn. The child lived but a few months, and in its little grave was buried all that remained of cheer to its mother. It was soon after the death of this child, that the title by which the lady Gruoch was best known, became confirmed in use among the retainers of her husband's household. When the thane had first brought her a bride to his castle, the raven hue of her hair, the intense depth of her beautiful eyes, the jet of those pencilled brows, and the long black silken lashes that fringed the lids, and rested upon the pale cheek, altogether formed so strikingly-singular a contrast with the generality of the fair-haired beauties who are the dwellers in that Northern land, that she became, by common consent, known as the dark lady of Moray. And after the loss of her son, the habitual gloom that settled upon her brow, the concentrated mood in which she was wont to nurse her disappointed fancy, the lofty pride that held her reserved and aloof in bearing, with the increased pallor of her complexion, which heightened the effect of her raven tresses, and of those deep, mysterious, self-communing eyes, combined to render the title more and more appropriate; and from that time forth she was always named "the dark lady."

Years of brooding discontent had lapsed wearily away, when the unexpected prospect of again becoming a mother, had re-awakened in the dark lady the hope of beholding a son. How that hope was once more blighted, has been seen.



The storm had subsided; and for many hours the sky had been clear and bright. It was high morning. The dark lady had been placed by her attendants in a half-recumbent position, within the influence of the cheerful rays that streamed in at the chamber-window; and thus propped and supported by cushions, with her back to the light, and leaning one cheek on her hand, she sat abstracted and silent, waiting the approach of her husband, who had sent word that he was coming to thank and bless her for the welcome gift with which she had presented him.

The old thane came; and bending over her in a transport of honest tenderness, he kissed her forehead, and whispered his joy to see her safe, his proud delight at the thought of the child she had brought him—his thanks—his happiness.

The dark lady turned those large full eyes upon him, with a look of wonder.

“Do you know it is a girl?” she asked.

“Surely;” replied her husband. “Dear little creature, she is sent by Heaven to make my age happy, and to comfort her mother when she has laid her old Kenneth in the grave. You might perhaps have had a partner better suited to you than myself, dear wife,” added the thane, “but you could hardly have had one who loved you more fondly; when you lose your old husband, you will miss him more than you perhaps think, and I am glad to know you will have this little one to love you in my stead.”

“I shall not survive you,” said the dark lady.

“Nay, now you are playing the young wife, indeed; and would fain make me believe that you have no thought of some day or other playing the gay widow,” said the thane merrily.

“I shall never be one,” replied the dark lady.

Her husband did not understand her; and, as was usual with him, in her cold abstracted moods, made no attempt to fathom her reserve. Besides, at this moment, his attention was wholly engrossed with his baby daughter, who was placed in his arms by Bethoc, the faithful old nurse.

The thane pressed the little creature to his bosom; he looked into the sleeping face, and listened to the soft even breathings, and a world of emotions filled his heart at the thought of this new morsel of vitality, this fresh-comer into existence, this atom on the thresholds of the past and present, this strange bit of opening life, this mystery of commencement, this tender blossom, this human bud awaiting with yet half-closed petals its future development; and the father raised his eyes reverently to the Creator, from whose presence the newly-born one seemed but recently come, and prayed that maturity might not sully the pristine whiteness of its innocence.

The rays of the morning sun fell full upon his silver hairs, and glistened in his tearful eyes, as the venerable thane uttered a devout thanksgiving for the child that had been vouchsafed to his old age.

The dark lady sat coldly gazing on this picture of patriarchal gratitude; and when the words of thanksgiving breathed from her husband's lips, the same look of scornful wonder dwelt in her eyes as before.

"But surely the bairn's a comfort to you, madam;" said old Bethoc to her mistress, when the dark lady was once more alone with her women. "Ye would not wish the babe unborn, would ye?"

"As well unborn, as born a girl;" she bitterly replied. "This is not the child I hoped! This is not the son who should have inherited his mother's spirit—have carried her heart into the field—have enacted with his brave arm what her soul inspired—have reaped glory and renown—have contended for, and won back, the rightful possessions and honors of two noble houses, lapsed into penury and decay through slothful ease, and tame submission. O where is the son might have done this!"

"Patience, patience, lady; who knows but the brave boy may still be yours? Who knows what another year may bring?" said the old nurse.

The dark lady's eyes flashed disdainfully.



"Did you note that snow-white head? Is that a man to be again a father, think you? One child accorded to doting age such as that, was a boon past expectance of Heaven's bounty; but that one child being a puny girl, Heaven's gift is scarce better than an affliction."

"Talk not so wildly, madam," said the aged Bethoc. "Ye can hardly have savoured true affliction, to speak of it in the same breath with a new-born innocent like this," said she, placing the little one in the arms of its mother, that in and with the act of bestowing nourishment from her own bosom, gentler thoughts might flow towards the guiltless offender. "And as for its being 'a puny girl,' a bonnier babe, or one more like to thrive, it has never been my fortune to behold. Ye might have complained, indeed, had it been your fate, my lady, to have been brought to bed of some monster, such as I have heard of before now. I remember once, in the time of the last great dearth, there was a gentlewoman gave birth to a poor unfortunate, with neither hands nor feet, and it was blind, deaf, and dumb; you might have talked of affliction, then, indeed; or have looked upon Heaven's gift as a grief, had you brought forth the deformity I heard tell of, that was born to an unhappy woman in Angus. It was a creature frightful to behold, with a head like that of a swine, a pigeon-breast, and distorted back and shoulders; it was web-footed like a goose, and its legs were curved and set with bristles, so that it looked like an animal, strange and ghastly, and horribly ill-favored. And then, too, there was that wretched lady in Galloway, who bore a double-child, with four arms and two heads; and which as it grew up, fought and brawled with its own other self, in a manner terrible to the beholders. For it possessed in its double body, two separate sets of wills and inclinations, that were ever at variance among themselves, so that the chiding and quarrelling was incessant and grievous. As when one body a-hungered, the other would gladly fast; and when one longed for sleep, the other was wakeful and desirous of sport; and these warring desires so plagued and tormented them, that the four arms would be rending and tearing in piteous fashion with their nails. But the worst was, when

sickness at length attacked one of these miserable bodies, so that it dwindled and pined, and gradually languished till it died; and the other twin-body, unable to support the nausea of its kindred corruption, sickened and died also."

Thus ran on the aged crone with her nurse's tales, in hope to beguile her lady; and lead her to think more well-favoredly of the babe, whose only blemish was her being a daughter, by these legends of prodigious birth, monstrosity and marvel.

But the dark lady heeded not her nurse's loquacity. She was watching the infant at her breast; and as it drew its life-sustaining streams thence, she half grudged to bestow them on this girl, this non-boy, this embodied disappointment, this mortification, this perplexity, this child that was no child,—to her.

Her imagination pictured to her the pride and joy with which she should have beheld a son and heir drawing from her bosom sustenance and strength to grow into youth and manhood by her side; a son into whom she might infuse her ambitious spirit, into whose mind she might instil her aspiring hopes, whom she might nurture in high enthusiasm, and train to courageous deeds, and whom she might one day see fulfil and attain in person all her long-hoarded desires.

The indulgence of her fancy in what might have been, served to convert the reality before her into a torture instead of a blessing; and so the mother looked almost with aversion upon her own infant. Mother's regards were well-nigh scowls; mother's smiles were all but disdain, not pitiful tenderness; mother's breast heaved repiningly in lieu of yielding its balmy treasures lavishly and lovingly; and thus the babe gazed wondering up into those dark unfathomable eyes with naught of maternity in their irresponsible depths; and thus the babe sucked bitterness, perverted feeling, unholy regret, and vain aspiration, with every milky draught imbibed.

But whatever of baneful influence and mysterious harm to that infant soul might mingle with the sources of nourishment thus con-

veyed, the little body waxed strong and healthful; its limbs gained firmness and vigor; it daily increased in force, activity and intelligence; and as the mother beheld its thriving beauty, she thought how well that beauty might have become a boy. As she viewed the healthful frame, and felt the energy and power which strained every muscle, and struggled in every movement of the robust little being that kicked, and stretched, and strove, and fought within her arms, the dark lady sighed to think such a frame and such powers were wasted on a girl. The canker of fruitless repining was fast destroying the parent-blossom, even while watching the promising growth of her fair opening bud; and while the babe increased and strengthened, the mother drooped and decayed. She had truly felt, that the disappointment she had sustained was her death-blow; and, as she had predicted to her old husband, she was destined not to survive it, or to outlive him.

She sat day after day, and week after week, never leaving her chamber, or seeming to take interest in a single object animate or inanimate. She remained, for the most part, in one listless attitude; rarely speaking, and scarcely looking at anything, or regarding any person. She seemed shrouded in discontent, yet uttering no syllable of complaint. She claimed no sympathy, and sought no relief to the monotony of inward despondency, but folded herself within an impenetrable veil of outward apathy, and heavy dull immobility. Ever proud and reserved, she seemed now doubly unapproachable, muffled and shut in with her mute regrets.

At first, her husband had endeavoured to withdraw her from her solitude, and to win her from the stupor of disappointment which held her sitting there day after day, in the unmoved position which was fast becoming habitual; but his efforts were repulsed with indifference, coldness, and silence. The old thane, with his wonted passiveness, soon ceased to oppose her apparent disinclination to leave her chamber; and it was not long ere he learned to acquiesce altogether in her seeming preference for seclusion, by leaving her to herself.

Her increasing silence and reserve made even her women refrain from addressing her; they acquired the habit of creeping to and fro

noiselessly while in her immediate presence, and receiving their orders exclusively from Bethoc, who supplied the place of her mistress by thinking for her, speaking for her, superintending the welfare of the infant, and giving the necessary directions to the female attendants.

And there, week after week, and month after month, sat the dark lady, like a living statue, mute and immutable; the only perceptible alteration in her attitude, being a gradual sinking and collapsing of the frame, which brought her low, bent, and drooping, like a withered plant. Each day, and from day to day, the change could scarcely be traced; but when she first assumed that seat, and that fixed position, her body was erect, haughty, energetic, and defiant;—before a twelvemonth had elapsed, the muscles were flaccid, the flesh was shrunk and wasted, the cheek was worn and hollow, the form was feeble, and the whole figure sat heaped together languidly, as if devoid of vitality.

The eyes alone retained their spirit. These still were haughty, energetic, defiant as ever. For as she sat there enwrapt in stony stillness, she would watch the shifting clouds, now careering in fleecy whiteness across the spring æther, now dappling lightly the summer blue, now hurrying athwart the murky grey, or driving wildly along upon the storm-blast; but through all the countless varieties of form, and hue, and motion, in cloudland, those dark eyes flashed ever towards the sky proud defiance, accusation, and resentment of hopes defeated. None the less a rebel to Heaven's will, for her voiceless inward chafing; it seemed as if the unrest of her soul fought all the more fiercely for the marble quiescence of her body.

One bright noon, even in that Northern region, the sun shone with powerful rays, and cast their broad light full into the chamber, where the dark lady sat, as usual dumb and motionless, surrounded by her silent women.

Bethoc, the aged nurse, held the child in her arms, as it struggled, and strained, and held out its hands towards the sunbeams, that shed their radiance in such bright alluring streams just within its reach. The crowing joy and glad shrill tones of the little one sounded strangely in that silent room, as the babe shouted its imperfect utterances of delight,

at the gay dancing motes it beheld in the sunbeams; and still it leaped and bounded in the nurse's arms, and clutched at the brilliant atoms it strove to grasp.

The mother's attention was arrested; and she gazed upon the infant's eagerness with a look of interest that her face had not worn for many a month.

Then vexation succeeded to delight, as the phantom brightness still eluded pursuit. The baby hands clenched angrily, and struck and buffeted at the golden rays they could not seize.

The dark lady noted the rage that sprang from opposition with a keen satisfied glance.

Frowns succeeded to smiles. Tears sparkled in the childish eyes. Short shrieks, and cries of baffled will, took the place of former joyful crowings; until in at the window flew a small silver-winged moth, that took its place with the motes in the sunbeams, dancing, and floating, and playing up and down in the flood of light.

This tangible object of interest and pursuit pacified the babe; and all its clutchings and strivings were renewed and concentrated upon this pretty buoyant spark of brightness. The old nurse drew back with her charge. "Let it alone, my darling; ye'll kill the bonny wee thing; ye'll crush the poor little beastie."

"Let her, so that she gets it!" exclaimed the dark lady abruptly.

The unwonted sound of her lady's voice made Bethoc start. The child made one more plunge, and by chance, caught the silvery moth.

The next instant, the little fingers were unclosed; to one of them stuck the mangled insect, crushed even by so slight a touch. But as the child held up the victim of her success in baby triumph, and as her eyes sparkled and glistened now with smiles as well as tears in token of joyful conquest, the mother exclaimed exultingly:—

"Resolute in achievement! Firm of purpose even unto death! That should be a masculine spirit! Bethoc, bring the little Amazon to me!"

But as she uttered the words, a sharp sudden shiver passed over her frame; a spasm convulsed the face, and before the women could reach



her, or Bethoc could place her child within her arms, the dark lady sank back,—a corpse.

The death of her mother made little difference in the course of the child's daily existence. The dark lady's seat was unoccupied now; but the babe, unaccustomed to be fondled, or prattled to, or even noticed, by the cold stationary figure that had so long filled it, seemed scarcely affected by the change.

Once, indeed, when the little one was helping itself along by the stools and chairs round the room, and learning to totter from one to the other, by aid of its arms and hands, it stopped in front of this seat—which was still called "the dark lady's," and never used by any one since her death;—and then the child gazed wistfully upwards, as if half calling to mind some object that it had been accustomed to behold there.

Who shall say what limits there are to infant memory? Who may tell what vague impressions of the pale cold figure that was wont to abide there, and which was the only shadowy semblance of maternity that had ever floated before the child's vision, might not at that moment have wandered into its brain, and inspired one natural yearning to behold even that faint shadow once again in its earthly form?

The attendant women observed the child's pause, and thoughtful look, and one to another said:—"Poor bairn, she's minded of her mother!"

"Maybe, she sees the dark lady's wraith;" was the rejoinder, whispered in an awe-stricken tone.

The old nurse Bethoc went softly to the side of her charge, and hung over her, telling her pretty tales to amuse her, to draw off her attention from the dark lady's seat, from which she gently led her away, and began crooning an old nursery rhyme, that she might lull her to sleep, and so efface the recollection which she thought might have disturbed the child.

For some time the little Gruoch remained thus almost entirely in the suite of apartments that had been her mother's; tended by her women,

and fondled, and petted, and indulged by them and the faithful old nurse, Bethoc.

The means of air and exercise were supplied by a platform, or ram part, of the castle, which closely neighboured this suite of rooms, and on which it was the custom for the women, each in turn, to carry the child up and down, whenever the weather permitted them to go forth.

By degrees, as the little limbs gained strength and skill in walking, Gruoch would run about here herself; and at length, it was a triumph with Bethoc to carry the child down into the hall, or the courtyard, or on the battlements, or wherever the lord of Moray might be, that the father should have the joy of beholding how well his little girl thrived, and that the child might have the pleasure of seeing and playing with her gentle old father.

The thane loved to have her brought to him, and to look upon the growing beauty of his little daughter: but he had so long accustomed himself to see that his presence gave no joy, and to believe that he did not possess the requisite qualifications to render himself beloved by womankind, that he seldom detained her with him above a few minutes, but gave her back to the nurse's care and women's tendance, as to society more genial than his own could be.

With a doting nurse, and ministering attendants, the little Gruoch's wishes were of course paramount; and it soon befel, that the indulgence of her will, the right of command, the custom of seeing herself obeyed in all things, became habitual to her at her earliest age. She could scarcely speak, ere her voice assumed the tone of authority; and long before she could reckon half a dozen years, she was mistress of the entire household.

Her father yielded to her, from his native disposition, and from affectionate tenderness towards the child of his old age. Bethoc indulged her as the darling nursing of her advanced years, and as all that was left to her of one to whom she had been attached in youth, and whom she regretted dead—for Bethoc was one of the few who had truly and devotedly loved "the dark lady." The waiting-women, one and all, petted and spoiled the little girl, as the only object that presented itself on

which to indulge their feminine propensities for fostering and cherishing all that is young and helpless. The few retainers and men-at-arms that the thane's impoverished fortunes enabled him to maintain, all worshipped the little Gruoch as an image of grace and beauty and infantine loveliness, magnified all the more by contrast with their own roughness and uncouthness, and with the bare unpolished plainness of all that surrounded her.

For in those remote times, in those periods of semi-barbarism, a thane's castle was no fairy-bower, no haunt of elegance and refinement; but scantily-tapestried walls, strewed floors, rudely-covered tables, turret-chambers, and rough-hewn battlements, were the only environments that the highest Scottish lady could then boast.

But amid such a scene, the little lady Gruoch was gay and happy; for she was sovereign mistress of all she beheld,—rule and sovereignty being the dominant desire of her nature. Short-sighted aim! that sees not how absolutely such worship enthrals the soul! making slaves of these would-be sovereigns! bidding them for ever bow before a self-created idol! and cheating them with the perpetual mockery of supreme sway, while enforcing perpetuity of homage from themselves!

As soon as she was able to run about by herself, the little girl found means of evading the nurse's wish to retain her constantly within her own supervision; and she would stray from the women's range of apartments, finding her way all over the castle in the spirit of inquisitiveness, and childish love of investigation, and thirst for novelty.

Sometimes she would seek out her father, and take pleasure in seeing the pleasure that always lighted up his venerable face at the sight of hers—so beaming, so bright in its youthful beauty. She would linger near him, and watch him fondle his dogs, three or four of which, of the tall Scotch breed, always accompanied his steps, or surrounded his seat. She would listen to the quiet tones of his voice as they spoke encouragement to his favourites, or uttered kindly praise and affectionate admiration towards herself; she would stand close to him, that he might see how tall she grew, and expatiate on the strange variation there was between her beauty and that of her mother—the one so dark, the other

so fair—the one with ebon tresses, the other with locks like the golden beams of morning—the one with those full flashing orbs of sombre depth, the other with eyes the colour of the azure lake when it reflects the serene expanse of a summer sky.

And yet there was a latent expression, a something antagonistic, in the clear beauty of that fair child. Surpassingly handsome she was; but yet a look there was in those blue eyes, that marred their loveliness of shape and colour, and seemed sinisterly to contradict their attractive power. In the mouth, too, round those full and rubious lips, and amid those exquisite dimples, there played certain lines that presented indications of a startling contrast of will and unfeminine inflexibility with so much charm of feature, which might have produced sensations of repulsive surmise to one accustomed to seek charm in expression rather than in linear beauty.

But among those by whom she was surrounded, there were no such scrutinizers—no such fastidious analyzers. Her fond father dwelt with rapture, and almost wonder, upon the face of his little girl, and found naught there but loveliness; and she, gratified with praise, would often come to him that she might enjoy that which he so constantly and profusely lavished upon her. But sated with adulation, and accustomed to indulgence, she soon tired of so monotonous an amusement, and she lingered less and less by her old father's side, and strayed farther and oftener in search of more congenial entertainment, than his quiet voice, and approving looks could afford.

She was fond of peering into the armoury, and watching the man who had the charge of the arms, perform his duties of cleaning, burnishing, and arranging them, and keeping them in order, ready for use in case of need; as there was no knowing in those turbulent times, when a sudden emergency might arise for the lord of a castle to put his men under arms for defence. Here she would loiter, asking a thousand questions about battle-axe, pike, dagger, lance, sword, and cross-bow; and as the armourer polished helmet, morion, cuirass, corslet, habergeon, and breastplate, she would enquire the shape and meaning of each several piece of coat-of-mail, and learn curiously the use of every separate weapon that she saw.

She used to watch the men-at-arms in the court-yard, practising their various arms in these different weapons, and she would note with keen interest the dexterity and skill of the retainers in these warlike sports and exercises.

There was a nook behind one of the buttresses, where the little girl would often ensconce herself, whence she could see the feats of the men-at-arms during their hours of exercise on the sward adjoining the court-yard of the castle. Here she would lurk, and watch, unseen; for she had one day found her way out of the lower apartments of the castle by a small dismantled window, or narrow outlet, through which she had crept to see the sword exercise, the pike-tossing, and the cross-bow shooting.

There was one man she remarked who was peculiarly skilful in the handling of all sorts of weapons. He was a tall, stalwart fellow, singularly uncouth and ugly, with wild shaggy hair, and a ferocious look. His name was Grym. But he uniformly surpassed all his companions in adroitness, bold daring, activity, expertness, and success in his feats of arms. So to this large, ungainly, ill-favored, but triumphant giant, did the child take a strong fancy, and he became a sort of hero, a personification of conquest and success, a favorite rallying point for all her wishes and interest in the scene of contention.

Once, when there arose a dispute as to which arrow had flown the best, and hit the nearest to the centre of the target, several voices contending clamorously for the rival claims of the two most successful bowman,—Grym and Ivan,—the little girl suddenly sprang forward from her nook, and joined the group of disputants, loudly and eagerly declaring that Grym was the victor.

“Don’t you see! Don’t you see!” she exclaimed, pointing up to the mark, which was high above her head; “That’s his shaft! Right in the clout!”

“I’ll lift you up, my young lady,” said one of the men; “and you’ll then see that Ivan’s arrow is just a point nighest.”

“Let Grym lift me up! Here Grym! Take me up! Hold me fast! Here, don’t you see, all of you,” shouted the child in all the ex-

itement of proving her words, and awarding the victory to her hero ; while with one hand she clung round the neck of the savage-looking archer, and with the other pointed triumphantly to the spot where his arrow rested : "Don't you all see that Grym's is the best shaft ?"

The child's excitement communicated itself to the men, and they one and all shouted—Ivan and his partizans as eagerly as any—"Grym's is the best ! Grym is conqueror !"

From that day Grym was the avowed favorite and playmate of the little lady Gruoch ; and his fellows were prevented from feeling any jealousy at this preference, in the oddity of the association ; for it was strange to see the fair child, a thing of smiles, and beauty, and grace, take a fancy to that grisly man-at-arms, and cling round his great bull-neck, and nestle within his huge stalwart arms, and make him carry her about from place to place to show her all the curiosities of drawbridge, portcullis, and moat, donjon-keep, and fortalice, tower and battlement, platform and rampart, embrasure and loop-hole, outwork, barbican, postern-gate, turret, and buttressed wall ; all the curious places, and out-of-the-way nooks and corners about a strongly defended castle, that possessed so wondrous an interest for an inquisitive and restless child.

Bethoc would try to win her from this whimsical preference, and sought to detain her within the women's apartments by tales and legends that she thought might amuse her fancy, and prevent her seeking entertainment from companionship and pursuits that the old nurse could not but think unseemly for her charge.

She would tell her of her mother ; of her lofty nature, of her high-birth, of her ambitious hopes ; of her regret at the passive disposition of her lord ; of her yearning for a son who might inherit the united honors of the noble houses from which he sprang, and who might win renown and added glory by his deeds of arms. She would tell her many a romantic tradition of her ancestors, of their heroic achievements, of their martial feats on the battle-field, of their noble alliances, of the mingling of even royal blood in their veins, of the proud assertion of their rights, of their daring exploits in maintenance of their claims, of their keen sense of honor, and of their deadly resentment of injury.

There was one story that Bethoc especially loved to tell, for it would always win Gruoch's deep attention, and enchain her to the old nurse's side while she related its dark terrors.

It was of how Fanella, the lady of Fettercairn, had vowed a fatal revenge upon the reigning king, for having caused the death of her son Cruthlint. Of how she had been sleepless in devising means for the compassing of her vengeance. Of how she had caused a goodly tower, adorned with copper finely engraven with divers flowers and images, to be built adjoining her own castle. Withinside, it was hung about with rich arras cloth, wrought costlywise in gold and silver. Behind this arras were cross-bows set ready bent with sharp quarrels in them. In the midst was placed a fine brazen image, in likeness of the king himself, holding, in the one hand, a fair golden apple set full of precious stones, devised with such art and cunning, that so soon as it should be seized, or removed never so small a space, the cross-bows would immediately discharge their quarrels with great force and violence.

Fenella, knowing the king had a taste for comely buildings, entreated him in seeming loyalty, that he would honor her poor house by coming to see this goodly tower that she had caused to be erected; and when he came to her castle of Fettercairn, she entertained him in sumptuous manner, and after meat she led the king to behold the chamber within the tower. Her royal guest commended much the costly taste of the hangings and furniture, and marvelled greatly at the image that stood in the centre, surveying it attentively, and asking what it might signify. The Lady Fenella told him that it was made to represent his own royal person, and that the golden apple crusted so rich with emeralds, sapphires, topazes, rubies, and turquoises, had been provided by herself as a gift for him. This she besought him to accept in good part, though not in value worthy to be offered unto his princely honor and high dignity, and though it in so slight measure carried with it the sentiments of her heart towards his kingly person.

"It carried hatred and death with it to the murderer of her son," Gruoch would mutter, as she kept her eyes fastened on Bethoc, devouring each word that fell from the nurse's lips.

Bethoc would shake her aged head, and speak of leaving vengeance in the hands of Heaven : but the story went on to say, that the lady Fenella framed some excuse to withdraw from the king's side, feigning to search for something in a chest or coffer that stood in an adjoining closet. Then the king, taking much delight in viewing the gems and orient stones, and wishing the nearer to inspect their rare beauty, stretched forth his hand to remove the apple, which he had no sooner done, than incontinently the cross-bows discharged their quarrels so directly upon him, that he fell to the ground, pierced in sundry places, and there lay stark dead. Meantime, the king's servants still waited in the outer chamber, awaiting the coming forth of their royal master, with his fair hostess. But after long abiding, and they found that he came not back, they knocked first softly at the door ; then more loudly ; then rapped hard and clamorously ; and lastly, misdoubting that somewhat had happened, they broke open door after door, until at length they came into the chamber where the king lay cold dead upon the floor. Then the cry and alarm was raised by his attendants, and the lady of Fettercairn was cursed and sought for everywhere, all men accusing her of having committed this heinous and wicked deed.

“ And Fenella ? ” eagerly whispered the young audittress.

When she beheld the king drop dead, she tarried not a moment, but fled secretly away by a postern door into a wood hard by, where she had appointed horses to wait ready for her, so that she escaped all danger of pursuit, ere the king's death was discovered. Fenella was safe, but she was compelled to fly her country ; she took refuge in Ireland, where she was fain to abide in exile and concealment.

“ But she gained her end ! ” was Gruoch's comment at the conclusion of the tale.

There was a wood in the vicinity of the castle of Moray, where the little lady Gruoch loved to wander, and fancy it like the one which had favored the escape of Fenella from her castle of Fettercairn. She would make Grym carry her thither, of a bright spring or summer morning ; and here she would play about, attended only by her gaunt favorite, and



the young page, Culen, who, with a boy's sagacity in finding out what he liked, and in securing it when found out, always contrived to be of the party, when he saw Grym, with the little lady in his arms, take the path to the wood. Culen soon ingratiated himself with his young lady-mistress, by a thousand ingenious devices. Now he would bring her a rustic crown and sceptre, woven skilfully of rushes from the margin of the lake; anon, heaps of wild flowers to adorn her mossy throne in the wood; another time, feathers from the eagle's wing, or the jay's, which he would deftly form into a sylvan fan for her; and sometimes he would thread scarlet berries into chains and bracelets to hang around her neck and arms, and twine amid her bright gold hair.

These boyish offerings were graciously accepted by the little lady, who received them as a sort of homage due. She even grew to take pleasure in seeing the page constantly form one in the association that had grown between herself and Grym—but she always treated Culen as a vassal and an inferior, while to Grym she behaved familiarly and almost fondly, as one in whom she recognised that which she could admire and respect.

And truly there was that in the uncouth Grym which might command both admiration and respect. Not only was there the power of conquest, and the assurance of success in his stalwart proportions, which had originally won the young Gruoch's regard, by appealing forcibly to her ruling passion for supremacy and sovereignty in the abstract, and to her unconscious tendency to attach herself to their external images wherever they might present themselves,—not only was there this symbol of power in Grym, but there was a kind heart, much right feeling, and good sense, beneath the rough exterior of this huge man-at-arms.

He had a gruff voice, and an abrupt mode of speaking; but he had just sentiments, and benevolent feelings. He was spare and curt in words; but his heart overflowed with honest good-meaning. His bearing was ungain, his features were harsh, and his countenance was forbidding; but he would not have hurt a fly, and he was incapable of an ungenerous thought or mean action.

He was keenly sensible of the fancy the beautiful child, Gruoch, had taken to him, ugly as he was ; and his attachment towards his young mistress was profound and devoted. It was unexpressed, save in action, but it was none the less ardent for its smothered light. It burned steadily though silently, within the recesses of his own heart.

It was like a potent spell, the hold which the young beauty had upon the affections of those around her. The old thane, her father ; Bethoc, the aged nurse : Grym, the brave man-at-arms ; Culen, the young page ; all doted upon her very footsteps, and yielded implicitly to the fascination which she exercised over their feelings. It seemed impossible to behold the fair brilliant being, and not worship the image of triumphant beauty she presented. Her very habit of command seemed to heighten her charms, and imperatively to claim homage, admiration, and regard.

She was one day straying in the wood, attended only by Grym,—Culen having gone to seek for some water-lilies, that he had noted on the shores of the lake, and intended to weave into a garland for her,—when suddenly, on approaching the rustic seat of moss which she was accustomed to occupy as her sylvan throne when she rested in the wood, Gruoch perceived a figure seated there, in a half-reclining attitude. It was that of a Highlander. He seemed faint and way-worn, and drooped his head forward upon his hands, so that his face was hidden from them as they approached. At first Gruoch bade Grym go and bid the man retire from the seat which was hers—her throne ; but the next moment, noting his weary and dejected attitude, she added :—“ Stay, the man seems tired ; let him come to the castle for rest and refreshment.”

The Highlander raised his head slowly. “ There is death at the castle !” he exclaimed solemnly.

Then steadily regarding the lady Gruoch for a few seconds, he added :—“ What is it I trace on that fair young brow ! But such weird shall not be read by me for one that has just proffered rest and refreshment.” And he sank into his former attitude.

“ Go, Grym, and assist him to rise ;” said the little girl. “ What does he mean ? Is he sick ?”

Grym shook his head, and looked round for Culen, that he might send for aid to the castle; for he was resolved not to quit his young lady's side.

The page came up at the moment, and Grym despatched him for some of his fellows, that they might come to the stranger's assistance, and support him to the castle.

"Take me home, Grym," whispered little Gruoch. "Take me up in your arms, I want to hold by you. I don't like him! Take me away!"

Grym felt the child tremble, as he lifted her up in his arms, and bore her from the spot; for she had thought upon what the Highlander had said; and, as will sometimes happen with sounds unnoted at the moment of utterance, their sense recurring afterwards, his words now conveyed an import to her mind that they had failed in doing at the time.

"What did he mean by 'death in the castle,' Grym?" whispered she, after they had proceeded some paces.

Grym only shook his head again.

"Speak, Grym—you must speak—I want to hear your voice," said the child, grasping his shaggy hair, and pulling his face round towards her own. "Look at me, and tell me, Grym!"

"God grant it be not second-sight! Some of these Highlanders have the gift," muttered Grym.

"What do you mean? 'Second-sight!' I don't know what you mean, now, Grym. Speak, speak!" And the little lady tugged and pulled at the shaggy locks, in the vehemence of her eagerness to urge the taciturn Grym to explain.

"We shall know soon enough, when we reach the castle," said he.

Gruoch said no more, for she had fallen into a fit of thought. She could not help dreading that something fatal had happened to her father. Many indistinct feelings came upon her of kindness towards that gentle old man, who had never thwarted her, never spoken harsh words to her, never crossed or chidden her, but was all indulgence, and praise, and fond admiration for her. She had an imperfect sense of having neglected

him, of having disregarded his wish to have her near him, of having almost despised his partiality for her, and felt his fondling to be insipid, wearisome, and distasteful. All these thoughts were vague, and dimly felt by her; but still they flitted athwart the little girl's fancy, and added a sting to the pain and grief which she began to fear might await her. She was still a mere child, but she was old enough to feel what remorse might be, added to the tidings of a father's death, even though she could not have given a name to the feeling itself.

She had scarcely crossed the drawbridge and court-yard of the castle, than she threw herself out of Grym's arms, sprang to the ground, and rushed into the hall where her father usually sat, surrounded by his dogs, near the hearth. There, in his wonted place, she found him; and with a warmth of gratitude and love that had never before swelled her heart, she flung herself into his arms, weeping and sobbing upon his breast, while she hugged him passionately and repeatedly.

Surprised and alarmed at the violence of her emotion, the old thane enquired what had happened to grieve and terrify his darling.

Grym stepping forward to relate the encounter in the wood, and her father dreading that to hear it repeated, would only increase the agitation of his child, desired some one to go and fetch Bethoc, that she might soothe and comfort her young mistress; then bethinking himself, he added:—"No, no, not Bethoc! Let some one go and bid Eoda and Lula come for their young lady."

And thus this kind-meaning, but weak parent missed the occasion of himself ministering to the mind's health of his daughter; and delegated to others the charge of bestowing sympathy and solace, which should have been his own care in the hour of grief, alarm, and awakened conscience.

Soon after Gruoch had been led away by her women, she learned that the reason Bethoc had not been summoned to her aid, was, that the poor old nurse had been seized with sudden paralysis that morning, and had expired not half an hour before her young mistress returned to the castle.

"Then hers was the death predicted!" thought Gruoch. And in

the relief of finding it was not her father's, that of the aged and faithful Bethoc was comparatively unfeigned.

When those of the household who had been summoned by Culen to the assistance of the Highlander, reached the wood, they found no trace of him. He had departed,—vanished, from the spot; and had not Grym and the page both seen him, the men would have believed that his having been there at all was a mere fancy of their young mistress's. As it was, his sudden appearance and disappearance, joined to the circumstance of Bethoc's death taking place precisely when the stranger's mysterious words had foretold the event, caused the matter to be adverted to in whispers only, and there were few among the retainers of the castle of Moray who did not shudder when the Highlander of the wood was mentioned. But in course of time, the circumstance faded from their thoughts, and it was not only no more spoken of among them, but no more remembered.

A year or two passed away; and for some while after Bethoc's death, Gruoch's interest and attention were drawn towards her old father in a degree that they had never been before. She would hang about his chair, and watch his face, and speak dutifully to him, and try to minister to his little daily comforts, and seek to enjoy his presence, and to give him more of hers; but there was something essentially unsympathetic in their natures that did not harmonize, or render their companionship a comfort or a joy to either of them. Never demonstrative or affectionate in her manner, she felt awkward and ill at ease in the presence of one whose gentleness and soft manners seemed to call for some corresponding suavity on her part. There was a perverse interchange in their respective positions, as it were. The father, from his submissive, easy disposition, shrinking from authority, which he neither exercised himself, nor resisted from others; the daughter, wilful, imperious, accustomed to dictate,—they seemed unfitly associated as parent and child. Their relations seemed reversed, and produced an untoward assimilation.

She would sit at her father's feet, and gaze up into his face, and

think upon these things; and wonder how it should be, that with the sincere and strong attachment which she felt for him,—an attachment that had caused her to start with terror from the possibility of losing him,—still that there should be withal so little of happiness or delight in their being together. And yet that mild face! That snow-white hair! Those bland eyes and mouth! Surely she felt very fondly, very pitifully towards so much meekness and softness? Yes, she did. But it was that very pity, that very mingling of something akin to compassion which pervaded all her feelings towards him, that prevented the fulness of a daughter's love—the joy that such love should create.

Not pity and compassion, but respect and reverence, are the true guiding lights that should direct a child's gaze to its parent, and that should shed a glory and a crowning beauty around a parent's brow;—and it was the lack of these natural rays that darkened and abated the joy of love which should have arisen from Gruoch's affection for her father.

One evening as she sat there, on a low stool at his feet, gazing as usual into his face, and thinking of what Bethoc had told her of her mother's regret that there should have been so little of martial ardour, of aspiring in his nature, so total an absence of ambition, of thirst for preferment or advancement of any kind, Gruoch thought how ardently she longed to pour some of her own spirit into that placid nature; how she would willingly infuse some of her own youth and vitality into his veins, where the blood flowed so tamely and sluggishly; how eagerly she would part with some of her own vigour and strength, to impart energy and impulse to those aged limbs, those supine and flaccid muscles.

Her pity for such infirmity almost assumed the poignancy of contempt. "Where sufferings are so passive," thought she, "what wonder that the heel of the tyrant crushes? Patience encourages oppression. Submission courts fresh wrong. Contentment beneath such injuries shows like crime. Would that the old man possessed my sense of inflicting evil, my spirit to resist it, my youth and activity to avenge

and redress!" She thought upon the shame of seeing the wealth of a noble house mulcted to feed the royal avarice (for Malcolin II, the then reigning king, had grown covetous and grasping in his old age, and oppressed his nobles with incessant severity); she thought upon the wrong and bitter degradation of claims unmaintained, of extortions tamely submitted to, of honors unsought, of injustice unresisted and unresented, until her eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with the burning thoughts that possessed her. Her father happened to look upon her upturned face at this moment, and started at the images he beheld of the brooding wrath and vengeance that rankled at her heart, and cast their reflex upon her countenance.

There was something so appalling in this antagonistic expression, which animated features of such exquisite beauty, that even her unob-servant father could not but perceive its effects, and he exclaimed:—"What's the matter, my darling? You look as Fenella of Fettercairn might have looked, child, when she led my royal ancestor to the fatal tower-chamber. Don't look in that way, darling. And the old thane passed his hand over his child's beautiful face, as if to remove the terrible look that marred its loveliness.

"And who was Fenella?" asked Gruoch.

"O, she was an ancestress of your mother's; but don't let us think about Fenella—it's a dark story—and not fit for my bright beauty—my innocent child." He patted her fair head, and smoothed down her long golden locks; and with the fatal weakness which was a part of his exceeding gentleness, he evaded present perplexity, instead of seizing the occasion to administer wholesome instruction,—to inculcate salutary admonition and precept.

Gruoch held down her head, and thought within herself that Bethoc had already told her the story, so that she need not care for her father's evasion. She felt that he had put her off with this slight answer, and she therefore indulged the triumph of knowing that his intention was foiled by her previous acquaintance with the tale he would have concealed.

"He does not care to tell me anything," thought she. "He does not

care to talk to me. He is contented to sit there quietly, hardly looking at me, with his hand upon my head." She half withdrew it from beneath his touch, at the moment, with a suppressed sound of annoyance "He strokes my hair, and pats my head, just as he caresses his hounds. I wonder whether he loves me better than one of those dogs."

After a time, when the train of her reflections had a little softened, and were somewhat less bitter, she looked up again towards her father's face. It was serene and calm as usual, and the eyes were closed. He had fallen asleep quietly, with his hand upon his child's fair head; there was a look of deep repose, and an almost holy benignity in his aspect, which touched her, as the thought crossed her mind that it was mercifully sleep, and not death, which she gazed upon.

"Kind old father!" she muttered. "He *does* love me; and I love him!"

And Gruoch stepped softly on to the little stool from which she had risen, and leaned over him, and kissed the face of her father as he slept.

But gradually the old restlessness returned; and Gruoch found the constant companionship of her parent as irksome as ever. She loved him (as has been said), and felt dutifully towards him; more affectionately, perhaps, since the emotion of anxiety she had experienced for his life; but after a time, she stayed with him but a brief portion of the day. She resumed her old haunts, renewed her association with Grym, sought her former pursuits, and learned to add new and other amusements to those she had formerly found in company with her ungain favorite, and the young page, Culea.

The latter had now grown a tall stripling; but his devotion to his young lady-mistress bore full proportion to his growth. It increased with his height; which is not always the case with the liking of boys, at his age. A boy will often feel a strong attachment to a little girl, while they are both so young, as to make them mere children together; but when he starts up into a tall lad, a youthful man, he is apt to acquire notions of importance and superiority, that make him treat the little girl as a child still, while he considers himself a man.



Not only, however, did the authoritative manner, and commanding style of beauty, that distinguished the young lady Gruoch, tend to preserve her influence over the lad's feelings; but her superior rank, and relative position with himself, served to maintain respect and admiration on his part towards her. Her commanding mien has been more than once alluded to, but this arose from no advantage of height. Her figure was small and slight, her stature diminutive, her complexion delicately fair, which gave her the appearance of being younger than she really was; but the effect of her personal charms upon all those within the sphere of her influence was potent, impressive, and irresistible. Many little women have been known to possess this ascendancy over mankind.

But she was still a very young girl, when once, she and Grym happened to be practising with bow and arrows at a mark, that had been set up at one end of the long platform on the ramparts of the castle, which has before been alluded to as adjoining the women's range of apartments. This was a favorite pastime with her, and she had attained some skill under the teaching of the veteran man-at-arms. She was just in the act of fixing a fresh shaft, and preparing to take aim again, when her eye caught sight of the page, who approached along the range of platform, tossing lightly up and down something which he held in his hand, and which was gay and parti-coloured.

"What is that, Culen? A ball! And how light, and how well-made! Is it for me?"

"Yes, my lady, it is for you. I made it, hoping you would like to have it."

"It is very handsome! Thank you, Culen; I like it very much. How well you have made it! How bright the colours are! And how well it flies!"

The young lady tossed the ball high in the air, and watched it with her upturned face, and sprang forward to catch it as it fell.

"Throw it straight up, or you'll pitch it over into the court-yard below, my lady," said Grym, as he walked to the other end of the platform, to collect the arrows from the target, ready for his young mistress when she might choose to resume the sport, after tiring of her new plaything.

She continued for some minutes tossing up the ball, and watching the flying gay colours; while the page stood by, to look upon the bright beautiful face, the graceful form that bounded to and fro in agile pursuit.

When she ceased for a moment, panting, smiling, and out of breath, Culen said;—"I have something else to show you, that I think will please your ladyship; I found it out yesterday. There are plenty about the castle heights; but this one is so near that you can see right into it, and watch the birds."

The page stepped upon a stone ledge which formed a kind of seat in a recess of the battlemented outer wall that skirted the platform; and signed to his young mistress that she should silently follow his example, and peep over. She climbed up by his side; and looked over the ridge of the wall, in the direction of his finger. Upon a slight jutting point,—a timeworn inequality of the wall, a pair of martlets had built their nest; and from the spot where the young lady and the page stood, they could see the callow nestlings with their gaping mouths; they could watch the parent birds take short wheeling flights, and return to hover at the opening of the nest, and supply their young ones with food.

For some time Gruoch continued to watch this pretty sight with interest; then she stepped down from the stone seat, and began to toss her ball again. Suddenly it swerved in its upward flight, and fell just beyond the wall.

The page sprang to the spot he had just quitted, and exclaimed:—"I see it! It has lodged just below the nest! Look! On that frieze, that range of fretwork just beneath!"

"I see it! I see it!" cried Gruoch, who had stepped up again by his side. "It looks quite near! What a pity we can't reach it! O my beautiful ball!"

"If I had but a ledge ever so small to set my foot upon, I could get it; I know I could!" exclaimed Culen. "It's quite close, I could be over in a moment!"

"Would you venture?" said his young mistress, looking at him approvingly.

"That I would! I could get it in an instant, if I had but a spot to step my foot upon—ever such a point would do! If the martlet's nest were not there, now, that would be quite room enough!"

"But we can soon dislodge the nest, if that's all!" exclaimed Gruoch. "Here's one of Grym's long shafts—that'll do exactly to poke it off with."

"Oh no!" said the page hastily.

"Are you afraid?" said she, looking at him abruptly.

"No, not that; but I don't like—I can't push the nest off," said Culen.

"Then I will! Give me the arrow!" she exclaimed.

Gruoch leaned over the edge; fixed the point of the arrow into the caked mud and earth which fastened the nest to the jutting point; loosened it; raised it; and in another moment, the martlet's home with its unfledged tenants, spun whirling through the air, and was scattered to pieces, striking against the buttresses and rough-hewn walls. She stayed not to note its career, but turned to the page.

"Now, Culen! It was a brave offer! Have you courage? I will hold your hand firm! Give it me."

The page seized the beautiful little hand that was held out to him, and taking the arrow in the other, that he might reach and secure the soft ball with it, he climbed over the edge of the outer wall, which was narrower there, on account of the deep recess that was made in its thickness, and formed the ledge on which they stood.

But when he set his foot upon the jutting point which had lately held the nest, and then planted the other foot on the same spot, and after that, carefully stooped down, and stretched his arm out, so as to stick the arrow into the ball, that he might raise it, and convey it to the top of the wall,—he had no sooner effected this, than he suddenly felt his head reel, and his eyes swim at the unaccustomed height over which he hung suspended, merely sustained by that frail support.

He closed his eyes for an instant, and struggled to nerve himself boldly against the thought of the small point on which he stood, and to shut out the view of the depth beneath him.

Gruoch felt the spasmodic twitch that these sensations communicated to the hand she grasped.

"Keep firm, Culen! Hold fast my hand! I have yours tight!" And the small hand never trembled, or wavered, but clutched close, like a vice.

Her voice did him good; her tone of resolution inspired him, her steady grasp encouraged him; and he was enabled to recall his dizzied senses.

He looked up, and as he beheld that exquisite face leaning over towards him, anxiety and interest in each lineament, and wish for his success beaming in every feature, he flung up the ball from the point of the arrow, and strove to regain the top of the wall.

But on raising his arm to the edge, he found he should not be able to obtain sufficient purchase,—even when he should gain the assistance of the other hand which was now held by Gruoch,—to enable him to draw himself up that height. The point upon which he stood afforded too little space, the weight of his body was too great, to allow of his climbing up again unassisted.

The page cast one look of mute dismay towards his young mistress.

She perceived his peril.

"Keep a brave heart, Culen! Hold my hand steadily! You are safe, fear not!" she exclaimed. "Here, Grym! Grym! Come here; make haste. Help, Grym!—help!"

The whole scene has occupied some time to relate; but it had in fact passed so rapidly, that by no means a long time had elapsed since Grym had retreated to the other end of the platform to fetch the arrows. While occupied in collecting them, he had not perceived what had been going on at that distance; but he now hastened to the spot, on hearing his young lady's call for assistance.

He soon perceived the emergency; and hardly giving utterance to his thought:—"What have these children been about?" he leaned over the top of the wall, and seizing Culen's hand from Gruoch in his own herculean grip, he drew him carefully, but readily, from his perilous position.

The first impulse of the kind-hearted bow-man, was to hug the lad in his arms, and to enquire whether he was hurt ; the next was to shake him by the scuff of his neck, and to ask him gruffly, " What d'ye mean by playing such fool's tricks, master page ? Don't you see how you've frightened my young lady, here ?"

And as they both looked at Gruoch, they saw her turn pale ; she staggered forward, and would have fallen to the ground, had not Grym caught her in his arms :

" Poor lamb !" he muttered, as he bore her gently to her own apartments, to recover ; " She's as tender-hearted as she's beautiful."

" And she feels thus for me !" whispered Culen's heart, as he stood rooted to the spot, his cheek flushed, and his chest heaving, at the thought.

They were wrong. Neither the page nor the man-at-arms guessed that her swoon was the effect of mere physical sympathy ; a sickening sense of danger past ; a reaction of the nerves,—braced for the moment by strength of will, with an object in view,—but suddenly relaxed from their tension, by the native weakness of a frame less powerful than her spirit.

Years passed on. The handsome girl became a confirmed beauty ; the wilful child became the determined woman ; for with such a character as hers, youth early acquires the self-possession and decision which in softer natures belongs only to a more advanced maturity : and Gruoch, still in her non-age, and in person singularly delicate, was yet in spirit, in bearing, in formed opinion, a woman.

Her affection for her father was the tenderest sentiment she felt ; but it was the tenderness of pity, of protection. Her partiality for Grym was the most active preference she had ; and this displayed itself in familiar treatment, esteem for his good qualities, confidence, companionship, and mutual ease of intercourse. Her liking for the page partook of kindly tolerance ; and she accepted his services, and his devotion to her every wish, as those of a faithful serf, or of an attached and favorite spaniel. She had ever been accustomed to regard him in the

light of entire inferiority, so that he scarcely presented himself to her mind as one of the same race with herself, and she would as soon have dreamed of one of her father's hounds conceiving a passion for her, as have entertained the most remote suspicion of the one which glowed in the heart of the brave and handsome Culen.

His very personal advantages were unnoted by her as belonging to manly beauty. He seemed scarce a man, to her; he was a page, a retainer, a servant—no more.

The constant sense of his subordinate state, rendered her blind to the traces of feeling in him, as to the traits which exteriorly distinguished him; she was as far from guessing the love that lurked in his heart, as she was from perceiving the graces that adorned his person; and she as little noted the evidences of the passion that burned within, as the eyes themselves, which shot forth such ardent expression. The altered voice, the changed colour, the checked respiration, the agitated frame, at her unexpected approach, or her sudden address, no more struck her than did the well-favored countenance, the handsome figure, or the comely bearing of the young man. Had he possessed the brilliant advantages of nobility, or even gentle blood, it might have lent her light to discern his native merits,—but wanting this grace, the rest were as naught in her eyes. She was not even aware of their existence.

One evening she had been pacing the castle platform, enjoying the purity of the mountain air, and the pleasant warmth of the sun, which shed a glowing beauty upon all around,—valley, lake, and hill lying steeped in the golden light, ere the setting glory should depart. She was attended as usual by Grym and Culen, with the former of whom she was discussing the incidents and success of a falcon match that they had flown together the day before. From hawking, they went on to talk of other sports, and the lady Gruoch took occasion to acknowledge the obligations her skill owed to Grym's tuition. In alluding to archery, she was reminded of her childish exploits with the bow, and of the scene which had taken place while they were practising on the very rampart where they now stood.

“I have hardly looked over there, since that time,” said she, stopping:

at the recess in the battlemented wall. "Here's the very spot! Do you remember, Culen? where you climbed over for my ball; and where you turned so giddy at the moment, and I so faint afterwards? Give me your hand; I'll look over now."

"She stepped up, on to the stone ledge, as she spoke; Grym supporting her on one side, Culen holding her hand, as she bade him, on the other. But he was fain to rest his elbow on the ridge of the wall, for the purpose of steadying the hand which held hers, that she might not perceive it tremble. She spoke to Grym on the singular power of height; of the involuntary submission of the nerves to its influence; of the physical effect it has been known to have upon the stoutest hearts; upon the ability to resist this effect; of the possibility of subduing it by practice, and by habituating the frame to such trials. She spoke of endurance, fortitude, bravery, and of her admiration and emulation of such virtues. Of strength, and of courage, and of how she marvelled that any one could rank softness and sweetness by their side.

"Of what use are these so-called virtues?" said she. "Do they gain anything? Do they serve to win one high object? One single end worthy of attainment? Softness, sweetness, meekness, gentleness, and a whole tribe of these washy goodnesses, were only styled virtues by knaves who sought to take advantage of the easy prey which such a creed would produce them in its professors."

"Then you, my lady, would not give your vote for our new king Duncan, if monarchy went by election," said Grym.

"Not I, in faith," answered the lady. "He seems to be too like his predecessor; who built churches, when he should have erected fortifications against the Danish inroads; gave his people public prayers to say, when he should have filled their hungry mouths; sent forth his book of Regia Majestas under pretence of wisely establishing laws and ordinances for the government of his realm, when he might have advanced their honor and glory by conquest and worthy achievement; and so got the name of sanctity, while he outraged all godliness by his avarice and his selfishness. Out upon such carpet virtues, which might show well enough in a clerky monk, but beseeem not a monarch, a Scottish sove-

reign! And when, pray, is this gracious meekness, this new-inflicted suavity, this milk-and-water amiability to be crowned?

"This day sennight is appointed for the convocation of nobles at Scone, my lady;" replied Grym. "The coronation is to be celebrated with great magnificence, they say."

"And how do the people stand affected to the new sovereign?" asked his mistress. "Does report say whether he be popular? Though all new monarchs are popular, as a matter of course."

"Public opinion hath two voices just now;" said Grym. "Though most men are loud in their praises of the good king Duncan, there are not wanting those who say his cousin Macbeth would have better filled the throne. He is a right valiant gentleman, and hath well-nigh as close claims to the monarchy as the king himself, being descended in the like right line; for Macbeth is the son of the one daughter of our late Malcolm II, as Duncan is the other."

"Then why not have chosen the valiant knight, instead of the carpet knight? Why not Macbeth, rather than Duncan, if they possess equal claims?" asked Gruoch.

"Because Duncan's mother was the elder of the two sisters;" replied Grym. "Besides, it is whispered that the valour of Macbeth partakes of somewhat more than hardihood and bravery, and that to what his partizans call courage, his enemies might give the harsher name of cruelty."

"The bold and daring never want for enemies among the weak and timid, who are legion;" said lady Gruoch; "and who stigmatize that which they cannot hope to emulate."

While she thus conversed, she had remained half sitting half kneeling, in the recess, and had been leaning upon the ridge of the wall, or rather upon the arm of the page; who perceiving that she still rested upon the stone ledge, and wishing to preserve her shoulder from its hard contact, had placed his arm so that she might have its intervention.

She leaned upon it as she would have done upon a cushion, or upon his cloak, had he folded it into one for the purpose; totally unconscious



that the support she used was human in its sense of her touch, or that there was human sympathy, human affection, human passion, beating at the heart close beside her.

Every pulse, every fibre of the arm upon which she leaned, thrilled with the consciousness of its contact with the fair body that it upheld; but it might have been a mere mat, for aught she knew of the sensations with which it was instinct.

"If it were not that all the world is sunk into apathy, and infatuated with seeming virtues and inglorious love of ease," continued the lady, "public opinion could have had but one voice, and that voice would have been for valiant Macbeth, instead of the poor-spirited Duncan. Were all men of my mind, better befits a sceptre be wielded with harshness and glory, than with infructuous mildness. These are no times for milk-sop kings! All men should be soldiers—and kings, most of all men!"

"All men should be soldiers?" echoed Culen half unconsciously.

"Ay, master page. Though I thank you for your pains to save my shoulder from the hard edge of this stone wall; yet methinks I could better like to see your good right arm strike a firm blow in Scotland's cause, than benumb itself into a cushion for a lady's back, though the back be mine own."

"And have I your ladyship's leave to seek service in the field?" asked Culen, his eyes sparkling at the thought of winning favor in hers. "If my lord, your father, and yourself, sanction my leaving the castle of Moray, I ask no better fortune than the chance of showing my lady that the arm has been nerved to achievement, not 'numbed to inaction, by having had the honor to serve her for a cushion."

"Well said, Culen;" said the lady Gruoch, looking at him with a smile of approval; "I will myself obtain my father's consent to your quitting our inglorious castle of ease: to your exchanging this dull, stagnant, slothful vegetation, for a life of action, of glory, honor, and renown. Would my mother's wish had been accomplished! Would I were a man to go forth with you! You should be my trusty squire, and Grym, my faithful man-at-arms;—and so should the knight of

Moray set forth to the field doughtily equipped ! Would I had indeed been born a man !”

The lady Gruoch arose thoughtfully ; and quitted the ramparts, that she might seek her father, and inform him of Culen's suit ; which, strengthened by her own representation, could not fail of success, for she was never refused a single point she desired to carry with her foud old parent.

Culen watched the retiring form of his beautiful lady, and as it receded from his view, a shadow fell upon him ; for he remembered that his desire to take arms, would involve his banishment from her presence, in which, till now, his existence had been spent. But the thought of her bright smile, when he had proclaimed his desire to become a soldier, shed its light once more upon his spirit, and he eagerly entered into consultation with Grym, how best he might carry out his desire of winning advancement abroad ; with which he secretly hoped some day to return home, that he might lay its trophies at the feet of his mistress. A lurking, half-defined sense there was, that he should thus raise himself more nearly to her own level ; a successful soldier of fortune approaching a poor thane's daughter less hopelessly, than a humble page,—a retainer of her father's ; at any rate, he knew that to be a soldier at all, was one step in her regard, and that sufficed to inspire him with hope and courage for the present.

At first he thought of seeking service under this very Macbeth, the “right valiant gentleman” of whom they had just been speaking ; but Grym told him, that he thought he could obtain (through means of one of the monks whom he had formerly known, when a lad, at the nearest abbey,) a recommendation to Banquo, the thane of Lochaber, a worthy leader, and a renowned warrior ; who, if he would let Culen fight beneath his banners, his training as a soldier, and his subsequent success in arms was secured. And thus it was conoluded upon. And in a few days, Culen, no longer a page, left the castle of Moray, to seek his fortune as a soldier. In parting with him, the gentle old Kenneth had bestowed a kindly benison on him ; Grym had growled him some rough but sensible advice ; and the lady Gruoch had given him her hand to

kiss ; which favor he had knelt to receive, and which had done much to console him for the sacrifice he made in leaving her. No thought reached her of the emotion that filled his heart, as he knelt before her, and vowed to win all his honors in the name of her who had sent him forth, and to ascribe to her inspiration all the glory he trusted to achieve. She was proud to behold the champion whom her ardour had animated, but no surmise that his own passion, no less than her words, had been the animating cause of his championship, crossed her mind for an instant.

For some time after Culen's departure, the castle of Moray seemed to sink into more than the usual state of dullness and stagnation, of which its young mistress had complained.

But one day its inhabitants were thrown into a state of unwonted excitement and interest, by the arrival of two strangers at the gates, who entreated to speak with Kenneth, thane of Moray, and his fair daughter, the lady Gruoch.

One of these strangers was a Highlander, habited of course in the costume of his mountain home ; the other, a young damsel, who was closely shrouded in her tartan plaid, which she wore over her head and shoulders ; but who, from the glimpse the attendants caught of her countenance, as they ushered the strangers into the presence of their lord and lady, they pronounced to be " bonnie beyond ordinar."

But no sooner had the lady Gruoch looked upon the strangers, than she recognized in the man, the Highlander she had some years before encountered in the wood. She was about to utter some exclamation of surprise, but she checked herself, and listened to what he was saying in reply to a question her father had asked, as to what had brought them to the castle.

The Highlander said that he was travelling in search of employment for his only child, his daughter Doda ; that she played the harp passing well ; that the monks at the neighbouring abbey had told him that she would most likely find entertainment and favor at the castle of Moray with the lady Gruoch, who probably loved music. That he would fain

have kept his child at home in his mountain hut, but that the nipping of hard times had left no other alternative than that of employing her talent, or starving together. That he hoped that the lord of Moray and his fair daughter would give Doda leave to let them hear her skill on the instrument she bore beneath her plaid; then signing to the damsel, she threw back her tartan screen, and disclosing a face of great loveliness, amid a profusion of golden hair, she began to play.

The sounds she drew from the instrument were sweet and full; but when she accompanied them with her voice, pouring forth strains of purity, and beauty, and chanting songs full of variety, now of pathos, now of animation, the venerable Kenneth listened entranced, and sat rapt by the delicious music, with which the young damsel's harp and voice filled the hall.

The lady Gruoch listened too, but it was musingly; and as if her thoughts were not entirely engrossed by the strains she heard. She looked upon the beautiful face of the damsel, but now and then her glance was directed towards the Highlander, who leaned upon his staff, and watched his daughter with eyes of affectionate admiration.

He raised them with gratitude towards the old thane, when he declared that he had never heard anything like the charm of the damsel's harping and singing, and that her music and her beauty were those of an angel.

While her father was occupied with the Highlander and his daughter, the lady Gruoch had noted Grym enter the hall, who, with his fellows, had crept in, to hear the stranger's music.

She beckoned the man-at-arms to her side, and by a glance indicated the Highlander, she whispered:—"Is it not he?"

"It is the same, sure enough," replied Grym. "I knew him again the moment I cast my eyes on him, and I wondered, would your ladyship do so too. Shall I bid him begone, my lady? Do you dislike his presence?" added he.

"No, no; I do not fear him now. I was a child then, and dreaded every shadow, I suppose. I will speak to him; I only wished to be sure that my recollection served me aright."

The lady Gruoch moved to rejoin her father; who was still intent upon Doda and her music. He had promised that she should remain as a companion to his daughter at the castle of Moray, and delight them with her marvellous skill, saying that he should be well pleased to add to his retainers a damsel of such merit.

Her Highland father seemed gladdened by the promise, and by the prospect of such a home was secured for his child. He only entreated that she might be permitted to come and see her old mountain home every few months or so, and rejoice the heart of her fond father with the sight of her bonny face, and with the assurance that she was well and happy. "That thought will keep me company, and serve to make the solitary hut, over beyond the hills, blithe and cheery," said the Highlander in conclusion; "and I can now return there with a light heart, though alone. Bless thee, my child, bless thee, my Doda!"

His daughter clung to him, and he embraced her fervently. Then repeating his thanks to Kenneth for the protection he afforded, and bowing lowly to the thane's daughter, the Highlander was turning to depart, when the lady Gruoch looked him steadily in the face, and arrested his steps by that look, as well as by saying:—

"The death you foretold, befell; and now I would fain hear the other weird you were about to read that morning. Speak!"

The Highlander passed his hand across his brow, muttering, as he gazed at the lady Gruoch:—

"I remember now! The castle of Moray! Ay, there was death there, then! Somewhat else there was, I dimly saw, but cared not to read, to one who had offered help. My hour was then upon me. My hour of darkness and of light. Darkness to the soul, light to the vision. When my hour is upon me, I see more than is given to ordinary human ken."

"And is not your hour upon you now? Speak, old man! Read my weird now!" said lady Gruoch.

The Highlander still gazed upon her; but he shook his head, and laid his finger upon his lip.

"How came it you were no longer in the wood, when assistance

was sent to you? Who are you? What are you?" asked she hurriedly.

"I am a poor Highlander, my lady. I had wandered across the hills to these parts, on an errand to the abbey near here, where I knew I should find help. I saw your ladyship, that morning,—I now recollect,—in the wood, where I had set me down to rest. In the kindly impulse of youth, you offered me aid, but when you withdrew, I knew not that you had gone to seek it, and send it me. When you left the spot, I arose and resumed my path to the abbey, where I found that I sought, and returned forthwith to my mountain home, whence I have never since strayed, till compelled to do so for my child's sake. I could have borne want myself, but cannot look upon her starvation."

"She shall find a home here," said lady Gruoch graciously; "the pleasure her melody gives to my father, would alone make her a welcome inmate to his daughter. She shall dwell with us."

"And you will let her father's eyes behold her occasionally?" asked the Highlander, after renewing his thanks.

"I will myself send her to see you, safely escorted;" said Gruoch. "Meantime, among my maidens, she shall be nearest to my person, in token of the favor in which her skill is held."

She turned to speak some words of encouragement to the timid Doda; and the Highlander, blessing heaven for the auspicious prospects of his child, once more embraced her, bowed lowly, and withdrew.

The presence of the fair young damsel, and her passing excellence in song, served well to enliven the monotony of existence in the castle of Moray; and she soon became a universal favorite. Even with the waiting-women, who shared her attendance upon the lady Gruoch, she was looked upon with no envy or suspicion, when it was found that she made no attempt to supersede them in the good graces of their mistress. She was modest, retiring, and unassuming even to timidity; and devoted herself almost wholly to entertaining the old thane's solitary hours with her music. She seemed never to weary of singing and play-

ing to him, while the venerable Kenneth was equally unwearied in deriving pleasure from the exercise of her gift.

Gruoch seemed well-pleas'd that there should be this source of gratification added to the few that existed for her quiet old father, and treated the Highland girl with consideration for his sake; else there was little intercourse between the lady of the castle and her timid handmaiden, Doad. To the lady Gruoch herself, the still-life of the castle seemed as unbroken, dull, and irksome as ever.

However, soon there came tidings of an event that promised to supply food for curiosity and interest to all within the walls of the castle.

A horseman rode up to the gates, bringing a missive to the lord of Moray from a former companion-in-arms, Sinel, thane of Glamis; who informed his old friend, that his son, Macbeth, was abroad on a martial expedition, which would take him through that part of the country; that his son, therefore, craved leave to call upon the venerable friend of his father, and pay his respects to the lord of Moray, and to his fair daughter, the lady Gruoch, of whose charms, fame had spread report, even so far as to his castle of Inverness.

"Gladly indeed, shall I welcome the brave son of my brave old comrade. And how far hence is thy lord, good fellow?" said Kenneth to the messenger. "When may we expect the approach of valiant Macbeth?"

"My lord will be here to-night;" replied the man. "I outrode his company but a few hours. He sent me on to bring your lordship intelligence of his arrival, with his father's letter"

The news spread of the expected approach of the renowned visitor; and all was anticipation among the inhabitants of the castle. Every one desired to behold the illustrious chieftain, one of the first soldiers of the age, a military hero, a noble of blood-royal, a cousin of the king himself. Hasty preparations were made to receive the honored guest with due hospitality; and all that could be done in the small space of time that intervned, was done, that a well-spread board and fitting apartments might be prepared for the feasting and accommodation of Macbeth and his company.

In those rude times, the bare necessities of life—mere beef and bread, were to be had in abundance, at a small cost, when no season of dearth occurred ; and though they were but scantily cooked, and roughly set forth, yet the appetites of men inured to hardships of the battlefield, were not likely to be fastidious, any more than their limbs were disdainful of repose found in ill-furnished chambers ; and thus, food and a roof, such only as the old thane's resources could command, would be no unwelcome hospitality to a warrior and his company of soldiers after a day's march.

Macbeth arrives. The old thane receives him warmly, as a worthy representative of Sinel, his father, whom Kenneth remembers a prodigy of valour, when his own less daring spirit yet generously bade him take pride in the deeds of his friend. The handsome warrior receives courteously the commendations of his father's friend, and adds farther greetings to those contained in the letter. The lady Gruoch joins her welcome to that of her parent ; and while the gracious words flow from her lips, Macbeth looks upon her surpassing beauty, and his heart owns he has never beheld charms of equal potency with those of the thane's daughter. There is something in those azure eyes that compels and enthral's his gaze ; their fascination is only rivalled by the brilliancy of her complexion, by the lustre of her golden hair, and above all, by the magic of a commanding presence, which asserts the claim of such a combination of beauty to homage and admiration. Nothing unwilling, the chieftain yields himself more and more to the spell ; he cannot withdraw his gaze, nor does he desire so to do. He is content to submit his senses to this new and intoxicating influence ; content also to find that his gaze nowise seems to distress or oppress the object of his fixed regard. She is animated, self-possessed, radiant in conscious charms, performing the duties of hostess, and presiding at the festal supper-table with ease and grace. Her retired life has induced no bashful embarrassment, no rustic awkwardness ; she seems born a queen, and her seclusion from society appears only to have allowed free field for the growth of her natural refinement and elevation of demeanour. She converses with freedom, discovering intelligence and decision of opinion. Her bearing is ma-



jestic, yet affable; lofty, yet courteous; dignified, yet attractive. Her eyes beam with spirit and fire, yet possess alluring beauty in their blue depths; the rich carnation of the lips has voluptuous softness in its pouting fullness; and though there lurks cruelty and unrelenting in those deeply indented corners, yet dimples, and seductive smiles play around, and help to conceal the sinister inflexibility.

By degrees, he discovers yet a new charm amidst so much beauty. He sees a something of answering admiration in the manner in which the bright flashes of those azure eyes met his. The handsome person of the chieftain, the ardour of his manner, the spirit of his converse, all coming to confirm the impression which his previous reputation had created upon her imagination, leads her to regard him with scarcely less admiration than he does her; and their mutual looks and discourse grow more and more animated, and reveal more and more how each is struck and enchanted with the other. The gentle remarks and kindly speeches of the old thane fall almost totally disregarded, while the attention of the young people becomes every instant more exclusively devoted to each other.

Suddenly the sound of music is heard. At a signal from the lord of Moray, the Highland maiden has been sent for into the supper-hall, and now strikes a few chords on her harp by way of a prelude to the song he has requested.

"Doada will sing to us, my lord;" said Kenneth to his guest. "Her music is worthy your ear, I can assure you."

"What name did you say? How called you the maiden?" said Macbeth, abruptly regarding her.

The damsel blushed, at the sudden gaze of one so illustrious, till the blood flew over neck and brow, and her fair skin showed the ruffusion so apparently, that a lily seemed suddenly transformed to a rose.

Gruoch's face flashed scarlet too.

Kenneth repeated Doada's name to his guest; and then bade her play and sing one of his favorite airs.

The damsel obeyed. But though the strain was plaintively sweet, the guest soon forgot to give it his attention, in resuming his conver-

sation with the lady Gruoch. They talked in a half-whisper out of deference to the old thane's love of music, but they did not share his enthusiasm, scarcely affecting to note the song or the singer. Indeed, it was evident that the fair hostess preferred engrossing his attention herself and he appeared to pursue her inclination with no unwillingness.

But when the music came to a close, Kenneth canvassed applause for his favorite Dooda; and he drew his guest's attention to her again by asking if they did not possess minstrelsy in their poor castle of Moray worthy even of royal hearing.

"Ay, by my faith;" replied Macbeth. "And the damsel is as fair as she is gifted. I scarce ever beheld hair so beautiful. Golden locks such as are found in the castle of Moray, are rather of heaven than of earth. They are what we fancy beaming around angelic heads."

The chieftain's look rested again upon the lady Gruoch as he spoke; and the scarlet flush which had once more sprung up in her cheek, had scarcely faded away, when he thus resumed his gaze, and found her in heightened colour looking more bright, more beautiful, than ever.

Before the company retired for the night, Macbeth bade his aged host farewell, saying that he and his retinue would in all probability have left the castle before the old thane would be stirring. He asked his leave to depart thus abruptly, as it behoved him to be at some miles' distance from the castle of Moray before noon on the following day. When his host expressed regret at parting with him so soon, the chieftain told him that he had hopes of being able to return in a day or two,—it might be on the very morrow of his departure; and therefore, if he would let him do so, he should return to the castle of Moray, and lengthen his visit to his father's friend, and improve his own acquaintance with the venerable thane and his daughter. This prospect was eagerly greeted both by Kenneth and the lady Gruoch, whose sanction had been included by a beseeching glance in the leave which Macbeth had asked of her father for this renewal of his visit. With mutual interest and liking on all sides, they parted; and in a short time, all within the castle seemed slumber and repose.

Yet within the chamber of the lady Gruoch there was neither. Her

heart knew no peace, her frame no rest. Agitated as she had never been before, she paced her room for many a long hour through the night. It seemed as if in action alone she could meet and contend with the busy tide of thoughts and emotions that pressed, and heaved, and whelmed around her.

Paramount above all, was the image of Macbeth. His martial bearing, his handsome person, his ardour of admiration for herself, all claimed her woman's preference, and won him her regard, her individual liking. His illustrious birth, his military renown, his distinguished position, were so many accumulated appeals to her ambitious nature, and fulfilled the highest requisitions of her aspiring fancy as to what that man should be with whom she would desire to link her fate.

In every respect he embodied the ideal she had conceived of a hero whom she could love, whom she could seek to win; and this very hero she dared to believe she already saw won, at her feet, at her disposal, to accept, or to reject.

Was it indeed so? Might she believe that he was as much enthralled as his eyes had declared? Might she believe that her beauty had sufficed to secure so important a conquest? Was he indeed so surely won, so entirely hers?

And then came the thought that had flashed into scarlet witness upon her cheek, when it had first crossed her mind, as she beheld the glance he gave towards Doda, when he heard her name. Again she felt the pang that darted athwart her heart, as she heard him praise the Highland maiden's golden hair; and though the praise was followed closely by words that directed the compliment as much to herself—yet the mere thought of sharing his admiration with another was not to be endured, and she muttered with clenched teeth and hands:—

“She shall go. She shall be here no longer to meet his eye when he returns. On the morrow of the day which is now dawning, he said his return might be. Before this day's sun sets, she shall be far on her way to her mountain home. No minstrel girl,—be her name never so soft, her hair never so bright,—shall come between me and my hope! She goes!”

No sooner had Macbeth and his train departed, after an early morning meal, than the lady Gruoch told the Highland maiden, Doda, that she intended to allow her to go and pay the visit to her father which had been promised when he left her at the castle; and that as well-nigh three months had elapsed since his departure, they would doubtless be happy to meet and spend some time together. She gave her leave to remain for a stated period, adding many gracious words as to the loss that the want of her music would prove to the lord of Moray and herself, and bestowing upon her several useful and handsome presents to her father, together with some gifts and tokens of approbation for herself.

The damsel blushed her gratitude and thanks; but when the lady Gruoch spoke of her immediate departure, Doda ventured timidly to say that she feared nightfall would set in, ere she could reach the hut among the mountains; as, when her father and she had come hither, they had quitted their home by day-break, and that it was late now to set forth.

"But I have provided that you shall have safe escort;" said her mistress. "Grym is to accompany you, maiden; and he will protect you from all harm, be it by day or by night, and place you safely within the arms of your father, with whom I wish you all happiness. Farewell!"

The lady Gruoch paced the castle platform, watching the departure of the Highland maid with the faithful man-at-arms, as their retreating figures threaded the path which led by the shores of the lake, and branched off upwards among the hills. As they diminished gradually, and faded away in the blue distance, Gruoch felt her heart lighten of the load which had pressed upon it, so long as the maiden remained in the castle. Now she could give herself up to unmingled satisfaction in looking forward to the return of Macbeth. Now no anxiety need she feel, lest his eye, his attention should be withdrawn an instant from herself; and she could indulge her fancy with picturing how exclusively she might hope to enjoy his society, how best seek to win his regard,

how most happily secure his love, and give him assurance of her own. At the thought, her heart swelled with a sense of triumph, and her eye dilated, as she raised it in proud exultation skywards.

The sky was suddenly overcast. It had been a bright forenoon. The opening year had somewhat advanced, and some symptoms of early spring had smiled upon the landscape. But the breath of winter still prevailed, and occasionally returned to resume its empire in all tyrannous severity.

The lady Gruoch had lingered on the ramparts to enjoy the clear morning air, and to indulge the sense of relief that possessed her while watching the departure of Doda; but now, as she gazed into the sky, she beheld the sullen veil that was drawn athwart the blue heavens, and obscured all trace of that brightness which till then had irradiated the face of nature.

She was sensible, too, of the increasing bitterness of the cold, now that the sun had withdrawn his rays; and with a shudder, partly of chill, partly of misgiving, she drew her mantle more closely about her, and prepared to quit the platform.

One more glance she threw northwards, in the direction of the hills. A shrewd blast of wind swept from that quarter, and a moment or two after, a few flakes of snow fluttered through the keen air;—white, feathery, pure, subtle, light, insidious snow.

During the long hours of afternoon and eventide, the lady Gruoch heard the murmurs of regret which her old father could not repress, for the loss of Doda and her sweet music.

“Why was she sent away?” he asked at first.

“My lady sent her to see her father;” was the reply of his attendants.

The old thane did not answer; but sighed, and caressed the head of his favorite hound in silence.

When his daughter joined him, after quitting the ramparts, he repeated his question to her.

Her reply was nearly the same as the one he had received before

"I sent her to visit her father in their mountain home; you know it was so promised, when he left her with us."

"But why should she have gone to-day? Besides, it is foul weather. Is not that snow, I see yonder, through the oriel window? She will starve with cold, poor thing!"

"It was fine when they set forth. I sent Grym with her."

"But why send her to-day?" reiterated the old thane, whom vexation at the loss of his wonted recreation, and uneasiness for the safety of the minstrel maiden, rendered unusually querulous.

"It was needful she should go;" replied Gruoch in the peremptory tone she knew was always sufficient to decide a question with her father. "It is well-nigh three months since she has been with us, and her Highland father will be wearying to see his child."

Kenneth submitted to the tone which he knew so well, and which generally closed all points at issue between them. He merely sighed, and resigned himself to his accustomed patting of the dogs' heads, seeming to take refuge in their mute tokens of sympathy and attachment, and to find solace in their looks of dumb affection.

The lady Gruoch roused herself to attempt the entertainment of her old parent, that she might supply to him as well as she could, the loss of the music he so much missed; and she began to speak to him of the expected return of their guest, to extol his various accomplishments, to dwell upon the manner in which his personal merits kept pace with the reputation and renown he had acquired, and took pains to discover whether her father's sentiments of Macbeth's excellence agreed with her own.

She soon found, by the interest he took in the theme, how entirely the chieftain had won her father's regard, not only as the son of his old companion-in-arms, but in his own individual capacity; and so well pleased did he seem with the subject, that while it was being discussed with animation by them both, the old thane forgot to repeat his regrets for the loss of his favorite Doada and her music.

With so facile, so gentle-spirited a father, what might not an affectionate daughter have done to make his life one of happiness, instead

of one of monotony, neglect, and almost solitude,—save for the society of his dumb favorites, the hounds.

While with her father, in the hall, striving to amuse him, and at the same time indulging her own train of thought by speaking upon the theme which most engrossed it, the lady Gruoch had felt her animation return, her exultation revive, her spirits restored to the proud and hopeful tone which they had assumed that morning as she watched the departure of Doda.

But when she bade her father good night, on quitting the hall, and retired to her own apartment, the same sense of shuddering chill and foreboding crept over her, and she made excuses to detain her attendant women about her person somewhat later than usual.

“Make up the fire well upon the hearth. Eoda; draw the logs together, that the blaze may last;” said she. “Have you made fast the door which leads on to the platform, Lula? The chamber seems unusually cold. Draw the hangings close before the window. So; you may leave me. But let the door of the ante-room remain only slightly closed, that I may call you, if need be.”

When the women had withdrawn, the lady seated herself beside the blaze, and strove to derive cheer from its influence. She sought to reassemble those bright thoughts of hope, of love, of ambition, which had danced before her eyes, while dwelling upon the image of Macbeth. She tried to recall his looks, his words, his ardent manner, with the happy conviction they had engendered, and the joyful feelings they had awakened. But nothing of joy or of happiness could she summon to bear a part in her musings, to shed a glow on her spirits, and lighten the gloom which made her feel the solitude of her chamber insupportable.

After a time, she stole lightly to the door of communication between her own room and that where the attendant women slept. She pushed the half-closed door; it yielded, and she could perceive that they were already at rest, and all asleep. She revoked her thought of summoning one of them, and drawing the door to again, she remained a moment or

two, fixed in thought in the centre of her apartment. The tapestry that hung around the walls, shook and heaved with the bleak gusts that made their way into the chamber. The hangings round the mullion window, though they were of heavy woollen arras, waved, rose, and sank with the night-wind that forced itself through the crevices and rough stonework of the deep embrasure. By a sudden and seemingly irresistible impulse, the lady Gruoch moved hastily across the room, and drawing aside the curtain, gazed forth into the night.

The snow had continued falling fast and thick ever since she had noted those few first flakes ; and now it lay in one wide sheet of white, bespreading castle, hill, and valley. The glare of its surface distinctly indicated the objects it shrouded, displaying and tracing that which it covered. The ridges and ledges of the castle walls were clearly defined, around and beneath, on all sides within view of the window ; and from the foot of the building stretched away the valley, with the neighboring wood and lake, towards the hills, alike sheeted with white. The window overlooked the platform, which has been so often alluded to, and to which there was access from this range of apartments through a small door, opening from the lady Gruoch's own chamber. For awhile she gazed forth upon the blank desolation.

" If he should not come to-morrow," muttered she, " it will have been needless. But he will come ; I know he will ; and whatever befall, she must not be here. I would have her away ; why then should I repent that she is away ? The fact crowns my desire, and all is as it should be."

She closed the curtain, and flung herself but half undressed on the bed. The red embers of the dying fire cast a lurid and a fitful light through the apartment. The lady Gruoch closed her eyes and slept ; but her sleep brought no peace, her slumber no repose, her dormant thoughts no rest. Her frame was for a time extended on the couch, her limbs lay stretched in inaction, but the mind was still tossing to and fro in a sea of agitation. The soul was wakefully fighting, while the body lay drowsed and prostrate ; but presently the struggle of the soul communicated itself to the body, and compelled that to act in concert with the strong contention maintained within. The waking soul roused the sleeping body



and constrained it, still sleeping as it was, to perform the deeds of waking. The volition of the spirit made the passive body involuntarily fulfil its promptings, and move mechanically obedient to interior impulse. Consciousness and unconsciousness had equal possession of her frame, and dictated alike its motion. Asleep in body, yet awake in spirit, the form of the lady Gruoch arose from the bed, and, traversing the apartment, halted near the door, which led from her room on to the castle platform. Some idea of recalling Doda, of concealing her within the castle from the sight of Macbeth, instead of sending her forth into the snow-storm, had taken possession of her soul, and in the strength of its impress, this thought now led her into the open air in the dead of the night, with her thinly-clad slumbering body, and her fighting spirit. The door was unbarred, unclosed, and the lady stepped forth.

"You are cold, Doda—come back. You shall not perish;" she muttered. "Abide in this retired chamber—it is but for awhile—till he is gone. Do as I bid you, maiden, I will have it so! How cold you are! Come in, I tell you! The snow will starve you—and my father will be grieved! Cold—white—dead!"

The lady Gruoch had crossed the platform; and as she concluded her muttered words, she laid her hand on the stone wall that skirted the rampart. The sharp cold of its touch had startled her senses into consciousness, and she awoke to find herself wandering alone in the inclement air at dead of night, half clothed, half asleep, and shivering with cold and awe. She shrank back to her chamber, hastily refastened the door, cowered beneath the bed-clothes, and summoned the attendants to renew the fire, and watch beside her couch till morning.

With the light of day her courage returned. Her spirits revived, and she could teach herself to look back upon the tumult of the past night unmoved. She persuaded herself that Doda was safe, and that she had permitted an exaggerated idea to alarm her, that any danger could exist for the maiden while under the protection of Grym. She remembered that Macbeth was possibly to return that day to the castle, and that it behoved her to meet him with smiles and a serene brow, un-

ruffled by traces of the emotions of the past night. She struggled to recover her tranquillity, to smooth her haggard looks, and to resume the charm and majesty of her native mien.

The thought of his near approach, and of the probable result of his return, helped to wreath her lip with smiles, give a glow to her cheek, and light her eyes with a glance of fire; and by the hour when the chief and his retinue reached the castle of Moray, its mistress shone forth with all her accustomed radiance of beauty.

After an interchange of courtesy with the old thane, her father, Macbeth soon contrived to lead the lady Gruoch apart, and renew the animated strain of conversation in which they had both found so much pleasure the first evening they had met.

They leaned, talking together, in the recess of the oriel window of the hall; and while the old thane noted them as they stood a little apart thus, he thought how handsome they both looked, how happy they seemed, how accordant their beauty and bearing, and how well fitted for each other they were; and then the thought ensued, of how goodly-assorted a couple his daughter and the son of his friend would make in marriage.

As the father mused thus, Macbeth allowed the ardour of his manner to assume less and less reserve, and the warmth of his admiration to be less and less concealed; and at length his words and looks were so unequivocal, that the lady Gruoch could entertain no doubt of the conquest she had gained.

Something he had said in allusion to the lustre of her charms, and in avowal of the power they had exercised over his hitherto untouched heart, entreating her permission to speak of his passion to her father; to which she had gaily replied that she would hear him plead farther herself, before she sanctioned his carrying his suit to any other umpire of his fate.

"But I own no eloquence in speech, lady," said he. "I am a rough soldier; my arguments have hitherto been deeds not words, and I have learned no arts of peace in the battle-field. I can wield a claymore, but have no skill in poesy or song, or in aught of such things that may help a knight to win fair lady. The belief that I behold that in you which

disdains such silken accomplishments, it is, which gives me courage to sue in behalf of the rough soldier ; at the same time that it ought perhaps to bid me despair of ever calling such superiority in mind and beauty mine own."

" I care little for poesy and song, it is true ;" said Gruoch.

" By the way, where is the minstrel maiden, that sang to us the other evening, I do not see her to-day ?"

" Do you desire to see her ?" asked the lady abruptly, with a sudden flash of her deep blue eyes.

" Not I ;" replied the chieftain ; " I only felt an interest in her for the sake of my mother, whose name she bears ; and for the sake of one," he added, lowering his voice to a tone of passionate admiration, " whose golden hair is even brighter than hers, which attracted my regard for an instant as I compared it in thought, though unjustly, as I now find by closer inspection, to these lustrous tresses that transcend all others."

As the handsome chieftain hung over her, raising one of the golden curls gallantly to his lips as he spoke, and thus, by a few simple words, explained the origin of the passing interest he had evinced for the Highland maid, the lady Gruoch looked forth from the oriel window amid the snow-tracks and frozen distance of the drear wintry landscape, and a shadow of regret clouded her brow, for having so hastily sent the damsel forth. But the cloud was transient ; the shade passed from her thought, as she turned beaming and gracious to the suitor at her side.

And soon, no doubt of mutual preference remained to mar the joy of either Macbeth or the lady Gruoch. She found that the chieftain thought but of her ; he discovered that he had succeeded in winning her regard. Their attachment was avowed to her father ; and it was agreed that Macbeth should but return to Inverness to impart to his own father his successful suit ; and that as soon as preparation could be made to receive his bride, he should return to the castle of Moray to claim her, and to celebrate his nuptials, that he might carry her to her new home

The lady Gruoch had scarcely bidden farewell to her new-trothed lord, when Grym returned. He entered the court-yard of the castle, as

she was retiring from it, on her way to her own apartment. There was that in the face of the man-at-arms, beside its usual ugliness,—more ghastly than its wonted look, that arrested her steps, and made her pause to hear what he might have to say.

"I performed your bidding, Madam;" said he. "I took her to her home."

"Well done, good Grym; faithful to thy trust;" replied his lady. "You placed the maid within her father's arms. 'Tis well."

"I did, Madam; but——"

The man-at-arms faltered; there was that in his eye and voice that belied his rough exterior.

The lady cast a searching look upon his face. She read a terrible meaning there; but she said with her firm steady voice:—"You did? 'Tis enough; thanks, good Grym." Then staying to hear no more, she resumed her way to her own apartments.

But not so summary was the inquiry of the old thane with regard to the disappearance of his favorite Doda. He questioned Grym closely concerning the incidents of their journey; and from the sparing curt speech of the man-at-arms he at length gathered the particulars of her fate.

On the afternoon of their departure from the castle of Moray, they had not reached far among the uplands that stretched away from the shores of the lake, when they were overtaken with the snow, which at first fell lightly and scantily, then thicker and faster, and at length profusely and incessantly.

At first, Grym would have persuaded the maiden to return, and defer her journey to the hills until a fairer season. But by this time the thought of shortly beholding her father, joined to that of having to encounter the stern cold looks of the lady Gruoch, should she return when bidden forth by her, gained sufficient empire over the Highland girl to urge her to proceed. Soon, it became as difficult to make their way back, as to continue on; and Doda, her spirits rising with the prospect of approaching each step they took, more nearly to her home, cheerily toiled upwards and onwards with the elastic happy step of hope, and chatted with the light heart of youth and anticipation.

"It will be such a gay surprise for my dear father!" said she. "He little thinks every moment is bringing his child closer to his arms. And he loves me so dearly, good Grym. You don't know what a kind father he is. He never would have parted with his Doads, but that he could not bear to see Hunger and Death each day approach nearer and more near to our threshold to snatch his child from him. And now she returns, to carry him joy, and comfort, and wealth. See, good Grym, what my lady has given me for him. My lady may seem cold and grand, and awful to look at, or to speak to;—nay, when I am in her presence, I scarce like to raise my eyes to hers, and tremble like a leaf, simpleton that I am, when I have to carry any message to her,—yet she is as kind as she is handsome. She must be, to think of sending these to my father."

"You are sure you know your way?" said Grym abruptly.

"Of course I do. Straight on; we can't miss it. This is the path we are in,—skirting these rocks," answered the maiden.

"Yes, but the snow sets deeper and deeper; the track of the path shows less and less," said Grym.

"And it is getting dark;" said Doads, looking up; "the night is coming on. But I know my way—oh yes, I know my way surely. There is the stunted thorn; farther on we come to the black cavern; then the deep pool in the hollow; and after that the clump of firs on the hill-side—beyond that, the eagle's glen; and then it is but a little way up farther to our hut by the burn-side. The bonny burn springs up close at hand, near to our door—and it's merry to watch its leap, and dance, and frolic, and bound away over rock and fell, in a bright spring day. If it's not frozen over by to-morrow morn, you shall have a cup of its sparkling waters, Grym, and maybe something stronger, to temper it into warmth and comfort after this cold night. How bitter it is! and how keen the wind whistles! Sharp from the North! But no matter, Northward lies home—and home warms the heart full well!"

Long after this, the girl strove to maintain her cheery tone, and her hopeful step. But the darkness crept on and on; the snow fell thicker and thicker; the night-wind blew, piercing them through and through:

the path was obscured, and the white glare on all around served but ill to trace even well-known objects to eyes that began to droop and drowse beneath the influence of the intense cold and growing fatigue.

Yet still she struggled onwards, now wavering and uncertain in her course, now more assured, when some familiar object was recognized as marking the path they ought to take; now she would lag dispirited and doubtful, now again endeavour to resume her hopeful tone and her assured step. Several times they wandered from the track, which with much difficulty was regained, and still the night hours crept on, and still the girl staggered blindly forwards. By this time, Grym had assumed the task of guide, trying to trace the objects Doada had named as marking the course they were to pursue; and by this time, it was he who maintained the cheerful tone of comforter, endeavouring to inspire and encourage the weary girl. But her limbs dragged more and more heavily along; her slight frame clung even more helplessly against the side of the huge man-at-arms; her head flagged, as a flower snapped in its stem; and her senses yielded to the lethargy that pressed its sullen weight upon body and spirit alike. "Let me rest, good Grym; let me rest here for a few minutes;" she murmured, "I shall be able to go on better afterwards, if you let me rest a little."

Grym attempted to rouse her, telling her that the dawn would soon break,—that they could not now be far from the hut,—that if she could but hold on for a short time yet, they would soon reach home where she might fully rest. But the imperative summons was not to be withstood:—"I cannot, good Grym; let me rest here,—I shall rise refreshed.—and then we will go to my father." And with this, the maiden sank down, totally overpowered, in a stupor of frozen slumber.

Her rough-seeming companion screened her as well as he could, in the craggy nook where she had dropped; drawing her tartan plaid closely round her and adding his own, which he took off for the purpose, to shelter her as well as might be from the falling snow, and cutting wind. Then, carefully marking the spot, he left her thus couched, while he endeavoured to find his way on to the hut, to fetch help.

But in darkness, and ignorance of the track, he only wandered farther and farther from the right direction; and he was compelled to return to the nook in the glen, after a fruitless search, determining to await here the dawn of day, which he thought could not be far distant.

With the first glimmer of light, he renewed his attempt to discover their way; and found that they were, in fact, within sight,—not hearing (for the frost had arrested its flow, and smitten it into silence) of the burn or brook which Doda had described as having its source near to the mountain hut of her father. Cheered by this token that they were closer to their journey's end than he had dared to hope, Grym endeavoured gently to arouse the Highland maiden. But no efforts of his could awaken her. The man-at-arms was startled, as he raised the tartan screen from the white still face, and the stricken form that lay there, but he would not allow to himself that what he looked upon was death. He would not listen for her breathing, but held his head erect, apart, as if determined not to ascertain what he would not allow himself to doubt. "The father will know best what will restore the lassie," he muttered, as he raised her tenderly in his arms; "let me but find him."

And he strode on with his burthen, which was scarcely such to his brawny strength, until he came to the door of the shieling, or hut.

The door was barely fastened; with one stroke of his foot, the man-at-arms made it yield, and he entered, bearing Doda into her native mountain home.

On the hearth stood the Highlander. Grym went up to him, and placed the daughter within the father's arms. In a few words the events of the past day and night were explained; the departure from the castle; the snow-storm; the sleep; the home-return; the hope that a father's embrace would restore warmth and life.

But one glance of the father's eye sufficed. It revealed to him the fatal truth. It told him that his child, whom he had left but a few short months since blooming, well, and happy, was returned to him, inanimate, cold, dead! He received within his arms, in lieu of his living daughter, a frozen corpse!

The lady Gruoch reached her own chamber. Thence, she stepped upon the platform; the freedom of the open air braced and confirmed her mood of thought. She paced to and fro for awhile, and resolutely shunned the remembrance of Grym's face, which seemed to suggest more than she cared to know. And thus she mused.

"The girl is gone. She is out of my path. If she cross it no more—the better. Ten such minions removed whence they might breed mischief—what matters it how they be removed? I am not one to abide the ire of an irritated imagination. It is but brainsickness to consider too deeply of things that are past and done; a disease of thought to ponder on the means which have already helped us to our wish. I have mine in her removal; the sum of her image shall henceforth be that to me."

As the lady Gruoch turned in her walk, at one end of the platform, she beheld at a few paces from her, the Highlander, standing immediately in her path.

"How camest thou hither, good man?" she asked; surprised to see one so suddenly and so near, whom she had thought at a distance. "How found you this part of the castle? What has brought you to me?"

"I am come to read thee thy weird at last!" said the Highlander. "When first I looked upon thee, I beheld a crown spanning the fair young brow—but I beheld it through a red mist, and would not reveal the fearful secret to one who proffered aid"

"A crown?—a crown, said'st thou?" exclaimed the lady.

"Ay, a crown, a royal crown—the golden badge of sovereignty! I would not then foretell so dread, so fatal a vision. But thou hast sent me my child through the snow-storm, and I read thee thy weird through the red mist. A crown is thy weird; the red mist is blood!"

"What matters, so that the weird be a crown!" cried the lady Gruoch. "Methinks to gain that, I could stem torrents of blood; scarcely heeding though some of my own were shed to mingle with the stream."

"Thine own?" echoed the Highlander, with a scoffing laugh; "That were too gentle a sentence."



“What mean'st thou? Speak farther!” The lady advanced, as she spoke, towards the spot where the figure of the Highlander stood with folded arms and derisive lips. “Speak, man!” she continued. “Tell me thy knowledge. I will have it!”

In her eagerness, she still advanced, and would have laid her hand upon the folded arms. She touched no substance. She saw the mocking features, and beheld distinctly the chequered colors of the tartan plaid in which his figure was enveloped,—but she felt nothing. No tangible matter met her grasp, and with horror and awe unspeakable she recoiled;—then plunging desperately forward, she passed through the vivid shadow as if it had been a rainbow!

An instant—and the whole thing had vanished; and when, some time after, her women sought their mistress, they found her extended on the ground, senseless.

Messengers bring tidings of Macbeth. They bear a letter to the lady Gruoch, in which the chieftain tells her that the country is infested with a scum of Gallowglasses, disaffected rebels, and turbulent marauding Kernes; against whom he is employed, seeking to quell and exterminate them from the land. That this duty calls him to the field, and detains him from the hope with which he left her, of preparing all things at the castle of Inverness for the reception of his bride. He adds, that this active service in which he is engaged, not only interferes thus with the fulfilment of his own wishes, but it likewise employs all his available men, so that he fears he shall scarce be able to send messengers to her so frequently as he desires; but he concludes by beseeching her to believe him, through all lets to their continued intercourse, to be her true and faithful knight, devoted to her beauty solely, in the hope of speedily calling it his own for ever.

Upon this letter, and the attachment it breathes, the lady Gruoch lives for awhile. But soon her thirst for farther tidings of her betrothed lord rises to a feverish longing, which must be satisfied.

She resolves to send Grym to the camp of Macbeth; though she knows the remainder of the men-at-arms who will then be left at the

castle of Moray will afford but insufficient protection for her old father and herself, in case of any hostile attempt to invade their quiet from the insurgent marauders. For the faithful and experienced soldier, Grym, is a host in himself; and now, for the first time since his departure, Culen is thought of with esteem and regret. But the anxiety to obtain news of Macbeth is paramount, and the lady Gruoch dispatches Grym.

During his absence, the inhabitants of the castle hear frequent rumours of parties of wandering Kernes, who demolish crops, spoil husbandry, oppress the neighbouring poor, and commit other depredations in the vicinity; but no actual hostility threatens the thane of Moray's own possessions.

Grym has been gone long enough to warrant expectation of his return. The lady Gruoch begins to look impatiently for it, and to tax him, in thought, with strange lack of zeal in her service, when suddenly there is an unwonted stir in the court-yard of the castle. The portcullis has been raised; an armed horseman has been admitted across the drawbridge, who leads his steed by the bridle through the gates; the charger bears a wounded man upon his back, who is supported in the saddle by the armed knight that walks by his side, leading the horse.

In the armed knight, who wears his visor raised, the men-at-arms of the castle of Moray have recognized their former companion, Culen; in the wounded man, they have beheld their fellow-retainer, Grym.

The lifting their comrade from the horse's back, the placing him upon a heap of plaids hastily spread upon the ground for his reception, the murmured expressions of wonder, sympathy, and inquiry from the other men-at-arms, all crowding around Grym, and endeavouring to assist and relieve him, caused the unusual stir in the court-yard which attracted the attention of the lady Gruoch, as she sat in the hall, and which brought her forth to see who the wounded man might be.

"It's Grym, our Grym, madam," whispered the men, as they made way for their lady to come near. "He is wounded; and it seems mortally. For he stirs not; and speaks not."

"Grym! my faithful Grym!" exclaimed the lady Gruoch, as she approached, and bent towards the bleeding soldier. "What, rouse thee, man; art thou indeed so sorely hurt?" The dying man raised his eyes by an effort. "That's well; cheerly, good Grym. And what news, my trusty Grym? Hast thou the packet? Has thou no letter for me?" she added.

There was a visible struggle. The faithful man-at-arms strove to speak; the blood gushed from his lips instead of words; and he could only faintly attempt to lift his hand towards the breast of his buff doublet. The lady at a glance understood the movement, and eagerly withdrew the desired packet from the place he had indicated, to bring which to her in safety he had forfeited his life-blood. Some of this same life-blood soiled the fair hands that were searching the bosom of the dying servitor for that which he had died to preserve for her.

"Faithful unto death!" she cried, as she transferred the precious packet from his bosom to her own. "But must thou indeed die, my faithful Grym? Can no leech save thee? Half my possessions I would gladly give to him who might restore thee to life, to thy mistress. Who may I ever hope to attach to me, as thou hast been devoted to me? Devoted unto death; my faithful Grym!"

The dying man's eyes looked fondly at her as she uttered these expressions of regret at his loss. To him they conveyed no particle of the self-consideration that was betrayed in every word. To his partial affection they were all he could have desired in requital of the life devoted to her service,—of the death incurred in her behalf. His face wore the satisfied look that an indulgent parent might have cast upon a favorite child, in whom he can perceive no fault, and who satisfies all that his yearning love could wish.

He expired with the belief that his mistress held him as dearly-valued, as sufficed to reward him to the utmost for all he had done,—and he died contented, proud, happy in the conviction of her regard.

The lady Gruoch looked upon the uncouth visage of the dead man with sincere (because selfish) regret. Then she withdrew from his side, that the attendants might remove the body of their comrade; and she

heaved one deep sigh, while a voice near her said :—" I could find it in my heart to envy Grym, to be so mourned !"

The lady turned to look upon him who spoke ; and she then perceived, for the first time, that the armed figure beside her was Culen. But Culen so changed in bulk and stature—so altered in look and bearing ; no wonder she failed to recognize him, while she scarcely noted his presence, during the absorbing scene that had just occurred.

The slight figure of the youth she once knew had now acquired both breadth and height. His wide chest and shoulders displayed stalwart proportions beneath his cuirass and breast-plate of burnished steel. His handsome features showed manlier, and bore a more confirmed expression beneath the visor and head-piece of his helm. The light flaxen curls which had formerly been allowed to revel in luxuriance around the page's countenance, and had given it an effeminate beauty, were now close-trimmed and shorn, and showed little or none beside the beard and moustache that gave additional vigour to the knightly face.

" It is to your prowess I owe the rescue of my faithful Grym, I doubt not, sir knight," said the lady Gruoch. " It is to you I owe the sad pleasure of witnessing his last moments, and mourning the loss of his trusty worth, while I received the last pledge of his devotion, and acknowledged it with thanks and approval that consoled him in death. Tell me how it was that you came to his aid."

" I was on my way to the castle through yonder wood ;" replied Culen, " when hearing the noise of an affray, I pricked my horse forward, and found Grym hard pressed by numbers. He was surrounded by a party of Kernes, with whom he was fighting desperately, spite of their superior force. I rushed to his aid ; but it was too late. The villains fled at my approach, but they had wounded Grym so severely, that he could but reach the castle in time to render his breath at the feet of his lady. Happy at least in that one circumstance of his fate."

" Fulfilment of purpose is the great end of life ;" said the lady thoughtfully, placing her crimson-smirched hand upon the letter within her bosom. " And Grym fulfilled his ; worthily, faithfully !"

" And you have fulfilled yours, sir Culen ;" resumed she after a

pause. "I see you have won your spurs; you have achieved knight-hood; you have gained prowess in arms. Let me see the device you have adopted for your shield;" said she, raising the buckler to inspect the emblazonment and motto which it bore. They were, a silken cushion turning back the point of an arrow aimed against it, with the words "*ex otio repugnantia*."

The allusion was too pointed to be forgotten. The smile of the lady Gruoch showed that she remembered the incident, and that she appreciated the homage to her will indicated in the device he had chosen.

"The arm that you redeemed from a service of luxurious ease," said Culen, elated by her smile, "has learned strength, and the power of resistance; only too proud if it may return to devote its allegiance in the same behalf. Use the power, as you formerly deigned to avail yourself of the ease, afforded by the arm. Let me still serve my lady, but as her knight now,—not as her page"

"A trusty squire of dames sir Culen will ever be, I doubt not," replied Gruoch. "But let him not think I esteem his companionship lightly, when I enlist it henceforth in behalf of my father rather than myself. I trust to you, good Culen, to comfort him, and be to him as a son, when his daughter leaves him. Meanwhile receive my earnest thanks for your valorous assistance to my lost Grym."

The lady turned to quit the court-yard as she spoke; and in the act of retiring, her hand was once more raised to her bosom, to clutch the secured letter.

"When his daughter leaves him!" unconsciously repeated Culen half aloud, in echo of those words of hers which had so perplexed him.

"Ay, master Culen," replied one of the retainers, who, returning to the spot, happened to overhear him. "Have you been abroad in the world, and have not heard that our young lady is to wed the valiant Macbeth? Why, that was the letter of her betrothed husband, that she seized so eagerly from Grym's bloody doublet. A lady's impatience regards not bedabbling its dainty fingers, when a lover's

letter is in view, I warrant me; and yet I doubt if the omen be canny."

Culen remained an instant in mute despair at what he had heard, confirmed by that which he had seen. Then, exclaiming:—"Farewell ambition, fame, hope, life itself!" he flung himself into the saddle, turned his steed's head from the court-yard, urged the horse across the drawbridge, and galloped full speed away from the castle of Moray for ever.

The letter from Macbeth brought welcome tidings indeed. His active measures against the insurgents had been effectual in dispersing them, and he was actually about to quit the field for Inverness when he wrote. Very shortly after, he looked to set forth for the castle of Moray; and by the time that the letter reached the hands of the lady Gruoch, she might daily expect his approach.

The chieftain and his retinue arrive. The venerable thane greets the betrothed husband of his daughter with affectionate welcome. That which the lady Gruoch extends to her expected lord is no less warm. Proudly, exultingly, she prepares to unite herself with this noble warrior, this king-descended hero. A new existence is opening for her; a life of hope, of glory, of ambition—of ambition satisfied, in the martial successes he has already achieved; of ambition expectant, in the rank and royal favour he may still attain. A life of hope, glory, and ambition, to be shared in acquirement and fulfilment with the man of her preference. One with whom she may feel alike in ardour, activity of spirit, and daring aspiration; one with whom she may happily reap the fruition of their joint exertion and hope.

In her, Macbeth beholds imperial beauty. In her there is that which at once captivates his senses, and commands his admiration and esteem. There is a plenitude of feminine charm in the delicate features and figure that satisfies his inclination for that which is in contrast with his own manhood of strength and vigorous proportion; while in the marked decision, self-possessed manner, and confirmed opinion, that distinguish her character, there is that which he feels supplies well the defects in

his own nature, of which he is perhaps half conscious. He sees in her that which will spur his ambition, invigorate his will, give constancy and energy to his purposes, steadiness to his aims, firmness, solidity, and consistency to all his views, enabling him to pursue them to a successful issue. He sees precisely the qualities in her which will best give stability to those points in his own character which most need fortifying. His faith in her excellence is entire; his subjugation to her charms is complete; but it is with no unwillingness that he yields to the empire she exercises over his fancy. He is proud to call such beauty his own; proud to submit himself to its influence; proud to share with her his hopes, his life,—to make her the partner of his greatness. Proud were they of and in each other; and joyfully did they link their lives in one, accepting a joint fate from that time forth.

The nuptial ceremony was performed. The bridal train left the castle-chapel. The horses ready caparisoned for the journey, trampled and champed their bits in the court-yard; and the cavalcade awaited but the bride and bridegroom, who were to join them to proceed at once to the castle of Inverness.

The bridegroom led his bride to the hall, where they had left her father, that she might receive his blessing as a new-made wife, ere she quitted the paternal roof. There sat the old thane, Kenneth, in his accustomed seat by the hearth. He was leaning back; his eyes were shut; while the tears crept from beneath the closed lids, and coursed down the aged cheeks; his hand rested on the head of one of his favorite hounds, that had laid its muzzle on the arm of the chair, and kept snuffing and whining uneasily, as it fixed its eyes upon its master's sorrowing face.

His daughter knelt at her father's feet, and spoke some words of comfort in her own calm and self-possessed way.

Her husband joined his expressions of kindness to hers. The gentle old man roused himself feebly, blessed them both, and bade them believe that his sadness at parting with them was outweighed by his happiness in having thus assured that of his daughter. Once again he blessed them; and struggled to utter the word "farewell!"

Lady Macbeth arose—reverently smoothed the snow-white hairs on either side of the furrowed cheeks—kissed the venerable forehead—exclaimed :—“ Farewell, my father !” Then, turning to her husband, she said firmly :—“ I am ready, my lord ! Lead me forth. I am yours now.”

The existence of the newly-married chieftain and his lady, in their castle of Inverness, fulfilled the anticipations which the prospect of their union had excited in each. They found their mutual satisfaction as ample and complete as they had hoped. In all her husband's pursuits, schemes, and views, lady Macbeth demonstrated an eager and intelligent participation.

In his wife's dominant beauty, Macbeth's passionate admiration found full content ; whilst in her high-reaching undaunted spirit his own felt support, encouragement, incitement, strength. His natural valour seemed to gain fresh impetus ; his bravery new vigour ; his deeds additional daring, with such an incentive by his side to urge him to exertion, and with so lustrous an object to gratify by his triumphs.

Achievement followed achievement ; promotion ensued to promotion ; fresh honors and renewed instances of royal favor were heaped upon the chieftain, near to his sovereign, both by blood and by ties of affection. For the meek-spirited Duncan loved to rely upon the sterner counsels and more active measures suggested by his kinsman, for escape from public censure, which not unfrequently accused him of feebleness and slothfulness in the administration of justice.

Negligence in the due punishment of offenders ; connivance at misrule among the civic rulers, and at contumacy among the ruled ; a general want of strictness, and a perilous lenity ; all combined to make king Duncan's mild sway regarded rather as weakness, than as paternal indulgence. It encouraged faction and insubordination, and offended those who sought protection from order and judicious government. To preserve peace for the peaceful, and to secure safety from the turbulent, the services of Macbeth were put in constant requisition by his royal master.



To his kinsman, the favorite general, the king looked for aid and support in every emergency of sedition and insurrection; Macbeth's tactics and rigour of discipline rendering him no less valuable as a statesman, in the cabinet, than his military skill and personal courage made him all-powerful in the field.

To the extended influence which accrued to him from his large share of royal favor, was added increase of rank; for, not long after his marriage, Macbeth, by the death of his father, Sinel, became thane of Glamis.

These rapid and accumulated circumstances in the rise of Macbeth's fortunes and position, made the long-hoarded secret hope of his own and wife's ambition assume a palpable form; it presented itself no longer as a distant improbability—only just barely possible. Macbeth could not but remember that his own mother was no less nearly descended from the late king, than she through whom the reigning monarch derived his royal seat. They had been sisters; and though the son of the elder now ruled in Scotland, yet should he cease to live, his cousin Macbeth, from kindred, as well as from popular favor, stood nearest in probable succession to the throne. It is true that Duncan had sons—but they were quite young; and until the elder should have been created Prince of Cumberland, he was not the royal heir-apparent. Meanwhile, each fresh step in Macbeth's rank and power, raised him still more securely within grasp of the secret object of his wishes; and as each grade became his, he and his wife to themselves exulted. She could not but sometimes allow her fancy to muse on that predicted circumstance in her fate, which afforded confirmation of all that now seemed ripening to a fulfilment—a reality.

To inherit their present growing dignities,—and that crowning one which might be in store for them, a son was born to them; and Macbeth beheld the beauty of his mother, while she beheld the representative of his father's honors, in the infant Cormac, who thus enhanced the joy of both parents.

A secret faction arose. A party of the insurgents had the hardihood to plan an attack upon the castle of Macbeth, thinking the thane him-

self to be absent on state affairs. But he had returned suddenly to Inverness from Fores, and he was unexpectedly on the spot to sally forth and repel the invaders.

The encounter raged fiercely for some time on the plain before the castle walls, for the besiegers had assembled in great numbers, and fought with desperation, knowing they had nought to expect from Macbeth's rigour should they fall prisoners into his hands.

Lady Macbeth, anxious for her husband's safety, ascended to the battlements with her infant son in her arms, that she might watch the fight. She endeavoured to distinguish her lord's figure among the combatants, to mark his bravery in the strife, to follow his progress, to note the issue of his death-dealing strokes, and to be the first to hail his success.

Her solicitude for his safety, soon yielded to admiration at his valour; she quenched all inquietude as to the result of the encounter, in the certainty of conquest which such valour seemed to ensure. She felt that this assault was already quelled; she saw these rebels already defeated.

She smiled as she surveyed the scene of contest, with a sense of prospective victory. She heeded not the danger of her own position, in the satisfaction of observing the bravery of her husband; she saw not the peril that surrounded both himself and her, in the thought of their approaching triumph.

For the portion of the battlements where she stood, was not entirely sheltered from the flying arrows of the besiegers; and at any moment one of these missiles might reach her, as she stood there with the child in her arms, marking the progress of the skirmish.

But close beside her—watching her, as intently as she was watching the field,—crouched a queer, shambling, rough, bent figure, that kept its eyes undeviatingly fixed upon her, as she stood there, near the outer wall. It was that of a poor dumb creature, a strange, distorted, stooping, half-wild being, who had sought service among the underling retainers of the household, and who had shown a singular hankering after the presence of the lady of the castle, and an especial fondness for her baby son, Cormac.

He would haunt the passages and galleries where the women attendants were accustomed to pass with their infant charge. He would crouch and hang about the portions of the castle which lady Macbeth was in the habit of frequenting. He was shy, and shrank from notice, particularly from that of the lord of the castle, who knew not of his being there at all,—and was incognizant of the very existence of so insignificant a member of his household. But even when the dumb slouching Indulph sought the vicinity of his idols, he never courted their regard, but slunk about their footsteps, contented, as it seemed, to behold them distantly, and hover in their neighbourhood.

As for the lady herself, after the first inquiry with regard to who he was, and how he came to be about the castle, she had never thought more of him, but became accustomed to see him creeping and slinking here and there, without bestowing farther heed to his presence. She only knew that he was a dumb, harmless, kind of savage, who appeared to take a peculiar pleasure in looking through his fell of thick red hair, at her beautiful babe and herself.

And there, at that time, he lay, stooped and crouching, close to the ground, a yard or two from the portion of the battlemented wall where she stood. Upon her and the child he keeps his eyes fixed, gleaming from amidst the shaggy elf-locks of ochrey red that hung about his face, and left but little of his features to be distinguished, save those eager wild eyes that never strayed from the objects of their regard.

Still the lady looks from the battlements, watching the scene in which her lord is engaged; and still the crouching Indulph stares upwards, watching her and the babe in her arms.

The little Cormac is restless, and cares not to be kept so long in one position. The dumb attendant creeps nearer and more near, until at length he is so close, that the lady in her eagerness of noting the fight, unconsciously lets her child's feet rest upon the shoulder of the crouching savage, who stoops there mutely, and steadily supporting the little creature, though he maintains the same earnest watch upon its mother and itself.

The child plays with the red fell of hair, and pats and clutches

among the thick locks, and sees no repulsive ugliness in the being who has always looked fondly upon him.

The mother's gaze is for a moment withdrawn from the object of her attention, to look towards her child, who strains more and more from her arms, as he becomes more and more occupied with his new plaything.

She sees him dallying and tugging with the ochre hair,—she sees him sporting with kindly hideousness, and there is something in the sight that brings Grym and her own infancy to her thought; she finds that his feet are resting upon the ready patient shoulder, and the image of Culen and his cushion-arm comes into her mind for one instant.

For one instant—but for one passing instant, does the recollection of these by-gone things flit across her memory; the next moment she is again absorbed in noting the scene that is acting beneath the castle walls.

The child climbs back into its mother's arms; the battle rages on, more fiercely and more near, and in her increased interest in the contest, lady Macbeth receives her little son half unconsciously, clasping him to her bosom, without withdrawing her eyes from the fight.

The combatants press more closely. The besiegers rally; they rush forwards, and make a desperate attempt to force a breach through a portion of the defending party that seems less strong than elsewhere. A shower of arrows is discharged, and a few of them flying higher than the rest, reach the battlements over which the lady is leaning.

Indulph springs from his lair. He makes wild and vehement gesticulations to his lady that she should retire from the dangerous station she is occupying. But she is intent upon the affray, and heeds him not.

An arrow alights near the spot. Then another. In despair at her peril, Indulph exclaims:—

“For your boy's sake, if not your own, stand back, madam!”

The lady starts, and looks round in amazement.

“Indulph! Can the dumb speak! And with that voice, too! I surely know that voice!”

She fixes her eyes upon the stooping, crouching, dumb savage, now

erect, alert, energetic, eager, imploring her to withdraw from her perilous situation. [www.libtool.com.cn](http://www.libtool.com.cn)

In another instant, he darts forward, covers her son and herself with his interposed body, while the threatening arrow pierces his own throat, and he falls at her feet.

The locks of red hair are scattered back from the dying face, and lady Macbeth recognizes without a doubt, the features of Culen.

She bends over him, and utters his name with wonder and pity.

"I no longer envy Grym ;" he murmurs.

"But how came you hither? What means this disguise?" she said, after a pause.

"I could not live without beholding you. I had lost all hope—I relinquished fame as worthless. I crept hither, hiding stature, features, voice, beneath the stoop, the stained hair, and the eternal silence of the dumb crouching Indulph, in the single thought of again living in your presence—and it might be, of dying in your service. I am blest that it is thus."

The secret lay revealed before her. Love for her—a passionate devotion to herself, had then inspired this heart, that was fast ebbing forth its last tide at her feet. But the thought of how this would appear to Macbeth, were he to come to a knowledge of this passion, beset her with a sense of annoyance and vexation. She felt mortified rather than exalted by the discovery of this fervent attachment; and a stern look settled upon her face, as she watched the blood that oozed from the death-wound.

Footsteps approach. Macbeth is seeking her, and hurries towards the spot where she stands, that he may tell her all is well over—that their enemies are defeated—that the day is their own.

"But how comes this wounded man here?" said her lord, when he had received her proud congratulations. "A stranger! Perhaps a traitor!" added he. "Do you know who or what he is, dearest chuck?"

The dying eyes mutely entreat her, that he may have the bliss of hearing her acknowledge his lifelong faithful attachment. But hers are averted—she will not meet his look—she will not see his last request.

"It is Indulph, the dumb helper, my lord," said one of the by-standing attendants. "He is wounded in the throat—mortally, I think."

"He saved our boy's life, by the loyal intervention of his person, my lord," said Lady Macbeth; "thank him for us both."

"It is too late; the brave fellow's dead;" said Macbeth, looking at the expiring throe with a soldier's experienced eye, and with the indifference to death proper to one bred amid scenes of slaughter. "Come, my dearest love, let you and I, in to the castle; and rejoice at our success. A feast shall be held in honor of our victory; and this young hero's escape shall be celebrated in flowing wine-cups. You breed our boy well, sweet wife, in teaching him thus to look upon a battle-field be times. Thou art truly fit to be mother to a race of heroes!"

Not long after Macbeth thus felicitated his wife and himself on the salvation of their son, the child's life was threatened by sickness. His mother nursed him like a mother; while her anxiety was shared by her husband, who passionately loved them both.

But fate has decreed that the boy shall not live; the little Cormac yields to the disease, and is carried off in his infancy.

In the midst of her fierce pang for the loss of her offspring, Lady Macbeth receives tidings of her old father's death; but she bears both strokes with her stern composure, that she may stimulate her more impassible husband, whose duty calls him from Inverness.

She firmly urges him to obey the mandate which summons him to Fores; where his presence is required by his sovereign, king Duncan, that he may aid in repelling a threatened invasion from Norway; and in quelling an insurrection that has arisen in the Western Isles.

This latter is headed by Macdonwald, one of the chief among those traitors most disaffected to the present dynasty. He has been heard to utter railing taunts against king Duncan, declaring him to be a 'chicken-heart, more fit to preside over a brotherhood of idle monks in a cloister, than to have the government of such valiant and hardy men of war as the Scots.'

Lady Macbeth fails not to remind her lord of how closely his own interest is concerned in preserving the throne from assailants; its present occupant being of his own line, and scarcely retaining tenure by a nearer claim of blood than that which he himself possesses. Between the husband and wife, the question of this equally near claim, and its possible results, has been discussed; but with scarce-uttered, scarce-conceived intentions; neither season nor opportunity offering for the removal of the one obstacle to their wishes. Their imaginations are fired with the same thought; but they hardly permit its burning image to be visible to each other. Dimly, luridly, it lurks latent, fed with foul vapours of unhallowed desire; only vaguely, dare they permit themselves to shape its existence in words;—but they know and feel, that a crown,—even though it be gemmed with bloody drops,—is, in fact, that one glowing thought.

The thane departs.

Lady Macbeth receives tidings of her husband's progress from time to time; for he has no dearer thought than that of sharing his successes with her.

He sends messengers with letters to her; informing her of his gracious reception by the king, of the confidence expressed in the succour he can afford to the state, of the entire reliance upon his counsels and prowess. He tells her that he has responded to the monarch's wishes, by undertaking the whole direction of the royal forces; upon condition that no misplaced leniency shall interfere with his proceedings, and that the unreserved controul and appointment of the war shall be placed in the hands of himself, and of Banquo, thane of Lochaber, to conduct as they list, and as best shall seem to them. Under their combined generalship, thus unrestricted, he has undertaken, that the rebels shall be shortly vanquished and put down.

Exultingly expectant, Lady Macbeth abides in the castle of Inverness; and each fresh letter that she receives, confirms by its prosperous intelligence, the fulfilment of her aspiring hopes.

News reaches her of the successful issue of the combat between her lord and the rebel Macdonwald, whose traitor head is fixed upon the royalist battlements.

Close upon the heels of that messenger arrives another, who brings word of the encounter at Fife, wherein the invading army of Sweno, the Norway king, is put to the rout and defeated, and the victory secured, by Macbeth, who is to be invested immediately with the forfeited title and estates of the thane of Cawdor; he having disloyally fought beneath the Norwegian banner.

Scarcely has Lady Macbeth welcomed these tidings, when a letter is placed in her hands by a trusty envoy from her lord, wherein she reads words of wondrous import, that kindle into flame the smouldering fire of her thought.

Her self-communing upon this perusal, begins in these words of apostrophe to her lord :—

*“ Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
What thou art promis'd.”*



But that ‘our will become the servant to defect,’ the above should be ‘prologue to the swelling act of the imperial theme.’



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**HELENA ; THE PHYSICIAN'S ORPHAN.**

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TALE III

HELENA; THE PHYSICIAN'S ORPHAN.

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"She derives her honesty, and achieves her goodness."

*All's well that ends well.*

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"WELL met!" said the chevalier de Vaumond, to his friend, Gautier Gerard, as the two young men encountered each other in one of the principal streets of Perpignan, on a certain fine summer morning. "And pray whither may you be bound, my good fellow? On some scheme of pleasure, I trust. Do, for once in a way, consent to omit attendance upon that very worthy, but unquestionably prosy Professor of yours, and leave him to lecture to the few steady stolidities, your brother-students, who may be absurd enough to hold it their duty not to play truant, when such a morning as this bids them keep outside of College walls."

Gerard answered with a smile.

"You will not call it a scheme of pleasure, perhaps, de Vaumond. Your taste has no relish for rural enjoyment. For my part, I long for a pure breeze, a stout walk, the broad expanse of sky, and the open, honest face of Nature. I have been studying hard; and had determined to give myself a holiday this morning; and so took my way forth early, resolved not to set foot again within the gates of Perpignan, for many a pleasant hour of freedom, fresh air, and exercise."

"And what says Papa Gerard to such a spell of liberty as that?" asked his friend. "Can he let you absent yourself so long from the

Temple of Mammon, the cavern of golden ingots, the precious store-house of wealth, the beloved Banking-house? But I forget, good Papa Gerard wills that his son and heir shall redeem the bourgeois stain, erase the roturier stigma from the family name, and raise the dignity of his house, by eschewing the clerkly stool and mercantile desk for the higher honors of the medical chair. Well, did the young doctor obtain the paternal sanction for this long holiday?"

The chevalier glanced somewhat maliciously into his friend's face, as he made this broad allusion to the merchant-banker's well-known strict maintenance of patriarchal authority. But young Gerard, though he colored slightly, only said with a good-humoured laugh, "Oh yes, I have leave of absence; so let us be off! That is, if you care to go."

"If I do, you must promise not to keep up such a striding pace, my good fellow!" said the chevalier in a languid tone, and suddenly coming to a halt. "Recollect, the breezes won't float away, or the sky fade beyond your ken, or the fields run from you. So you needn't pursue them at that Atlantean rate. And besides abjuring this foot-race speed," continued he, when they had resumed their walk at a more moderate pace, "you must promise not to let your proposed long walk detain me beyond a reasonable hour of return this evening. I have an appointment in the Rue Grenoble, after sunset, that I would not miss for all the rural landscapes that ever were beheld."

"I wish you would give up those meetings in the Rue Grenoble, my dear Etienne," said Gerard earnestly. "You waste your health, your fortune, and your best energies, by devoting them to so worthless a pursuit as gambling. Shutting yourself up night after night, as you do, in that stifling saloon, breathing only its impure air, scorched by wax-lights, reeking with fevered breath, poisonous with unwholesome murmurs and imprecations; and this you prefer to the balm of evening air, the glow of sunset, and the tranquillity of a country scene!"

"I never could see the vaunted charm of rural delights, for my part," said Etienne de Vaumond peevishly. "They seem to me to consist in dusty roads, vicious cows, wallowing hogs, stupid-faced baaing sheep, ill-victualled larders, infamously-cooked dinners, milk-pans for wine-flasks—

or vinegar, by courtesy called wine,—louts of men, and thick-ankled red-handed, sun-burned women.

“Do you find no charm in such a spot as this?” asked Gerard, as the two young men turned at this moment out of the high road, along which they had been proceeding hitherto, and entered a small wicket-gate which opened into a broad-spreading meadow. “Do you see nothing pleasant in this green-sward beneath our feet—those waving corn-fields yonder, those stretching uplands—that wooded descent on the left, combining the bright green of chesnuts, the sombre silveriness of olives, the walnut, and tufted mulberry—that clear mill-stream below—those trailing vines on the right, flaunting and twining in profuse festoons from tree to tree—these shadowing oaks above our heads, with their rugged branches, and clusters of leaves so richly defined against the blue sky beyond—the smell of the earth, of the fresh air, mingled with the wafted fragrance of blossoms, of weeds, and odorous breath of kine? Is there nothing in these shapes and scents of Nature that stirs a sense of enjoyment within you, and rouses an emotion of gladness and gratitude?”

The chevalier looked at his friend with a sort of wonder, and a light laugh, as his only reply to an enthusiasm which he could not understand. Gerard felt, at the first moment, that kind of bashfulness common to ingenuous youth when it finds itself suddenly betrayed into the expression of a deep feeling, which has been long allowed to dwell secretly within. The surprise mirrored in a commonplace countenance checks the sentiment's utterance as something misplaced and absurd; but an honest heart will recover soon from this first misgiving, and, with faith in its own true feeling, will only cherish it more deeply than ever, though learning to guard it henceforth more sacredly from unsympathetic observation.

The two young men walked on a few paces in silence: then fell into a lively talk about some of their mutual friends and companions; of a fencing-match that was in prospect; of the chevalier's determination to enjoy to the utmost the independence which had lately fallen to him by the death of his father; hints of the commiseration he felt for his

friend, less favored by fortune in this respect than himself, seeing that Gerard was still subject to parental domination.

"My father loves to see me yield with a good grace to his will, it is true," said Gerard with his former half-blush and smile; and sometimes he seems to forget that I have trebled six years, for he still talks to me as if I were a child of that age, and questions me of college studies as he used then to do of my baby lessons and good behaviour. But it is only the partial fondness of a father for his only son, that makes him unwilling to give up this tone, and I should be churlish indeed if I resented as interference, what is only affectionate anxiety for my good."

"As long as his notions of what may be your good, and your notions of your own good, chance to accord, this may be all well and good, my good fellow, and so far so good;" retorted de Vaumond; "but depend on't, when difference of opinion shall arise between you upon this point,—as it must and will, some day or other—you may find Papa Gerard's solicitude for your welfare a little troublesome, mon cher."

"Well, till that day arrives, I am contented to remember only that his paternal ordering of my affairs has hitherto been productive of nothing but benefit to me;" said Gerard. "He has given me a liberal education, a liberal allowance, and destines me for a liberal profession—for all which I am heartily grateful, and think the least return I can make for so much liberality on his part, is generosity in construing his kindness, and a dutiful observance of his wishes on mine."

"Which observance includes entire submission of your will to his;" muttered the chevalier; "appropriation of your time according to his disposal; shaping your goings and comings solely by his good leave; taking your meals at his appointed hours; responsible to him in all things; your thoughts, opinions, feelings, scarce your own;—for depend on it, such tyranny grows by indulgence, and your penalty will be slavery complete. You have had your profession chosen for you with a view to helping the family honor a step up in the world—from the rotourier wealth of the banker, to the hoped-for renown of the physician; and next, you will have your wife chosen for you, as a means of obtaining another grade in society. I should not wonder if some demoiselle of

gentle blood is even now in Papa Gerard's eyes, who shall link his name with nobility."

Gerard laughed out. "You have indeed drawn a formidable picture, de Vaumond; and I must add, an exaggerated one. But however that may be, as there is no chance of so serious a controul being exercised over my inclinations as marrying me against my will, yet, let us enjoy the holiday vouchsafed to me at present. Hark, what music is that? There seems to be a village festival going on here."

As Gerard finished speaking, he and his companion emerged from the wood through which they had taken their way after crossing the meadow, and they suddenly came upon a scene animated and gay, that formed a striking contrast with the solitude and quiet amid which they had previously wandered.

There was a large assembly of peasants, who had gathered from several neighbouring villages to celebrate the festival of the patron saint of the vicinity. All were in their holiday array; all was sport, feasting, and sylvan revelry.

The spot was a village green. Several cottages were sprinkled around, forming a not very considerable hamlet; and farther on, might be seen the tower of the rustic church, with its few grassy tombs beneath, surmounted by their sparkling gilt crosses, hung with garlands, and bespread with scattered flowers. But flowers and garlands prevailed everywhere in the scene that presented itself to the eyes of the two young men. Heaps of flowers decorated every window; festoons of flowers hung from door to door, looped and fastened with gay-colored ribands; long chains of flowers were suspended in all directions from the spreading tree that stood in the centre of the green sward; nosegays of flowers were in all hands; coronals of flowers decked all heads; bunches of flowers were set out upon all the tables; and some favorite flower adorned the vest of each of the lads, and the boddice of each of the lasses.

In one corner sat the group that furnished the music for the occasion. Homely were the pipes that blew, and slightly skilled might be the bow, which scraped those sounds of mirth, but well they sufficed for



timing the gay footing of the dancers, who with native vivacity and grace were bounding away in joyous lightsome measure, while some brandished tambourines high above their heads, and thrummed and jingled to aid the music, and swell the merry uproar.

Cordially rang the laughing voices, sprightly were the glances, cheerful the hearts, swift the steps, whisking the petticoats, rapid the heads, sudden the arms, pliant the waists, twinkling the feet, bright the colors of the holiday garbs, as the peasant youths and maidens darted to and fro in their mad-cap sport, and hand-in-hand dance.

The turf seemed alive with bright-coloured beings, on the spot where the dancing was at its height. But spreading in all directions, were animated groups of gaily-clothed peasants; some two and two, with bent heads and low earnest tones, engaged in rural courtship. Others lolling on the grass, toying, and chatting, and frolicking, in games where some half dozen were occupied together; a gaping crowd farther on, collected round the wonder-rife table of an escamoteur; another grinning at the humours of a charlatan, holding forth in extolment of his wares; another staring wide-mouthed and nez-en-l'air at the marvellous leaps and bounds of a voltigeur; at the tables sat a knot of village-politicians, listening to some favorite orator, or a set of jolly fellows drinking, or another set deep in the interest of dominoes; and on benches around, sat groups of elders, proud mothers, gray-headed fathers, discreet aunts, indulgent uncles, gossip lovers, talkers, and lookers-on of all sorts.

"I suppose you feel no inclination to sue for one of those red hands, as partner in the dance, de Vaumond;" said Gerard, smiling. "Those damsels are all too thick-ankled or too sun-burned for your worship's fastidious town-taste, of course? And yet, do you know, they look so gay and good-humoured, and I can, methinks, even at this distance, discern many a trim foot and slender waist among them, that would be quite comely enough for my turn, if one of their pretty owners would indulge me with her hand, for a dance or two. I am still quite boy enough to feel my blood tingle to make one in such a merry dance as that yonder. Come, what say you to one dance among them? Let's be worthy Frenchmen, and find a dance irresistible, when a pleasant one offers! Come!"

"I care little for dancing," answered the chevalier; "but a tumbler of cool wine, now, after our long walk, would not be amiss. Perhaps some of the swains may be willing to bestow one, in good fellowship with a gentleman. We'll see."

"What if you can get a draught of milk only; or a vinegar potation?" said Gerard, as the two young men approached the busy scene; "you know, dairies are the only cellars in the country,—and milk-pans the only wine-flasks; unless you consent to drink vinegar under the name of vin du pays."

The chevalier made his way to one of the tables, where he soon made himself at home with its occupants; gravely bantering the politicians, by engaging them in mock disputes, telling them marvellous news, and inventing strange rumours; winking humourously at the by-standers, making them parties to his jokes upon the sages, winning their personal liking by easy chat, familiar convivial manner, and sociable enjoyment of the wine-cup that was passing freely round.

Meanwhile, Gerard lingered near the dancers, watching their movements, and looking upon the many pretty faces and comely shapes; trying to make up his mind which of them he should ask to be his partner, when the dance should break up and another should be formed.

While he was thus engaged, a remarkably sweet-speaking voice struck his ear. He turned, but could see no one near, to whom the voice seemed to belong.

It is singular to notice how rapidly the mind decides, under such circumstances, in appropriating particular voices to particular casts of countenance; a glance suffices, at a strange face, to ascertain whether the sound just heard by chance, has proceeded from that person or not.

Again the soft feminine tone reached Gerard's ear, and though he could not distinguish the words it uttered, he felt irresistibly attracted to discover and look upon the speaker. He was leaning against the fine large tree that formed the centre of the village-green, and he fancied that the sound proceeded from the other side of the aged trunk, which was so large in the circumference of its bole, that it might well screen several persons from his view. He moved round the tree, and saw a

group of persons who were seated beneath its shade on the opposite side. A grey-headed man, whose garb at once proclaimed him to be the venerable Curé of the village, sat on a wooden chair with his back towards Gerard, whilst opposite to him was seated a white-capped, gold-carringed, smooth-aproned, wrinkle-cheeked, but quick-eyed old dame, who seemed to be his Bonne. She was knitting diligently, but her keen eyes were not required for her work; her practised hands plied the needles with twinkling rapidity, and allowed her sharp glances to be wholly absorbed by another object.

Over the back of the Curé's chair leaned the figure of a young peasant girl. She had drooped over the shoulder of the old man, so that her face rested nearly on his bosom, whence it looked up at the Bonne, and was indeed the object upon which her keen eyes rested.

By the young girl's position, her face was entirely hidden from Gerard's sight, but as soon as that bending figure met his eye, Gerard felt no hesitation in at once ascribing the voice he heard, to herself. There was something harmonious in the flexible grace of the outline that seemed to claim affinity with the gentle tones; something of beauty, purity, and attractive charm that rendered both naturally akin.

"But your father should not have allowed you to come alone!" retorted the Bonne with a tone as sharp as her eyes, to something the sweet voice had just said.

"I did not come alone;" it replied. "My father sent Petit Pierre with me."

"Bah! Petit Pierre, indeed!" was the tart exclamation of the Bonne, with a cutting flash of her eyes, and a smart snap of her knitting-needles—"Petit Pierre, forsooth! A pretty person to take care of you! A cow-boy! An urchin of ten years old! A scape-grace that can't take care of himself, much less of any body else! What could your father be thinking of?"

"My father was thinking of indulging me, as usual;" replied the soft voice. "You know everybody says he spoils his Gabrielle; and as he found she was intent upon going, and as nobody could be spared from the farm so well as Petit Pierre, my father sent him with me."

"I can't think why you were so intent upon coming, for my part," said the old lady, darting another piercing glance, and sticking one of her needles with a sudden stab into her apron-string; I don't mind your coming over quietly, as you do at other times, to read, and write, and study, and to talk, and confess, to Monsieur le Curé. That is all very right and proper, and what he approves, I approve, of course; but why you should take it into your foolish little head to come to the fête is what I can't fathom, and can't approve; it's not at all the thing for you, Mademoiselle Gabrielle, to come here, with only a cow-urohin to take care of you, among a parcel of strangers, and a crowd of nobody-knows-who from the other villages.

Here the old lady snatched out the knitting-needle again, and darted it into her work with a poignant thrust, and began another row, without so much as suffering her eyes for an instant to withdraw from the succession of pointed interrogatories they were aiming with such relentless acuteness into the face that looked up into hers. Be it remarked, by the bye, that this excellent old Bonne only whetted the edge of her vigilance upon the young girl from excess of affection towards her, and from a sense of her own duty towards one she loved so well. There are many worthy Bonnes like this old lady, whose feelings are more kindly than their manner; and whom to judge by their sharp eyes and tones, you would guess to be possessed of hearts made of steel or stone, and not of such soft stuff as they really are.

"I believe we mustn't quarrel with anything that brings her to us, my good Jeanneton," said the old Curé, patting the head that rested upon his breast, and pressing it against him; "we are too glad to have Gabrielle with us upon any terms, are we not?"

Madame Jeanneton only shook her head sharply, and muttered something about "spoiled on all hands; spoiled by her own father, and spoiled by her reverend father, who ought to know better."

"It is our fault if she be spoiled, certainly, Madame Jeanneton, you are right enough there," said Monsieur le Curé; "for who can help indulging Gabrielle? Besides, I don't find that she is spoiled, for my part; I think she's very pleasant and good. 'Gentille-et-sage' I call

her, don't I, Gabrielle? And Gentille-et-sage you'll continue to be, spite of the indulgence of your two old fathers, won't you, my child? After all, there's a great difference between spoiling and indulgence, you know," added the old Curé, as if to disarm his Bonne by placing his weakness on the high ground of principle; "I think that indulgence does people good, makes them better-behaved, and more pleasant—at least, sensible people; and our Gabrielle is very sensible, is she not?"

"And I wished so very very much to see the fête you cannot think," said the girl, with that sweet voice of hers, so childlike in its simple earnestness, so girlish in its innocent gaiety, so womanly in its deep tenderness. I had never seen the famous feast of S. S. Pierre et Paul, though I have heard of it ever since I can remember; so I could not help coming over this time."

"But as you are come to the fête you would like to dance, would you not, my child?" asked Monsieur. "Your young feet would fain be skipping about. I dare say; wouldn't they?"

"No, mon père;" replied the girl; "I did not come to dance, I came to see the fête; to look on with you."

Gerard had for some little time past, been determining that this was the partner he should best like to obtain for the dance he had proposed to enjoy; and had determined to step forward and ask her hand, when there should be a pause in the conversation. But these few last words discouraged him.

As he stood irresolute, the girl slightly changed her position; and in raising her head to look again towards the dancers, Gerard caught a full view of her face. It was not strikingly handsome, but it beamed with good-humour, good-sense, candour, and a bewitching look of sweetness that was almost better than absolute beauty.

At least, so thought Gerard, as he felt how entirely the face harmonised with the figure and the voice he had already found so attractive.

His hesitation in addressing her, grew in proportion with his increased desire to obtain her for a partner in the dance; he wished

for some incident which might offer a medium for what seemed an abruptness, and almost a presumption in one so wholly a stranger to her.

He had scarcely formed the wish, ere it was gratified. Monsieur le Curé happened to drop his stick, which had rested against his knee; and Gerard, alertly stepping forward, and restoring it to the old gentleman with a respectful look and a few pleasant words, at once gained the means of introduction he had desired.

His frank, pleasant bearing soon ingratiated him with the little party. He told Monsieur le Curé his name, and of his having left Perpignan that morning, with a companion, in the hope of enjoying a walk and a country holiday; he said how pleasantly fulfilled his hope had been by coming unexpectedly upon their village festival; he spoke of his desire to partake in the sports and dancing; and when he reached this point, he found courage to conclude, by expressing a hope that Mademoiselle would indulge him with her hand for the next dance.

"Mademoiselle Gabrielle did not come with the intention of dancing;" said the Bonne. It was not that the good lady disapproved of the young stranger; on the contrary, she thought he was a very eligible partner for their favorite Gabrielle; but it was simply from her habit of officiously settling the affairs of others, that led her to say this.

But Gabrielle, accustomed by indulgence to decide for herself, said simply:—"I *did* not intend to dance; but I think I should like to dance now, if you do not object, mon père?"

"I object?" Certainly not, my dear. Go, and have a dance, my child; I am glad you have changed your mind. Go, Gentille-et-sage, and dance with monsieur; what can be more natural than for young people to enjoy dancing?"

Gerard and Gabrielle amply confirmed the truth of the old gentleman's concluding proposition; for they joined with untiring spirit in all the successive dances that took place on the green-sward that day. It seemed to be the mode here that there should be no restriction in the matter of changing or retaining partners; each couple seemed to be

at full liberty to form new selections, or to remain constant to their original choice. Gerard availed himself of this license, by keeping exclusive possession of the hand of 'Gentille-et-sage;' nor did she seem averse from the arrangement. Hour after hour passed gaily away, unheeded by either.

In the afternoon, Monsieur le Curé asked Gerard to bring his partner to his house hard by, where he said a humble entertainment awaited them. The old man politely included in the invitation the gentleman whom he understood had accompanied Gerard from town. But the chevalier de Vaumond was deeply engaged in a game of dominoes; and protesting he had already dined sumptuously with his excellent new acquaintance (the clown with whom he was now playing), bade Gerard not trouble himself farther about him, but hasten to attend his fair partner, as they had both evidently discovered congenial friends and pursuits. Gerard did not altogether like the tone in which this was said; but the thought was soon banished from his mind, when he rejoined the Curé, Gabrielle, and the Bonne.

A cheerful apartment opening into a garden, where roses, pinks, pot-herbs, gilliflowers, myrtles, cabbages, oleanders, fig-trees, geraniums, orange-trees, honeysuckle, cherries, sweet-briar, apples, lettuces, lilies, mulberry-trees, vines, and carnations flourished in amicable confusion together, mingling their blended scents in one delicious combination of fragrance to greet the senses of the diners; a neatly-spread table, a kindly host, a sweet-voiced woman, happy spirits, gay looks, mirthful conversation, all contributed to render the repast one of the most exquisite Gerard had ever tasted.

A vision of some of the grand banquets given by his father to divers of his wealthy connections,—banquets where every species of costly delicacy, and rare wine, and massive plate had laden the board, which was surrounded only by corpulent Millionaires and rubicund Rentiers and dull Douairières,—came over Gerard with a sense of suffocation, as the contrast forced itself upon him passingly; the contrast which such gorgeous feasts formed with the simple meal before him.

Another merit presented by the simple lightness of the meal of

which they had just partaken, was, that it offered no impediment to the resumption of dancing as soon as they pleased.

The old Curé accordingly proposed their adjournment forthwith to the village-green; leaving the Bonne to superintend those household matters which might require re-arrangement after the important meal of the day. Nor was it perceptible that her secession caused any diminution of comfort to the party.

More dances were enjoyed together; more hours sped unheeded away. But when the sloping rays of the sun slanted so low and so level with the earth, that Gentille-et-sage could no longer disregard their warning of passing time, she said, "I must return. It is evening; and I must go home."

There was just enough of regret, in the sweet cadence of her voice, as Gabrielle uttered these few words, to console Gerard for their import. He yielded to the motion with which she turned in the direction where they had left the old man seated, that she might bid the Curé farewell, but he availed himself of the usage, which permitted him, as her partner, to keep her hand in his.

"You are going, my child," said the Curé, as they approached, and she took her leave of him. "Well, you are right; your father will be expecting you. I must not detain you. But how wrong this is of Petit Pierre, not to be here ready to go back with you!"

"I am not afraid to go home alone, mon père, you know I do it often, when I come over to see you," said she.

"I hope Mademoiselle Gabrielle will allow me the pleasure of being her companion, as Monsieur Petit Pierre has not thought fit to make his appearance;" said Gerard.

"Well, if you are not unwilling to go so far out of your way, mon bon Monsieur Gerard," said the old Curé, "that will be a very good plan. The farm does certainly lie a little round about; somewhat off the straight road to Perpignan, but to young legs like yours I dare say that won't much matter, even after a day's dancing. Besides, perhaps you may meet Petit Pierre on the road, you know, and then he can save Monsieur the trouble, can't he, Gentille-et-sage? If he should



make his appearance soon, I will be sure and hasten him after you, my dear."

The old Curé said all this with so much simplicity and unconscious good faith, that it seemed a pity to offer any new view of the affair ; and Gerard forbore to explain that he regarded the circumstance of Monsieur Petit Pierre's defection as peculiarly fortunate. Contenting himself, therefore, with taking a cordial leave of the good old man, thanking him for the share he had had in making his holiday one of the most delightful he had ever spent, and expressing a hope that he would permit him to come and renew his acquaintance ere long, they parted ; the venerable Curé returning to his own house, Gerard and Gabrielle taking the direction of the wood, through which the young man had passed just before coming upon the scene of the village festival that morning.

" I do not repeat what I said about not being afraid of going home alone, because it will be as if I asked you to assure me that you think it a pleasure, and no trouble, to go out of your way ;" said Gentille-etsage ; " so I will only thank you for your good company."

" If you wish to be very generous in your thanks, tell me that you prefer it to your own ;" he replied.

" I prefer it even to Petit Pierre's ;" said she archly.

" And pray how came this Monsieur Petit Pierre to indulge us with his absence, by leaving you so unceremoniously to find a substitute for his doughty escort ?" asked Gerard.

" I lost sight of him almost directly after we arrived here, this morning ;" answered Gabrielle ; " he seemed to think he had fulfilled my father's wish when he had seen me to Monsieur le Curé's side, and that he was thenceforth at liberty to follow his own devices for the rest of the day. As indeed he was, for no compact had been made that he should abide by me, or return for me ; and he well knows that I am in the constant habit of going backwards and forwards by myself between our farm and the village."

" Well, whatever may have been the seductive Mat de cocagne, or other entertainment which may have proved the irresistible cause of Monsieur Petit Pierre's truancy, I confess myself beholden to it ;"

said Gerard. "But," added he, "I suppose it is the society of that kind and pleasant old man which brings you over so frequently to the village. Monsieur le Curé seems to be worthy of all esteem and affection."

"He is indeed!" said Gabrielle warmly. "You should see him as I have done, praying by the side of the sick and dying, cheering, comforting, sustaining them. You should hear his holy words, and witness his own virtuous life which brings example as well as precept to the couch of the sufferer. You should know how he quits his snug hearth, his cherished study, his own bed, at all hours, and at all seasons, not only unrepiningly but with kindly eagerness. You should know how he lives scantily, and denies himself the luxury of books—a far harder frugality to him—that he may the better spare the assistance which is never withheld when needed by his poor neighbours. His charity is of the purest kind—for he is generous of his gifts, of his time, of his help, bestowed ungrudgingly from his own store. And his mind is as large as his heart; for though he is singularly simple-mannered and modest, he is very sensible, has read much, and has a fine memory."

"And he has doubtless afforded you some of the advantages of this love of study of his;" said Gerard. "It is as his pupil, and to read with him, I suppose, that you so frequently come over here from your own home."

"Yes, he is most kind to me; I love him dearly; we are very happy together; and my father, whose happiness it is to see his Gabrielle happy, lets me be with Monsieur le Curé as often as we both please. So I have spent much of my time in that pleasant little parlour of his, at his side, reading to him, and hearing him talk. For when we come to any passage that reminds Monsieur le Curé of something that he has read in some other book, he tells me about it, or even repeats it to me. He has an excellent memory, as I told you, which is very fortunate; since his charitable heart prevents his buying as many books as he could wish, he has luckily, in this way, a sort of extra shelf of them in his head."

Gentille-et-sage continued to chat on thus, so gaily and so easily, that Gerard, who was at home accounted a somewhat shy and reserved

youth, became, with this young girl, whom he had known only a few hours, equally communicative with herself.

He found himself telling her freely, with the happy egoism induced by cordial companionship, of his mother, whose partiality knew no bounds ; of his father, whose affection showed itself in a stricter exercise of authority, which perhaps only by contrast with her maternal fondness seemed like controul ; of his enthusiasm for his profession, and of his hopes of one day attaining skill and eminence in its pursuit.

A more exquisite flattery can hardly be administered to self-love, or one that better excuses the weakness it appeals to and elicits, than the sympathy of such a companion as Gabrielle ; it at once calls forth, and rewards the candour of revelation. Under such influence, a sensitive heart yields its hoarded treasures of feeling, and is at once happy in its new freedom, and grateful towards its liberator.

Gerard felt this gratitude towards Gabrielle. The encouragement afforded by the intelligence, interest, and response he read in every look of hers ; the simple ease of her manners which set him at equal ease ; the friendly tone thus at once assumed between them ; all made him feel more at home, more familiar, more allied, as it were, with this recent acquaintance, than he had ever felt with any human being.

An incident occurred that tended to heighten this sense of familiarity. The day had been sultry ; the sky now became suddenly overcast ; the gloom was more than the mere closing in of evening ; clouds gathered, a few large drops fell, then more, and faster, and soon a heavy shower pelted down with such violence, that the thick leaves above were insufficient to protect Gabrielle from the rain. Gerard perceived at a little distance an oak-tree, the trunk of which was so time-worn and hollow, as to admit of Gabrielle's ensconcing herself within. They hastened towards the spot, and as she crept into the rugged bole, he laughingly admired her Dryad's nook, and congratulated her on the perfect shelter it afforded from the wet.

"It is dry certainly," said she, "and yet I can't allow it to be a perfect shelter, since it is not large enough to hold us both. Dryads, I believe, were reputed beneficent, and the least the sylvan goddess could

do, would be to share with an unhappy mortal the protection her tree affords ; whereas I am snugly and selfishly screened, and you are getting wet through."

They chatted on about Dryads, woodland deities, sylvan haunts, poets and their poetical fancies, and a thousand pleasant subjects, which served to show that this peasant girl had profited by her reading with the old Curé, in laying up a store of beautiful and gracious ideas, and in obtaining a glimpse of something beyond the usual education of a farmer's daughter.

It was an odd combination—this fact of birth, and this accident of instruction—but it was a pleasant one ; for the country maiden was so natural, so unconscious, so merely valuing the acquirement for its own sake, for the pleasure it afforded her, and the opportunity it gave her of being with her old friend the Curé, that it did not injure her character. Gabrielle was a being, inartificial and graceful, as she was singular.

The shower was persevering. Half an hour, an hour, two hours elapsed, almost unconsciously ; although Gabrielle proposed several times, issuing from her nook, and facing the wet, saying that it was not very far now from the farm, and that it would be better to hurry thither at once, as the rain might last for some time. But Gerard was so urgent in protesting that now it was going to give over very shortly, and now it was much lighter in the wind, and now he was sure that if they waited ten minutes longer, they might go in perfect security, that Gabrielle gave way, and remained within the hollow tree.

The shower ceased as suddenly as it had come on ; but when at length she was able to emerge from shelter, Gabrielle found that a much longer time had elapsed than she had been at all aware of, while chatting away, screened within the recesses of the oak. She hastened on, and expressed some anxiety lest her father might be uneasy at her late return. As long as they remained within the wood, Gabrielle flattered herself that it was the shadow of the trees that made it seem so dark ; but when they reached the open fields beyond, she could no longer help seeing that evening had quite closed in.

"I hope my father will have fancied that I am staying all night at Monsieur le Curé's," she said, half to pacify her own thought, half aloud to Gerard. "Then he will have no anxiety about my safety."

Half a mile more brought them to a lanc, close, and bowery, and shut in by thick hedgerows on each side. Some trees grew overarchingly above, so that little of the sky could be seen; but here and there a star twinkled through the branches, and Gabrielle, perceiving that Gerard's pace was less assured, as he followed this darkened and unknown track, withdrew her arm from his, and taking him by the hand, led him onwards. He could hear her laughing melodious voice, as she paced quickly along this accustomed path, and spoke in gay, assured, home-returning tones.

Presently she stopped at a little door, which seemed to be made in a garden-wall. Gerard could hear her unlock it; and then she turned again to him, and said:—"Give me your hand again; you will not be able to find your way here, unless I lead you. Now stoop your head; you are tall, and the doorway is low."

Gerard could hear the rustle of the branches, and indistinctly see them laden with fruit, as Gabrielle held back the dripping boughs of some cherry and summer-apple trees, that overhung the narrow path, and besprinkled them profusely as they passed beneath.

"This is almost as bad as the shower in the wood; but you are already wet through, and a few additional drops won't signify. I shall soon be able to have your coat properly dried;" said the pleasant voice. "O, take care of that walnut bough—and these rose-bushes—round this way; now stoop again, under this honeysuckle arch; there, now up a few steps, and here are we!"

Another door was pushed open; they entered, and Gerard found himself beneath a roof of some sort, but he could see nothing; until presently, his conductress quitting hold of his hand, he heard a little gentle bustling to and fro,—a light foot,—a closet opened, and then came the sound of a flint and steel struck smartly; a spark fell upon the tinder, a flickering vision emerged from the gloom, of a face, irradiated by smiles no less than by the nascent glow, as the lips closed in a

rosy circle puffing gently and coaxingly upon the spreading light; a match was kindled, and held towards the taper, the flame sprang up, and a pleasant voice exclaimed gleefully as a child might have done:—"That's it!" and then gradually, the eyes of Gerard accustoming themselves to the light, after the recent obscurity, informed him that he was in a moderate-sized apartment, strewn with different articles that bespoke womanly occupation. A few books, some pencils, a work-basket, pens and ink, an embroidery frame, a garden-rake, a knitting-box, a portfolio, and some half-finished needle-work lay in that sort of neat negligence, graceful litter, that is found only in a young girl's own sitting-room.

Before he had time to do more than glance round at the place in which he found himself, Gabrielle had laid her hand upon the sleeve of his soaked doublet; and begging him to take it off, she stepped into an inner room, unhooked from a peg a thick cloak which hung there, and brought it him, to put on, while she took his wet garment to be dried.

"Give it me," she said in her easy manner, "that I may take it to the kitchen-fire of the farm. The embers are still hot, I dare say. I will not be gone long, but I must just step over, for I am longing to see my father, and tell him I am come back. You will forgive me, I know. I will be back in five minutes." So saying, she glided out of the door by which she had entered; and Gerard remained alone.

He had now leisure to examine the spot where he was. It seemed to be a sort of summer-house, or pavilion, such as is frequently found, built out in the garden, away from the house, in many parts of France. It comprised two apartments; for, beyond the one where Gerard was, he could see another room. They opened from one to the other by a small door, which had been left ajar by Gabrielle, when she had gone in to fetch the cloak. The glimpse afforded through this half-open door showed, by the white hangings which neatly draped an alcove opposite, that this inner one formed a bed-chamber; while the single snowy pillow and general air of tasteful simplicity that reigned around, proclaimed it to be Gabrielle's own sleeping-room, as incontestably as the scattered work, and other feminine confusion, bespoke the one in which he sat to be her sitting-room.

He could scarcely forbear laughing at his whimsical situation, and at the still more whimsical figure he cut, as he caught a glimpse of himself in a looking-glass which hung near. His youthful head, with its thick hair and coming moustache, peered above the folds of a woman's cloak. It was the dark woollen one, fastened with a silver clasp, worn by Gabrielle, in common with Frenchwomen of her class, in winter; and seemed as if only a snowy cap, or other feminine head-gear could crown it appropriately. He thought, too, of the unexpected train of circumstances which had grown out of his walk that morning. Here he was in a strange place, awaiting one, who, until that day, had been a stranger to him, but who, henceforth, was to be intimately blended with his every thought. He instinctively felt this, though it did not present itself in so palpable a form to his mind.

Gerard's nature, unconsciously to himself, now for the first time in his life met its kindred spirit. Hitherto he had dwelt only with dispositions uncongenial with his own; for although his filial reverence taught him to construe his mother's weak passiveness into gentleness, and his father's domineering selfishness into paternal guidance, yet the real temperament of his parents, had, till now, been the unfavorable social atmosphere in which the glow of his own feelings had been repressed and subdued. He had been accustomed to check and stifle warmth of expression as something unsuited to the chilling damp that pervaded the home circle; but now he had met with one, who at once made him feel unconstrained, unreserved, elate, happy

Gabrielle's manner was so peculiarly unreserved, so full of that frank yet modest ease which sometimes belongs to youth brought up with indulgence, that it inspired ease in him; the young girl's simple unembarrassed demeanour placed him at once on terms of intimacy; her tone of sympathy and intelligence won his regard and confidence, and the whole impression produced upon his feelings, was that one of repose, of content, of comfort, of serene joy which belongs to a tried and valued friendship. In this playful ease, this modest yet assured manner of the young country girl, which awakened such welcome novelty of happy feeling in Gerard's heart, lay the secret of her charm for him:

but as yet he knew it not; he was content to yield himself implicitly to the unanalysed pleasure he felt; to the joy of having discovered such a being; to the happiness of her presence, her intercourse, herself.

He sat there, indulging this kind of waking-dream—for it was rather with the shadows and voluptuous impresses of thought, than with the thoughts themselves that his fancy was luxuriating,—until the light footsteps of Gabrielle announced her return.

“It was as I hoped;” she exclaimed as she entered. “My father had not been uneasy, concluding I staid at Monsieur le Curé’s, all night, on account of the shower. So I found him snug in bed; where I would have had him remain quietly; but when he heard that Monsieur had been so good as to see his child safe home, he would needs get up and thank him. So I am come to fetch you to the farm, to my father. It is only at the other end of the garden. This is the old pavilion, which my father has had fitted up, and lets me have for my own little homestead. O, he is very indulgent to his Gabrielle—my kind old father! Everybody says he spoils her. He lets her have her own whims and fancies—her own way in every thing—and that’s so pleasant!”

The moon had risen now; and as they once more crossed the garden, her broad mild light shone clear upon flower, shrub, and fruit-tree, rendering needless the friendly guiding hand which had before led Gerard along the path.

He was in thought half regretting it, when Gabrielle said:—“You need no leading now, which is fortunate, or you might have had some difficulty in finding your way back to Perpignan; but you can scarcely miss it, in this clear moonshine, and the way is not intricate; if you follow the lane that bends a little to the right, leaving the wood on your left hand, when you have passed the field or two beyond, the road is nearly straight to the town.”

In the kitchen of the farm, they found the old farmer, hospitably intent on spreading a table-cloth, and preparing some homely refreshment. to which he invited his guest in unceremonious but hearty terms. He thanked him for bringing home his child in safety. in the same manner; and all his speech betokened the rough honest farmer. He



spoke a broad country dialect, a strong patois, but his words were kindly, though homely. He was as utterly devoid of polish or refinement, as his daughter was singularly graceful and superior in air and knowledge to her station; though the one was no less *natural* than the other. But she was simple, he was plain; she was innocent, he was ignorant; she was candid, he was blunt; she was intelligent, and had learned the happiness of reading, he was unlettered, and cared for no knowledge beyond the culture of his fields, and the superintendence of his farm. He was the mere rustic, she was the modest country-maid. The contrast was almost as great between this farmer and this farmer's daughter, as if the one had been a duchess and the other a cobbler; but there were some points in common between these two. Both father and child were perfectly free from assumption of all sorts; equally artless, equally unaffected, equally sincere, and equally steady in affection for each other.

By the time the hasty supper had been discussed, Gerard's doublet was thoroughly dry; as he resumed it, and prepared to depart, resigning Gabrielle's cloak which had wrapped him so comfortably in his need, many smiling words were exchanged between them all, of the help, and the shelter, and the kindness that had been mutually interchanged that day.

Gabrielle's father thanked the "bon jeune homme" for his care of his daughter; she thanked Gerard again for his "good company;" and he thanked them both for their care, their good company, and their hospitable kindness; but in his heart were myriads of thanks that could find no utterance towards her who had that day shed so sudden a flood of light upon his existence. Often thus, lies profound gratitude, concealed beneath light laughing words of courtesy—the bashful subterfuge of a generous hypocrisy, that feigns less than it feels.

These unexpressed emotions served to bear him joyful company back to Perpignan that night; the way imperceptibly melted before him, as he indulged the thought of how soon he hoped to retrace it; no idea of the lateness of the hour occurred to him, till he beheld the indignant, drowsy face of the cross old portress, who let him in when he reached his father's porte-cochère.

"These young people!" he heard her mutter; "little they think of us old ones at home! Fine times! Fine hours! Fine goings-on!"

He whispered some playful words, deprecatory of the ancient Cerberia's wrath; but the next morning he had to encounter the far more important displeasure of his father.

He met him for a few moments, just as Monsieur Gerard was issuing forth, ready hatted and gloved, to proceed to the Banking-house, which was at a short distance from his residence.

"You are late down to breakfast this morning, Gerard; no wonder, if you keep such late hours over-night. I hear it was much past midnight before you returned home. This does not encourage me to give you a holiday again, in a hurry. De Vaumond is a young man of high birth and connections, therefore I approve of your intimacy with him; but you must not allow his love of the gaming-table to make you forget your proper hours for returning home at night. It is not the few paltry écus you might lose, that I mind,—a lad of spirit, with a rich father, can afford to spend his money as freely as a young nobleman, but I do not choose to have my family hours altered."

"I met de Vaumond, it is true, sir," answered the son, "but——"

"There, let us have no more words about it, my boy," interrupted Monsieur Gerard. "I choose you to be home before midnight, do you hear? That's my will. Let it be observed. No more words, if you please."

The banker stalked away; and Gerard went to his College; but that day, his study was, for the most part, how he might best contrive time for another visit to the farm.

And another and another visit did he contrive. Monsieur Gerard had no more occasion to complain of late hours, either over-night, or at the breakfast-table. Punctually at nine o'clock, the established hour for the family to assemble at the morning meal, Gerard made his appearance, looking animated, happy, and with a glow in his cheeks, that bespoke early air and exercise. His parents remarked upon it with pleasure, each after their peculiar fashion. His mother observed, "she was glad to find he had minded what his father said about late hours. Getting

up early, and taking a walk, always made the cheeks blooming; and Gerard's were absolutely like a rose."

His father, who was fond of taking his own views of the matter, and assuming them as established facts, believed that his son was eager in the pursuit of herbal botany, and had chosen these early hours for his rambles, that he might not interfere with time devoted to other branches of medical study.

Besides, he had signified his desire that early hours should be observed; and Monsieur Gerard was one of those authoritative persons who consider the announcement of their will as tantamount to its execution.

"The boy is quite right, Helena;" said Monsieur Gerard in reply to his wife's observation touching their son's improved looks. "He acts in conformity with the advice of those who know what's best for him; and he finds his account in it, don't you, Gerard, my boy?"

"I certainly find my delight in these early walks," answered he; "for I have found ——"

"O spare us the description of every weed and every blade of grass you may have discovered, my good fellow;" interrupted Monsieur Gerard. "They are all rare specimens, I dare say, and may possess the most inestimable virtues of the combined Pharmacopeia, for aught I know; but I'm content to take your word for it. Helena, my dear, pass me that pigeon-pie; I find more entertainment in exploring its contents, monsieur le docteur, than in all your wild flowers that ever were distilled to cure or poison mankind!" And Monsieur Gerard accordingly began to dig into the bowels of the pasty, selecting the choicest morsels for his own plate, in his own important style. For the banker always helped himself, as if fully conscious what was due to the rich merchant, goldsmith, and banker of Perpignan, the father of a family, and the master of his own house. He helped himself as if the chief anxiety of all present, were bound up, with his own, in the fact of his securing those morsels best suited to his palate; and as if what he might reject was sure to be good enough for others. Monsieur Gerard, in helping himself from a dish, always gave you the idea that those por

tions which he left, became scraps—orts—mere refuse—unworthy of his notice—though they might serve for those who came after him. When he partook of an omelet he would cut the browned edges off with so choice a hand, and deposit them on his plate with so nice an egoism of discrimination and care, that the middle piece which remained lay there on the dish, a mere unpleasant block of insipidity, for any one who chose to take up with it; but had he preferred the less done section, it would have been just the same; for then the solicitude with which he would have lifted out the centre spoonful, and conveyed it with a steady hand, a watchful eye, and suspended breath, to its destination for his own peculiar discussion, would have converted the crisper edges into cindry chips, parings, despised remnants, pushed aside, rejected and abandoned, for any one that chose to collect them.

The confident unmisgiving air with which all this epicurean purveyancing was carried on, imparted a solemnity and dignity to Monsieur Gerard's eating, and Monsieur Gerard's taste, and Monsieur Gerard's selection, which deprived it of any appearance of selfishness—at least, neither his wife nor son was ever struck with it in that light; for they had been so accustomed to see him sniff at, and closely inspect, and pish-and-shaw at the dishes, and to hear him say:—"I'll try a bit of this, I think"—or, "Let me see if I can manage one of these"—or, "Perhaps I may fancy some of your dish, Helena, my dear, send it round to me;" that they had come to consider him as rather an ill-used gentleman on the score of appetite, and one whom it was providential if anything could be found to tempt and coax into eating at all.

In small matters, as well as in great ones, Monsieur Gerard was emphatically 'master in his own house;' and he liked to have his family think, as well as act, according to his sovereign will and pleasure. If he pitied and patronised his own appetite, as a poor one, and one that required pampering and indulgence, it was the duty of those around him to adopt his view of the matter—which they implicitly did. Monsieur Gerard had hitherto enjoyed supreme and unquestioned domestic sway.

His son, Gerard, had no intention of concealing the real object of his morning excursions from his parents; on the contrary, his naturally

frank temper would have led him to confide to them the new source of joy he possessed in the discovery of Gabrielle; he would have described to them her graces of simplicity, candour, and intelligence; he would have dwelt with delight upon the charm her character possessed for him, upon the feeling of amity and affectionate interest with which she inspired him; but the manner in which every thing had been taken for granted, and the total absence of all expressed sympathy, in leading him to expatiate upon his new-found source of happiness, chilled and discouraged him into silence. This had ever been the social existence of Gerard; till of an open disposition, it had well-nigh created a reserved one.

But now, whatever might be the lack of sympathy in his home-circle, none was wanting to make his hours spent at the farm those of unalloyed happiness. There, he was always received with the same cordiality, the same frank ease, the same friendly intimacy as that which had marked the epoch of his first acquaintance with Gabrielle and her father.

Calm and delicious were those pure summer mornings! Secure that however early might be the hour at which he could reach the farm, its inhabitants would surely be stirring, he would rise from his bed with the dawn, glide through the silent streets of the town, emerge into the open country, traverse the dewy fields, behold the rising sun in his glory, hail the face of gracious Nature in her fair beaming freshness, whilst his heart, cheerful and devout, offered silent homage to the Creator of all.

Then came the arrival; the welcome; the good-humoured hearty farmer; the honest labourers, exchanging a grinning bon-jour, for the young man's touch of the hat, or slap on the shoulder; the lowing kine, with their fragrant breath steaming forth into the morning air, standing patiently to be milked, before going to pasture; the busy clamour of poultry, hurrying to be fed; the hum of bees; the scent of hay; the clattering of milk-pans; the rustle of straw in the yard, amongst which routed and grunted, in swinish luxury, some pigs, with their upturned twinkling eyes; the creaking and flapping of huge barn-doors, disclosing

glimpses of scattered straw, piled logs, trusses of hay, grain, and high cross-rafters, among which sparrows flew in and out, perching and twittering; the neighing of sleek plough-horses; the cheerful barking of dogs; the swinging-to of gates; the many sights, and smells, and sounds that make a farm so pleasant a spot to the townsman, all greeted Gerard's senses with an impression of delight and enjoyment.

Then, above all, came the meeting *her*. She would come hurrying out from the porch, all smiles, and welcome, and beaming cordiality, looking by far the most fresh, and bright, and sunny object in those fresh, bright, sunny mornings. And then they would loiter about the farm-yard together, watching the farmer give his instructions to the men, congratulating him upon the flourishing condition of his farm, listening to his proposed improvements, giving their occasional opinion, and interesting themselves in all that was going forward without doors. Then they would stroll through the garden, and linger near the beehives, and debate the probability of an approaching swarm, or stay and peep at some sitting mother-bird who had built her nest in the close hedge near the harbour; or note the growth of some newly-set favorite of Gabrielle's planting; or watch the cool green shadows play and ripple on the surface of the small pond, while they idled on the brink side-by-side, and Gerard saw mirrored in the cheeks of his companion the dimples on the water, in her eyes its liquid brightness, in her soul its transparency, its clearness, and its purity. Then came half an hour in the pleasant sitting-room of the pavilion. Gerard would here give Gabrielle the book or print he generally brought for her; he would hear of the pleasure she had had in reading the last; or of something Monsieur le Curé had told her, when reading it to him; or he would look at the progress she had made, since the morning before, in her drawing, and would perhaps add a touch or two, and suggest a few more.

But however pleasantly the time might speed, Gerard never permitted himself to forget its lapse, so as to trench upon the appointed hour for his return. He told Gabrielle that he trusted to her for turning him out of doors when the sun should have reached the warning

height ; and so, when its rays had travelled round a certain space in the chamber, and, resting in a certain angle, proclaimed that it was time to depart, the pleasant voice said :—" See ! the sun beckons you to be going—or you will not reach home in time to welcome your mother downstairs, and lead her to the breakfast-table."

Morning after morning thus passed away, in scenes so peaceful, in thoughts so tranquil, in intercourse so calm, that Gerard had no suspicion of the change which had been wrought within himself ; he surmised not that this blissful sense of awakened existence, this powerful impression of happiness which he hugged close to his heart as a deeply-treasured possession, a newly-acquired gift, was the result of a complete revolution which had taken place in his own moral being. He knew not that love had taken possession of his soul ; he knew not that love it was which played in every breeze, which lured him forth to find fresh beauties in Nature herself, which filled his heart with joy, his spirits with exultation, and which lent a new zest to every thought and every act. He knew not that it was love which shed its radiance upon the image of Gabrielle, and which fraught every idea of her with beauty and delight. He believed that joys so pure and placid as those he savoured during the hours of morning, could originate with no emotion so powerful as love ; he could not imagine that the contentment and serenity of mutual understanding which subsisted between himself and that young country maiden, owed its existence to so imperious a feeling as love. He had heard love described as turbulent, restless, exacting ; could he therefore suspect that uneasy passion to have aught to do with the deep and plenary satisfaction of her presence ?

But though unconscious of his own secret, it was soon to be discovered to him in all its force, by means less pleasant, though no less potent than the promptings of his happy heart. A word of slight towards her he loved, revealed to him the whole strength and truth of that love.

One morning on his return from the farm he found his mother in tears, and his father in a towering passion.

His entrance was the signal for a torrent of reproaches.

"O Gerard, how could you?"—sobbed his mother.

"Listen to me, sirrah;" said his father, almost inarticulate with rage. "I find you have been deceiving me,—deceiving me, you young mauvais sujet! Know, that I happen to have seen the chevalier de Vaumond; that I have learned from him your idle low haunts, and your trumpery companions. Not content with a vagabondizing walk, and loitering about with boors and clowns, but you must needs fall to dancing and romping with the peasant wenches."

"Fie, Gerard! How could you?" again sobbed his mother.

"I never deceived you, sir;" said Gerard, his eyes flashing at the accusation of duplicity, and still more at the opprobrious terms in which allusion had been made to his acquaintance with Gabrielle. "I never sought to mislead you as to the manner in which I spent that day. You yourself assumed that I had passed it wholly with de Vaumond; and stopped me when I would have explained the truth."

"The truth, boy, the truth! Don't tell me of the truth! I say you have not told me the truth all along; for I'll be bound that's not the only time you have been to this low village. De Vaumond told me you seemed mightily taken with one of these wenches, some curate's niece, or something of the kind—and I shouldn't wonder if you have been to take a peep at her again! Your morning walks, sirrah, your morning walks! Confess that they were to this same village, and that your botanizing was all a pretence, all a sham!"

"I never pretended that botany was my motive for early rising;" replied Gerard. "Had you cared to know, sir, I should have told you that my morning walks were to the farm, to see Gabrielle."

Gerard had spoken firmly though respectfully; but his voice faltered a little, as he concluded, with the reluctance natural to the utterance of a beloved name in the presence of those we know to be prejudiced against its possessor; besides, he was just beginning to discover how dear that possessor was to his own heart.

There was something in the young man's manner which made the father pause, and consider him attentively. There was an air of manly resolution taking the place of old boyish submission, which Monsieur Gerard



had never before observed ; there was no filial deference wanting in the tone. but it was mingled with an earnestness of meaning, a decision of purpose that bespoke the existence of a strong internal motive. The father felt instinctively that will was there to meet his own, and that it was a man's will and not a child's will. Had his son grown from boyhood to manhood at a single hour's growth, Monsieur Gerard could scarcely more palpably have seen the alteration, than he read the one which had taken place in his son's mind from ductile youth to maturity. He recognized the origin of the change and the evil, for such he felt it to be, and resolved to deal with it at once. In the first place, he assumed a tone of more condescending equality with his son, than he had ever permitted himself to use before.

"And so Gabrielle is the name of this rustic charmer of yours, is it?" said Monsieur Gerard, drawing a long breath at the conclusion of his scrutiny. "And it was to see her that you could get out of bed so early, and walk abroad a-mornings! Upon my word! I don't know, though, that we ought to be angry with her, if she's the cause of such a reformation in our young mauvais sujet's habits."

"Be assured, all her influences upon me are good—like herself," said Gerard eagerly.

"But the better she is, my dear Gerard," interrupted his mother, "the more considerate you ought to be for her; the acquaintance of a young man like yourself cannot but compromise her. You cannot marry her, you know, and ——"

"Madame Gerard!" thundered her husband, "what folly is this? Leave the room, if you cannot talk more to the purpose. When we are by ourselves, Gerard and I shall soon come to an understanding about this matter."

She prepared to obey, with a fresh burst of tears; but as she passed her son, she repeated her sobbing:—"O Gerard! How could you? Tell your father you are very sorry—and are prepared to give up any acquaintance he dislikes."

"Mother, I cannot say I am sorry for what makes the happiness of my life."

"Did you hear me speak, Madame Gerard?" again stormed the banker. "Leave us!"

"Now boy," resumed he, when his wife had closed the door behind her; "let us hear all about this peasant girl. What sort of looking wench is she? But of course, a paragon of beauty—all young men's first flames are Venuses!"

"She is no flame of mine;" said Gerard hastily.

"No? Morbleu, I'm glad to hear that! By your manner, I feared that you were entangled past all hope—shot through and through the heart—over head and ears in love. Too absurd in a boy like you! Allons," continued Monsieur Gerard, "this is some comfort, however, to find that you have only had a passing fancy for picking up low acquaintances:—but mind, it's a bad habit, and one that grows upon you, and I want you to rise in the world, Gerard, my boy, and you won't do that by associating with poor country curates and their hoyden nieces."

"I forgive your speaking in injurious terms of one you do not know, sir," said Gerard. "But from what I said just now in hasty refutation of your light manner of speaking of Gabrielle, you may be misled into the belief that I do not love her. I would not have you deceived for an instant, father; I do love her, but I did not know until to-day how entirely she possesses my love. Now that I know my own heart, I open it to you. I do not ask you to sanction my affection until you know its object—but, once you have seen my Gabrielle, you will help your son to obtain her, as the best blessing life can afford."

"Ay, ay, we'll see this pretty rustic, and try what we can do to induce her to be kind," said the French banker. "But mind, Gerard, if I indulge you, in permitting you to choose your own acquaintances for passing your idle toying hours, I expect you to conform to my wishes in material points. The Chevalier de Vaumond is a man whom I approve of as your friend; and I hope shortly to introduce you to a young lady, the daughter of a very old friend of mine, the Baron de Montigny, who has been residing many years in Italy;—and this young lady I should wish you to make your best friend—your wife, Gerard."

"My wife, sir!" exclaimed Gerard. "I have been telling you myself, of the only woman whom I can ever make my wife."

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"I shall not, my dear fellow ; peasant wenches are not women to be trifled with," said Monsieur Gerard. "Understand me ; I insist upon it, that if I comply with your whim of keeping up the acquaintance with those villagers, you shall comply with my desire of seeing you married to Mademoiselle de Montigny. It is a match upon which I have determined from your birth ; and I will be obeyed."

"Then I have plainly to declare, that this is a point in which I cannot budge you, sir," said Gerard. "I never will marry any woman who is not my whole heart ; and it is already given to Gabrielle."

His father again read, in the firm calm tone, and in the look which met his own with unflinching regard, that his son was no longer a boy.

"I'll tell you what, Gerard ;" said he. "You know that I am a man accustomed to declare my will, and to see it accomplished. You know, too, that I am a man of my word. Now, I give you my word of honor, that if you don't marry according to my will, I'll strip you of every cent of allowance, withdraw you from college, ruin your prospects in life, and reduce you to beggary, in short. So mark me, young man, I give you four-and-twenty hours to decide between marriage to please me and your father's favor ; or marriage to please yourself, and beggary—with outlawry from home for ever, for I'll have no disobedience in my house !"

And with this, the banker stalked out, leaving his son to consider his words ; who, however, did not remain long in reflection, for he snatched up his hat, and went out also.

"The decision must rest with her ;" thought Gerard, as he took his way to the farm. "If she does not fear beggary, why should I ? Besides, beggary need not of necessity be our portion. Disinheritance does not deprive us of our limbs, our faculties ; I can work, I can earn bread, I can pursue my profession. With her—for her—what toil would be painful ? Cheered by her presence, secure of her possession, as a motive and a reward for exertion, how glorious then will be the pursuit of an art so noble.—a profession so worthy ?"

"What was it he said ?" he continued to muse, while a crimson spot burned upon his cheek, as he recalled his father's words—"peasant

girl- are not women to make wives of!" Monsieur Gerard did not display his usual amount of worldly prudence in calculating the advantages of bargaining for such a woman as Gabrielle on fair terms. In the clear mind of such a wife, a man secures aid in forming his own judgments; in the natural good sense of such a woman, a man finds support and encouragement in taking enlarged views of life; he rises superior to petty evils; he gains strength of mind, and moral courage; he learns to eschew prejudice, to avoid enmities, to conquer difficulties, to achieve fame, to win honor and consideration, to earn independence; she at once induces and graces his advancement. In such a bosom friend—such a wife,—a man obtains the crown of his existence; and it is such a friend as this that a selfishness, as mistaken as it is sordid, would degrade into a plaything for idle moments, a toy to be cast aside when sullied and destroyed. It is the life-long amity and attachment of such a woman as this, that a libertine would exchange for the mere caresses of a passing hour. A sensualist cheats himself, as well as his victim. He robs himself of a treasure, in seeking to filch a sparkling trinket. In seeking to make such a woman as Gabrielle a wife instead of a mistress, a man consults his own interest (which methinks might weigh with the Perpignan banker) as well as his glory, his honor, and his happiness."

"But I picture her to myself as a wife, and do I even know that she loves me? When I parted from her this morning, I knew not what was passing in my own heart, and I perceived nothing in her manner that should give me hope aught existed within hers, akin to my own feeling. We were both happy friends—nothing more; she brought me my hat, and helped me to look for my gloves, and bade me hasten on my way home, with the easy smiling air with which a sister might send a brother forth, secure of seeing him again in a few hours. And so she thought to see me, to-morrow; but in still fewer hours I am returning. She will not expect me. Shall I find her at the farm? She may be gone over to see Monsieur le Curé."

He hastened on, impatient at the thought of her possible absence; and as if he would have detained her on the spot where he hoped to find

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He thought he could tell her all he felt and all he hoped, best in the sitting-room of hers, in the pavilion ; as he thought of all he had to speak, to entreat, he wished he might find her there, in that retired spot, secure from interruption, till he had poured forth all his heart to her.

In such fancies did the young lover indulge, as he sped along the well-known path : when just as he reached an angle, where it turned off abruptly into the wood, he saw, sitting under the trees, at a little distance, Gabrielle herself.

The sight of her, thus unexpectedly, and with the thought of all that he had discovered of his own feelings towards her, since he had last parted, in the calmness of friendship, held him for a second, endeavouring to check the tumult of his heart, which now beat high with its newly-conscious emotion.

From the spot where he first perceived her, he could see her without being seen : and, in the pause of a second that he made, he witnessed that which held him breathless for some seconds longer. He saw Gabrielle put softly to her lips some object that she held in her hand, fondle it to her cheek, press it between her palms, and then kiss it again and again tenderly—nay, passionately. He was burning to ascertain what this object of her caresses could be, when in smoothing it out upon her knee, and drawing it on to her own little hand, he discerned it to be one of his gloves, which had been mislaid that morning, and which was nowhere to be found when he was about to return home.

He was just springing forward, when his steps were arrested by hearing others approach hurriedly through the trees, in the direction of the farm.

In another moment, Petit Pierre came brushing and rustling through the underwood, bawling Gabrielle's name, panting and out of breath. But before the lad came up, Gerard had beheld the glove hastily, though securely, concealed in Gabrielle's bosom.

" O I'm so glad you hadn't got far, Mademoiselle," said the cowboy " Your father guessed you had set out upon your way to Monsieur le Curé's, and bade me run after you, and see if I couldn't overtake you

and bring you back; he wants to speak to you about those rose-bushes that he is going to have removed from before the dairy-window; he says they're in the way there, and he wishes to know where you'd best like to have them transplanted."

"I'll come back with you directly, Pierre;" said Gabrielle, rising from her grassy seat. As she did so, she perceived Gerard, who advanced to meet her. With her usual frank grace she congratulated herself and him upon his having been able so soon to return, imagining that some college holiday permitted this excursion.

"And I hope you have the whole day to spare us;" said she. "We will return with Petit Pierre, to see what my father proposes, and to settle with him the best new place for the rose-trees; and then, if you please, we'll go over to Monsieur le Curé's together. I was on my way to show him this beautiful 'Clotilde de Surville' which you brought me yesterday."

The hearty farmer seemed as well pleased as his daughter to see the 'bon jeune homme' so soon among them again. Gerard had become a great favorite with the old man; he liked his sincere straightforward manners, and his unaffected cordiality; while the warm interest which he took in all matters that related to the farm and its inhabitants, and the liking he displayed for simple rural pleasures, pleased the countryman, and won his regard.

The affair of the removal of Gabrielle's rose-trees was soon arranged to the mutual satisfaction of the assembled trihominat; and then, while the farmer went off to his barns, Gerard and Gabrielle sauntered through the garden towards the pavilion.

"I have told Babette to take some strawberries and cream there for us;" said Gentille-et-sage; "I thought you would like to sit in the shade and eat some fruit before we set out for Monsieur le Curé's. I think I will pop a little pot of cream in a basket for the dear old man; and we'll carry it to him. And I think I can find room for a fowl and some new-laid eggs, and we'll ask him to give us some dinner, shall we?"

"With all my heart; and yet——" Gerard paused.

Gabrielle asked him archly if his hesitation proceeded from the

weight of the basket he would have to bear ; " for I give you warning," said she, " that I mean to let you carry it by far the greater part of the way."

" I willingly engage to let you carry it no step of the way yourself," said he. " It was not the basket that weighed upon my mind ; but I feel some scruples of conscience, I own, in accepting a second feast at the hands of Monsieur le Curé, when I have it in my hope to ask of his bounty a boon of surpassing worth."

" Indeed !" said Gabrielle. " This sounds like a secret. You must promise to tell me what it is that you are going to ask of Monsieur le Curé,—I long to know. In the first place, I never had any secrets, either of my own or anybody else's, to keep—and there must be something very grand and very pleasant in having a secret ; and in the next place, I can perhaps help you in obtaining this favor from him ; though he is such a kind old darling, he never can find it in his heart to refuse anybody anything."

" And yet this is a very, very great favor—the most valuable of all gifts. Still, you promise me your help—and your help is everything—nay, unless you, Gabrielle, grant me the boon first, I cannot ask it of Monsieur le Curé."

" Tell me, tell me ; I am all impatience," said she, " to learn this secret ; tell me what is the gift you mean to ask of Monsieur le Curé."

" I want him to give me a wife ;" said Gerard.

A rapid succession of emotions was visible upon the clear artless face of the country girl. First there was the sudden wonder at so new an idea presenting itself to her, as Gerard's marriage ; then the pallor which the thought of his loss occasioned, was replaced by a flood of rosy color which suffused her cheeks, brow, and neck, with the dawning consciousness of who was really the woman he desired for the wife he sought of the Curé.

" You may have failed to discover my love—I learned not its depth myself. until to-day, my Gabrielle," said the young man, pouring forth his words in hurried passionate accents ; " still, you cannot but have perceived how my happiness has grown since I have known you, how

my soul has knit itself to yours, how my grateful heart has exulted in the regard you have accorded me, in the gentle interest you have shown, in the affectionate tone you have permitted to subsist between us. You may have mistaken these tokens of my feelings for those of esteem, of friendship merely—till my father's words opened my eyes this morning, I mistook them for such myself—but O, Gabrielle, believe that the esteem, the friendship I feel for you have all the warmth of love—of love only—and it is as the partner of my existence—as the crown of all my hopes—as my wife, that I beseech you to give me yours in return.”

Gabrielle drooped her head, instead of replying to her lover's passionate appeal, and for the first time since she had known Gerard, her looks failed to respond to his. She seemed to be struggling for courage to strengthen herself against his pleading.

“Your father's words!” she faltered; “then he refuses to sanction your love.”

“His prejudices are worldly—he is unjust—he does not know your worth, my Gabrielle,” said her lover.

“A father's prejudices deserve consideration;” said the low voice of Gentille-et-sage.

“But not to the destruction of a son's happiness;” said Gerard. “Not when they interfere to sever those that love each other. My Gabrielle would not have me abide by a parent's prejudices when they bid me marry where I cannot love. Surely, mutual love has sacred claims of its own?”

“Ay, mutual love;” murmured Gentille-et-sage, persevering with what she conceived to be the duty of refusing one who sought her against his father's will, she strove to resume her old tone of archness and easy gaiety, “you speak of mutual love; but though you have told me of your own, I have not told you of mine. Pray who told you that I have any love for you?”

“My own eyes;” said Gerard. “Although my Gabrielle will not tell me that her heart has understood mine, that she has read its depth of affection beneath the smiling ease of our late happy friendship, al



though she will not generously own that her love exists as truly as mine; still I do not despair."

"And where is your hope, audacious?" asked the blushing and smiling Gabrielle, who could not resist the happy confidence of Gerard's eyes.

"Here," said he, drawing his odd glove from his pocket. "I have found my missing glove—the fellow to this one. I know where it is, at this instant."

The hand of *Gentille-et-sage* stole towards the convicted boddice, which fluttered and heaved with the consciousness of harbouring abstracted goods. For a moment she sat thus, the picture of innocent guilt, covered with blushes of mingled modesty, gladness, confusion, and happy love revealed; then without raising her eyes, she drew the detected glove forth from its concealment, took its fellow from her lover, and folding them one in the other, replaced them thus both together in the same sweet hiding-place.

Gerard was not slow to read this mute troth-plight, and confession of her love; but, with a lover's true avarice, which exacts fresh indulgence with each new evidence of affection, he rested not until he had obtained a spoken avowal, which Gabrielle gave him in her own simple ingenuous manner.

He, in return, frankly told her that he had no wealth to offer her, save his resolve to earn independence, by unremitting industry in the acquirement and pursuit of his profession; but if she would share in his early struggle, and become at once his incentive and reward, he doubted not of success. He did not conceal from her the alternative offered by his father's severity; but he knew enough of Gabrielle, to feel secure that the loss of present fortune consequent upon incurring Monsieur Gerard's displeasure, caused no part of her hesitation—which had proceeded solely from dread of inducing a son's disobedience. Gerard did not falsely calculate the motives and principles of her he loved.

Nor was it long before he succeeded in vanquishing her scruples on his father's account; in persuading her that she owed more considera-

tion towards one she knew and loved, than towards one she had never seen ; in pleading his cause, with love's own casuistry, so well, in short, that he gained her leave to ask her of her father at once, and, if he should sanction their union, her promise to resume the former plan of going over to Monsieur le Curé's that very morning.

The hearty farmer, when he found the object with which the young people sought him, only said :—" Ask Gabrielle, mon bon jeune homme, ask her ; if she be pleased, I am pleased. If she can be happy with you for a husband, I shall be happy to have you for a son-in-law."

And soon the lovers were on their way to the village where Monsieur le Curé lived ; nor were the fowl, the eggs, nor the cream forgotten, though there was happiness enough to have made it very excusable, even had the basket been left behind.

" And now to ask you of your second father, my Gabrielle," said Gerard. " We must obtain his consent to bestow you upon me at once ; for I am resolved not to return home till I am able to tell my father not only my irrevocable decision, but that my happiness in life is as irrevocably decided as my choice."

" Heaven send that it may be indeed your happiness which is thus decided by your choice," said Gentille-et-sage ; " but you must promise me to return home straight from Monsieur le Curé's, instead of seeing me back to the farm ; it will be only just to your father to tell him of your decision at once."

" The farm is my home now," said Gerard. " I know my father too well, not to be quite sure that he will abide by the alternative he has fixed."

" Still it is your duty to inform him which alternative you have chosen ;" said Gabrielle.

" You are right ;" said her lover. " It is only honest to let him know which marriage I have chosen ; it is for him to say whether he will not remit the other part of the sentence."

" Ay, he may think better of it, and change outlawry into forgiveness and welcome," said Gabrielle, with the sanguine hope of youth, and of one who had never known other than indulgence from her own parent.

Gerard shook his head. "You do not know my father—I do. However, I will go; he shall, at any rate, have the option of a kinder fiat. But remember, *ma mie*, should it prove a harsh one, you must prepare to receive an outcast at the pavilion this evening. Whether my sentence be amnesty or banishment, I shall return to the farm directly it has been pronounced."

"Where you shall find either gratulation or comfort;" said *Gentille-et-sage*, with one of her sweet frank smiles.

When they reached *Monsieur le Curé's* cottage, they found the old man in his garden; a jug of fresh spring-water was in his hand, from which he was preparing to fill a shallow vessel, that he always kept supplied for the accommodation of the birds.

"I love to bring them about me," said he; "and plenty of water for them to drink and bathe in, is as welcome to them in summer, as strewed crumbs are in the winter; so, as I have not a pond in my garden, as you have in yours, *Gentille-et-sage*, I have bethought me of this plan for letting them dip their dainty beaks, and plunge, and flounce, and flutter their wings and feathers to their hearts' content. I am glad to see you, *mon cher monsieur*. What is that you have in your basket, *Gentille-et-sage*? Something very nice, as usual, for the old man's dinner. I thought so, you little rogue! Well, we must get *Jeanneton* to make us a *fricandeau* and an omelet, out of these good things; and we shall have quite a feast, shan't we?"

"And I am sure *Madame Jeanneton* will exert her best skill, *Monsieur le Curé*," said Gerard, "when she knows it is to be a wedding-dinner."

The old man looked at him; then at the dimpling blushing face of *Gentille-et-sage*; and said:—"Ah, ha, is it even so? I thought as much, I declare. when I used to see this little rogue turn her head away every time I asked her whether she had seen that good young *Monsieur Gerard* lately. Ah, ha! the old man is very cunning—he knows *Gentille-et-sage* cannot tell an untruth, and so he used to ask her this on purpose to see her look down and own that the *jeune monsieur* had been to the farm that morning. 'And yesterday?' 'Yes, *mon père*.' 'And the

day before?' 'Yes, mon père.' Ah, ha! I thought what all these 'yes, mon père, and all these visits would end in. Ah, ha! the old man is very sly, and can see many things that Gentille-et-sage fancies she keeps very snug, sage as she is! And what say your parents to this marriage, my children? What says your father, Gabrielle? What says yours, mon cher jeune monsieur?"

The whole state of affairs was candidly stated to the good priest; and his simplicity could not find any objection to offer against consenting to join two young people who loved each other, and who availed themselves of a granted alternative between poverty and separation.

He united their hands; and a few hours after Gerard and Gabrielle had been made man and wife, they took their respective paths to Perpignan, and to the farm, consoling themselves for this temporary parting, in the thought of the duty that demanded it, in the reflection that they were now beyond the power of fate to divide them, and in the hope of meeting again ere close of day.

Not thus speedily, however, was their hope fulfilled. When the young man reached his father's house, Monsieur Gerard had not returned from the banking-house. As the best means of controlling his impatience, Gerard betook himself to his own room, and endeavoured to fix his attention upon a medical treatise which he had been diligently studying of late. But now the pages failed to convey any meaning to him; his brain refused to receive any definite impression from the sentences he read; the lines wavered and swam before his eyes, the words danced hither and thither, and formed themselves into fantastic images of Gabrielle's eyes, her hair, her mouth, her smile, every varied look of her countenance, every movement of her graceful figure. But he was not long detained thus. He heard his father's step in the corridor,—which led to Monsieur Gerard's room as well as his own,—and stepping forwards, thus addressed him. "Father, you accorded me twenty-four hours to decide on the alternative you offered me this morning. But as my mind is made up, I would not an instant defer the avowal of my choice."

"Then it is your choice, and not mine, that you determine to abide by, is it?" said Monsieur Gerard, in his usual mode of forming his own conclusions. "But I will take good care you shall have no opportunity of carrying out your absurd determination."

So saying, the banker furiously slammed-to the door of his son's apartment, and turned the key in the lock, while Gerard hastily exclaimed:—"Father, I am already married!" But Monsieur Gerard made far too much noise in his enraged departure, to hear the exclamation; and his son could hear him repeating, as he strode along the corridor:—"No, no; no, no; I'll take good care you shan't carry out your fool's intention, sirrah!"

Gerard sprang to the door, and shook it; but it was too surely fastened. He threw up the window—but there were too many feet between it and the ground, for even his eagerness to venture the leap.

He paused and listened; he heard the family assembling for the evening meal—he heard the opening and shutting of the dining-room door—he heard the domestics moving to and fro—and he determined to rein his impatience until one of them should be sent with his allotted portion, if it was indeed intended that he should be treated in all respects like a prisoner. But possibly Monsieur Gerard thought that a little wholesome fasting might not be amiss in helping a refractory spirit to due submission; for hour after hour passed, and no one came near the delinquent's chamber. Evening closed in; nightfall came—and still Gerard remained in solitude and darkness, pacing his room like a caged lion, his spirit fretting against this tyrannous confinement, while his thoughts, emancipating themselves as his body would fain have done, winged their way towards the pavilion of the farm, where he knew sat one watching through the starlit night for his coming. Morning dawned. "Patience," murmured the prisoner to himself; "he will not let me starve, and when he sends me food, I will make an appeal to my gaoler, whoever it may be whom he has appointed to the office."

But noon came before food was sent. It was bread and water; and was brought by one of the lackeys of his father's household.

"Jerome," said Gerard, "tell my father that I——"

The lackey shook his head, and hastily withdrew, leaving a small note on his young master's table.

The note was from Monsieur Gerard, and contained these words:—

“GERARD,

When you are prepared to conform in all things to my pleasure, you may signify as much to me in writing—but till then, I forbid your tampering with my domestics, by addressing them under pretence of sending messages to me. Jerome has orders to bring you your daily meal in silence.

“Your offended father,

“ANTOINE GERARD.”

“My daily meal!” So then I shall not see Jerome again till noon to-morrow!” thought Gerard. “This is starving me out with a vengeance! Hoping to reduce strength of will and strength of body upon bread and water! Prudent discipline! And this is how my father thinks to compel obedience! Is this how he thinks to exact compliance? Rebellion, contumacy, unnatural disaffection may rather be generated by such means, than filial reverence and submission.”

As the afternoon wore away, Gerard was sitting in another hopeless attempt to chain his attention to the study of his treatise, when a slight noise, near the entrance of his room, attracted his notice, and upon looking in that direction, he descried a paper packet, which was gradually making its way beneath the door, thrust by some furtive hand. He seized the paper, which he found contained an iron nail, and these words:—

“Monsieur desired me not to speak or to listen to you—but he did not forbid me to write (which I luckily can do), or to give you the means of pushing back the lock of your door. I don't like to see my young master shut up and forced to live upon bread and water—I like liberty and good eating myself—a man hasn't a fair chance or a free choice without 'em.

“JEROME.”

Gerard hastily secreted this welcome paper, and availed himself of the means of escape. He soon found himself outside in the corridor, along which he glided with noiseless steps, down the great staircase, into

the hall, where he was startled by hearing his father's voice. But it proceeded from the saloon, where Monsieur Gerard was entertaining a party of guests. At that moment, Gerard caught sight of Jerome, who was beckoning to him with one hand, while with the other he held his fingers to his lips. Gerard followed him in silence ; and Jerome, leading him hastily through a passage that communicated with the servants' offices, darted into a small closet near the larder, emerged again with a basket in his hand, went on towards a deserted yard in the rear of the house, across which he preceded Gerard at a rapid pace, until he reached a little cobwebbed, unused door, that opened into a back street. Here he paused, and thrusting the basket into Gerard's hand, unlocked the door, pointed through it, and enforced his meaning, by taking his young master by the shoulder, and amicably turning him out.

Gerard, hardly able to help laughing at the man's whimsical adherence to the letter of his master's orders while he thus zealously infringed their spirit, lost no time in hurrying along the unfrequented back street, from which he made his way out of the town, and was speedily on the road to the farm.

In the basket Gerard found substantial evidence of Jerome's opinion that a man needs better fare than bread and water ; and as he walked briskly along, he had an opportunity of enjoying that worthy domestic's favorite combination of liberty and good eating.

The short twilight that succeeds a southern sunset had yielded to the shades of evening by the time Gerard reached the farm. He threaded the bowery lane which skirted the premises, in the hope that the little door in the garden-wall might have been left unfastened for his access. It was as he hoped. " I am expected ;" he thought, as the door yielded to his hand. He pushed through the clustering bushes and fruit-trees, that hung their boughs athwart the narrow garden-path. He sprang up the steps that led into the pavilion. It was empty—she was not there. But the intermediate door that led into the inner room was partly open ; and as Gerard's eye caught sight of the *two* pillows, which now peered among the neat white draperies of the alcove, his heart again whispered—  
—" I am expected."

The stars shone clear in the blue arch of heaven; in at the open casement stole the soft breeze of evening, rich with the perfume of fruit and flower; no sound broke the stillness; and purity and peace seemed to hover with their angel wings around this sequestered spot.

Gerard hears a light footstep; he can discern a coming figure; he leans from the window, and as she approaches beneath, he drops his glove with true aim. Gabrielle instinctively retains it, recognizes the tokens of his presence, looks up, sees him,—at a bound is on the top step, and the next instant is clasped in her husband's arms.

For a few happy weeks did Gerard permit himself to linger in this quiet pavilion, making it his dwelling-place, and the scene of his wedded joys; but with his characteristic honesty, he would not allow himself to lose sight of the strict course of duty he had marked out for himself, by yielding to the too-seductive idleness of such a retirement. Accordingly he roused himself from his blissful dream of existence, and imparted to his wife a plan he had conceived for commencing a more active life, and one which should be the means of fulfilling his hope of earning independence and fame.

At Narbonne there lived an old doctor, who was Gerard's godfather. Much deference had formerly been paid to this old doctor's opinions by the Perpignan banker; for Doctor Dubrusc was esteemed wealthy, and in the hope of gratifying a rich godfather, as well as that his son might be brought up to a profession instead of trade, Monsieur Gerard had sent his son to college, to study with an ultimate view to a doctor's degree. But in course of time, it came to be discovered, or rather Monsieur Gerard came to one of his conclusions upon the subject, that the reputation which Doctor Dubrusc had gained for being a man of wealth, was merely founded upon his eccentricity,—his peremptory manner, his repulsive brevity, his indifference to the opinion of others, his reserve, his solitary habits, his wilfulness—all which traits had been considered indicative of the conscious possessor of wealth, as it was supposed that a poor man would not have dared to indulge in such unproductive whims of conduct. Circumstances arose which occasioned Monsieur Gerard to adopt his new view of the matter, and to believe



that after all, Doctor Dubruso was one of those absurd beings who consent to resign all worldly advantage, for the one delight of carrying out their own humour, and who, in consequence, remain paupers to the end of their days. When once Monsieur Gerard had made up his mind that this was the case, the connection with the old Narbonne Doctor had been gradually but decidedly dropped.

The last time that Gerard had seen his godfather was at the college at Perpignan, on the day when he had completed his twelfth year. The boy had been summoned to see a visitor, and found Doctor Dubruso standing in the room appropriated to guests.

Gerard showed sincere delight at seeing thus expectedly one whom he remembered as a child ; but when he pulled a chair for the old man, who stood there stock still and begged him to sit down, Doctor Dubruso only mumbled :—" Not tired ;" proceeded to look his godson steadily in the face for a minute or two, ending his scrutiny with an emphatic " Humph !"

" You will go with me to my father's, sir ; I can obtain leave to go with you, directly, I know," said Gerard. " He will be glad to see you."

" Don't want to see him ; shan't call," said Doctor Dubruso. " Did want to see *you*—have seen you—that's all !" And the old man turned on his heel, and was going straight out of the room.

" O don't go ! Don't go ! I've seen nothing of *you* yet ! Don't go, doctor !" said Gerard.

" Want to see me,—come !" said the doctor without turning back ; and in another moment he was gone.

Gerard had often thought of this singular visitation of his godfather ; and had as often begged his father's permission to go to Narbonne to see one whom he had always liked, spite of his oddity.

But Monsieur Gerard had no notion of sending his son so far merely to comply with a boy's wishes, and with those of a dictatorial old man, who had no right of opulence to entitle him to indulgence ; so year after year had passed away without Gerard having seen any more of his godfather, though he frequently regretted this abrupt termination of their intercourse.

Now he related to Gabrielle the circumstances concerning this god father; and he told her he thought that if this eccentric old doctor would consent to take him as a pupil, and conclude what had been well commenced at college, he should shortly be in a condition to commence practice as a physician.

"It is asking a sacrifice at your hands, my Gabrielle," said her husband, "to propose your leaving your father, your friend and second father, the Curé, and your native home, to go and settle in a strange place; but in Narbonne, with Doctor Dubruse's instruction and counsel, I feel sure of a career which must bring us independence. Who knows? I may one day see you the wife of a famous physician. One day I may win a surname that shall serve to reconcile my father to his denounced son. Should I live to be called Doctor Gerard de Narbonne, it will replace the family name, which, if my father still retain his ire, he may wish me to resign; in any case, it cannot fail to please him, and would gratify his pride. I have courage to ask this sacrifice of my Gabrielle; for I have good hope that honor and wealth await us in Narbonne."

Gabrielle for an instant thought how willingly she could resign any prospect of worldly advantage, so that she might still abide in this peaceful spot, the scene of her childhood sports, her indulged youth, her happy bridal hours; but she felt that it might be otherwise with her husband, whose energy and talent required a broader field—and whose honest spirit naturally sought self-earned support. She felt that though she could be well content to owe all to a parent's bounty, yet Gerard's sense of probity might shrink from trespassing farther on the generosity with which her father had hitherto accorded them a home—a home which his own exertions might obtain. She felt that she had no right to repress his honorable ambition, by the utterance of her own limited wishes, and she said:—

"Then let us go to Narbonne, dear Gerard."

Gerard accordingly wrote to Doctor Dubruse, stating the fact of his rupture with his father in consequence of his marriage; and asking his godfather if he would consent to aid a disinherited son (who had com-

mitted no crime but availing himself of an offered alternative) to acquire honest competence for his wife and himself.

Gerard also wrote to his father, stating his marriage, and expressing his hope that he might one day achieve distinction, which should restore him to favor, and obliterate the remembrance of his having attempted this achievement in a manner opposed to his father's views; but no notice was taken of his letter, then, or ever.

To the former application, Gerard received the following concise epistle in reply :—

“Told you before—‘Want to see me—come!’”

“BLAISE DUBRUSC.”

Gabrielle could not help thinking this a little unpromising; but seeing her husband look disconcerted, she said cheerfully, “Well, we can go and see him, at any rate; he may take a kinder interest in us, when we are there, than his words seem to infer.”

After many an affectionate leave-taking had been exchanged between the young couple and their two kind old fathers, Monsieur le Curé, and the farmer, Gerard and Gabrielle set out for Narbonne. Arrived there, the young man lost no time in hunting out the obscure lodging in which it pleased Doctor Dubrusc to abide.

He found him, after toiling up six flights of stairs, in a dilapidated old mansarde, where he sat environed with musty volumes, cobwebs, dust, dirt, and snuff.

“Humph! There; are you?” was his remark, as he raised his head from his book, on Gerard's entrance and salutation.

Having given the youth one finger, dry, dusty, and colourless as a bit of touchwood, which was his way of shaking hands, he jerked his head towards a chair, and said “Sit down!”

Gerard complied, by lifting several tomes on to the floor from one of the only two chairs, that were in the room besides Doctor Dubrusc's, drawing it forward, and seating himself. These two chairs had been long unaccustomed to support any other weight than that of books; and this one, beneath its unwonted human deposit, creaked resentfully and ominously, as if it intended to snap, give way, and come down, with a malicious fracture.

No such catastrophe occurred, however, and Doctor Dubrusc interrupted something Gerard was saying in acknowledgment of his permission to come and see him, and in explanation of his having been unable to do so before, by saying :—" Tell me your story."

Gerard faithfully related all that had happened from the time he had last seen Doctor Dubrusc at Perpignan, on his birthday, to the present moment of his arrival at Narbonne.

" What d'ye intend to do ? What d'ye want me to do ?" were the doctor's next words.

Gerard explained his views, his wishes, his hopes ; to all of which Doctor Debrusc listened, and when the young man concluded, said :—" Humph !" and turned round from him, and stared blankly at the opposite wall.

" Will you help me, sir ? Will you advise me ? Will you let me study under you, and commence practice under your direction ?" said Gerard.

" Yes. Come to-morrow. Go now." And Doctor Dubrusc resumed the perusal of the book over which he had been leaning when Gerard came in.

Next morning, Gerard returned early to Doctor Dubrusc, who had sketched out a course of study for his godson, and set his pupil down to commence its pursuit at one end of the dusty table, while he himself hung over his book at the other.

Before the young man settled down to his work, he was beginning to say something of his first impression of the town of Narbonne, and of the quarter he had chosen in seeking a lodging for Gabrielle and himself, when Doctor Dubrusc, without raising his eyes from his own book, but pointing to those which lay before Gerard, stopped him with :—" Don't talk. Learn."

For some hours Gerard worked diligently, and in obedient silence. Then the old doctor looked up and said :—" Go now. Come to-morrow."

His godson rose, and was withdrawing, when he returned to the writing-table, and said :—" I am anxious to present my wife to you, sir, that she may add her thanks to mine, for your kind help."

“ Wife ? Pshaw ! What’s the use of a wife ? But go now. Come to-morrow.”

Having entertained his wife with an account of the old doctor’s eccentric ways, Gerard agreed with her, that the benefit of his aid more than compensated for the strange style in which it was extended, and that his instruction was far too valuable a gift to be received without gratitude ; so they resolved that Gabrielle should venture to accompany Gerard to his godfather’s den on the morrow.

When she entered the room, the old doctor started, and rose from the arm-chair in which he always sat, at the table.

He advanced to the middle of the room, where he stood stock still, staring at her, while she, in simple graceful words, and with a blushing face, where smiles played in both eyes and mouth, uttered her thanks for his goodness to them both. She could not help these smiles, at the recollection of all she had heard of the old doctor’s oddity ; which, confirmed by his present reception of herself, rendered a decorous gravity impossible.

But Doctor Dubrusc, after continuing to stare at her for a few minutes longer, suddenly said :—“ Humph ! Good and pretty !” Then advancing a step or two nearer, said :—“ Very !” Then abruptly turning on his heel, he made his way back to his seat at the table, over which, looking, as if from a safe intrenchment, he said :—“ No women here ! Go away !”

Gabrielle left the room ; and Doctor Dubrusc, looking at his godson, added :—“ Can’t study with ’em. Send her away !”

Gerard hastened out after his wife, and found her sitting on the stair, at the bottom of the first flight. As he caught sight of her drooping head, he thought she might have been disconcerted, perhaps chagrined, at this unpropitious reception and summary dismissal, but on coming close to her, he found she was only indulging in a hearty fit of laughing ; of which she was endeavouring to suppress the sound, lest it might reach the queer old man’s ears.

“ He is so droll, Gerard ;” whispered she, with eyes brimming in mirthful tears. “ He is so very odd !” How do you ever manage to

keep your countenance, while you are studying with him—or to learn any thing of so strange a creature? How does he manage to teach you, with such sparing speech?"

And in truth it was marvellous how Gerard contrived to acquire so much, or his godfather to impart so much of knowledge, as they both did in the course of the months which followed the young couple's arrival in Narbonne. But certain it is, that though scarcely more than a dozen words were ever exchanged between master and pupil in the course of their daily studies, yet before a twelvemonth had elapsed, Gerard was more proficient in his art than many physicians who have practised for a series of years. Perhaps there are not wanting sly sceptics in the merits of the generality of medical professors who will think this is saying but little in favor of the young doctor's skill; but the fact was, that Gerard became within the space of time stated, not only master of a large amount of theoretical learning, but he had gained some practical experience in his profession, for he was already consulted and esteemed by a circle of patients.

These were mostly poor people, it is true, who could not afford large fees; so that Gerard and his wife still occupied the humble lodging they had taken on their first arrival in Narbonne; but they were happy in each other, and the size or grandeur of their household formed no part of their consideration.

Yet although a larger house, finer furniture, or a better-supplied table had no share in Gabrielle's estimate of what might be wanting to complete her comfort, she could not but sometimes feel that incompleteness to exist.

Carefully she strove to conceal this feeling from her husband; she strove even to conceal it from herself; but there were moments when the thought of bygone times—when she had dwelt at the farm, of those few happy weeks when she and her husband had all the world to themselves in the pleasant old pavilion—would come upon her with a fond retrospection that partook of regret.

It was not so much the altered existence, as the change which this new existence had wrought in Gerard himself, which occasioned her involuntary sigh when she recalled past days.

When they had first come to settle in Narbonne, her young husband would each day return to her after his long morning study with Doctor Dubrusc. like a released schoolboy. He would come laughing, and shouting, and bounding into the room, declaring that he must indulge himself with some noise and active motion after so still a sitting. He would snatch the needle-work or book out of her hand, whisk her round the room, give her half a dozen kisses, bid her put her bonnet on, and come out with him that instant for a long walk in the fields, that he might give his voice and his legs relaxation. He declared that his jaws and his limbs became cramped with the inaction to which they had been subjected for so many hours ; that his eyes ached with looking upon the stern immobility of Doctor Dubrusc's countenance, or the eternal monotony of the read or written page instead of the bright sunny smiles of his Gabrielle ; that his ears would become deaf with the silence of that dull old mansarde, and with longing for the cheerful sound of his wife's voice. And then he would make her chatter to him, as they walked along ; telling him of all that had happened in his absence—of the neighbours she had seen—of the work she had planned—of the drawing she had done—of the arrangements she had made in their little household.

But gradually this boyish gaiety subsided ; Gerard's youthful spirit was not proof against the diurnal dullness of those long forenoons. Insensibly, the silence became infectious, the sedentary position habitual ; and he would return home spent and weary, and disinclined to talk, as he was for exertion. The afternoon walks ceased to be proposed ; Gerard would hang over his wife's chair, and watch her needle as it took stitch after stitch, without asking her to throw it aside ; and the conversation languished, when only she was the talker. The change was so gradual, and Gentille-et-sage was so slow to perceive any thing amiss in the manner of one she loved so well, and likewise so little accustomed to urge what she found to be distasteful, that she yielded to his preference for remaining at home, and his growing disinclination to talk ; never discovering that he was altering, until the change had actually taken place. There was no change in his affection towards her. He loved her as passionately, as devotedly as ever ; his love seemed only

intensified by his greater sobriety of manner; but he had altered from the light-hearted youth to the staid man—from the ardent student to the grave doctor. He was as kind as ever, but he was less gay; he was thoughtful rather than hopeful; he was reflective, instead of demonstrative.

His love for her remaining the same, Gabrielle would neither have noted nor regretted the transformation of the boy-lover into the attached husband; but when she became aware of the shadow which had thus by degrees fallen upon his once bright young spirit, she could not but sigh when she remembered their joyful existence at the fa. u.

She would now have ventured to urge him to take more air and exercise, and would have endeavoured to lead him into lively conversation, instead of indulging him in the fits of silence into which he constantly fell; but she herself was no longer so capable of exertion as she had been. She could no longer walk so far, or chatter away in so continuous a strain as formerly. She almost felt tempted to repine at the cause of her incapability for much walking or talking, now that both might possibly conduce to rouse her husband into greater cheerfulness, but she could not bring herself to resign the hope of which her present state was the signal. She contented herself, therefore, with looking forward to the time when the baby she expected should be born; in the trust that its existence would be a source of new joy and interest to Gerard, inspiring him afresh, and restoring him to his native gaiety and animation.

The happy moment arrives. A little girl is born. Gabrielle places the infant in her husband's arms, and as Gerard blesses his child, and fondly traces its mother's face in those shapeless features that bear no impress to any other than a parent's eye, she murmurs:—"Like me Gerard! No; the portrait of yourself! I thought of our favorite Clo tilde's words:—true, as they are tender and beautiful!

'Voilà ses traits—son ayr! voilà tout ce que j'ayme!  
 Feu de sou œil, et roses de son teynt:  
 D'ou vient m'en esbahyr! aultre qu'en tout luy-mesme,  
 Peut-il jamais eclore de mon sevn f' "



That morning the young father is scarcely able to settle tranquilly to his study. Though his transports, which would fain have found vent in communicating to his godfather their cause, met with a check when he had first announced the tidings.

"Give me joy, sir!" said Gerard, as he entered the mansarde. "I am a father! Gabrielle has brought me a little girl this morning! I have a baby born!"

"A baby? Pshaw! What's the use of a baby?" muttered Doctor Dubruse; "Don't talk stuff! Write!"

Gerard tried to obey, and to work steadily; but just as a little hand, with its fairy nails, joints, fingers, and thumb, all in mimic miniature was shaping itself in fancy upon the page before him, the apparition of a bony, shrivelled, dry hand, grimy with snuff, and shiny with unwashed use, spread itself on the leaf, seeming gigantic in its proportions, after the baby image it replaced.

"Know as much as I do now! Needn't come any more! Can't teach you much more! Practice better than reading or writing now! Practise! Find patients!"

"I have some patients already, sir," said Gerard. "After leaving you of a day, I go my rounds; and they are fast increasing."

"All the better! Practise! Learn more than by coming here! Needn't come!"

"But I hope you will let me come and see you often, still, godfather. I can never thank you sufficiently for all you have done for me. Though you have taught me so much, and so untiringly, yet I must still come and intrude upon your time; I must still come to see you."

"Want to see me.—Come!" And Doctor Dubruse resumed the perusal of his book, precisely as he had done about a year before, on Gerard's first arrival in Narbonne.

His pupil and godson now pursued his medical career in good earnest. His practice increased, his patients grew more and more numerous; he gave unremitting attention to their cases, by devoting his thoughts to the consideration of symptoms, and devising means of cure,

when he was absent, as well as by the care, patience, and kindness, which he bestowed while attending the bedside of the sufferers.

Gerard was an enthusiast in his profession. He believed the art of healing to be a science divine. He regarded the privilege of cure as something partaking of godlike power. He looked upon his patients as sacred deposits in his hands, alike blessed in a vouchsafed recovery, and conferring a blessing on him who was the instrument of Providence for their rescue. The exalted light in which he viewed the functions of his calling, led him to discharge its duties conscientiously, reverently; he labored with scarcely less piety and devotion of spirit, than he might have done, had his ministry been a religious one,—for holy did he feel a physician's vocation to be. Its skill puts in requisition the highest faculties of the human intellect, as its administration calls forth the tenderest sympathies of the human heart. The able and the kind physician is a human benefactor. He garners up his treasures of learning and experience, that he may dispense them again to his suffering brethren. He comes with his timely succour, cheering both body and spirit with the single boon of health. He raises the sick man from his couch of pain, and sends him forth elate and vigorous for fresh enjoyment of existence. He restores the ailing, and rejoices their despondent friends. He gives new life to the sick, and revives the hopes of those who depend on the sick man's recovery for subsistence. He banishes illness, and holds death at bay.

Conceiving such to be a physician's privileges and duties, Gerard felt how especially they called him to their exercise among the poor and helpless. He accordingly devoted himself almost exclusively to the care of this forlorn class of sufferers, and sought rather those who needed his aid without the means of paying for it, than those who could summon and remunerate its services.

His skill, his tenderness, his charitable care, made him renowned among the destitute population of Narbonne; although he had as yet obtained little fame or employment among its wealthier inhabitants. But his time was so fully occupied with attendance upon his patients—as numerous as they were (pecuniarily) unprofitable, that he

had now less and less opportunity of leisure at home with Gabrielle than ever.

His personal vigilance of the cases he had in hand was unwearied ; and when he was not engaged in visiting a patient's sick room, his thoughts were anxiously engaged with the circumstances of the disorder ; with its origin, with its progress, with the means it admitted of relief, with the hope of its ultimate cure.

It was therefore fortunate for Gentille-et-sage that the birth of her little girl afforded herself a great resource from the solitude to which the incessant preoccupation of her husband would otherwise have condemned her. In its smiles, in its cooings, in its first recognition, in its growing love, in ministering to its comforts, and in developing its faculties, the heart of the mother found full content. To Gerard, also, at first, his infant daughter had been an object of great interest ; he had called her by his mother's name—Helena ; and had taken great delight in watching her baby beauty, and dawning intelligence. The child had thus fulfilled the hope which Gabrielle had conceived from the prospect of her advent ; but not long did the influence last ; soon the father's thoughts were again absorbed in his vocation ; and though Gerard's love was firmly and entirely fixed upon his wife and child, they possessed but little of his society or attention.

There was one demand upon his time and thought, however, which no preoccupation ever led him to disregard. However busy, however anxious, Gerard never failed to find a moment for calling upon Doctor Dubrusc. Three or four days never elapsed without his visiting the old mansarde. Though his godfather's brevity of speech promised but little gratification to either party from conversation, yet Gerard never neglected to go and see the old man, to tell him the news, to sit with him a few minutes ; to let him see, in short, that he was not unmindful of what he owed to his instruction, and that he felt both gratefully and affectionately towards him, spite of the eccentricity which might choose to repulse the expression of such feelings.

On the occasion of one of these visits to the old mansarde, when the little Helena had attained to an age, which placed her beyond that state

of babyhood which was avowedly objectionable to Doctor Dubruse, when she could trot about and speak plain, and understand every thing that was said, when she had become, in fact, a very pretty, lively, amusing child. Gerard thought he would take his little girl with him to see his old friend.

It happened to be the doctor's birthday, or saint's-day; and in observance of a national custom, Gerard stopped in the market-place, and bought a bouquet of flowers, which he might take with him to present to his godfather, when he wished him joy.

He gave the nosegay to Helena, while he carried her up the six flights of steep stairs which led to the doctor's attic dwelling. He set her on her feet, when they reached the door of the mansarde, and opening it, bade her take in the flowers, and souhaïter le bon jour à Monsieur.

The child obeyed; running across the room, looking up in the old man's face, and presenting the birthday offering, with pretty smiling looks, and tolerably articulate words; for Helena was not at all shy with strangers.

"What do you want here, child? Who are you?"

"She is my little daughter," said Gerard. "I thought you'd like to see her, sir, now she's no longer a baby. Helena, sir; my child."

"Child! What's the use of a child? Go away, child," said Doctor Dubruse.

Helena did not move, but stood there, staring at the old man, as he did at her.

"Do you hear me, child? Go away!" repeated the doctor; but in a less gruff tone than before.

Still Helena did not move. She gave a short little nod; then another. "Ess; I hear you," said she.

"What are you nodding at, child?" said the doctor.

"At you," she replied.

"What d'ye stand nodding at me for? Go!" said the old man.

"Ess, I'm going," said Helena, with a succession of rapid little nods, as she turned towards the door; then suddenly coming back, she

went close to the old doctor, leaned against his knee, held up her mouth towards him, and said :—“ Kiss Nenna 'fore she goes ”

“ Kiss ye, child ! Get along with you !” But though the old man said this with much surprise, there was no harshness in his voice, nor did he draw back from her as he uttered the words.

The little girl, judging, as most children do, rather from manner than words, and finding no very formidable repulse in the former, proceeded to clamber on to his knee, repeating :—“ Kiss Nenna 'fore she goes ! Well, then, kiss Nenna 'fore she goes !”

The old doctor gave a little stealthy bashful glance at Gerard ; and seeing him apparently absorbed in the contemplation of a map that hung against one of the dusty walls, he ventured to let his face stoop towards that of the child ; who, hugging him round the neck, and giving him a hearty kiss on his wrinkled cheek, slid down from his knee, saying :—“ Not angry with Nenna ; she go now.” She went to her father, put her hand in his, and led him towards the door, looking back at the old man with a repetition of her series of short nods, as she said :—“ Good bye, good bye !” And then she and her father, who repeated her salutation, quitted the mansarde, leaving Doctor Dubrusc staring silently after them.

Next morning, nothing would suit Helena, but her father must give her some sous. Gerard was going out to his usual round of patients ; and he could not stay to listen to what his little girl asked. “ I don't know what she is talking about, Gabrielle ;” said he to his wife. “ Make out what she says, and give her what she wants. I think she is asking for money ; though what such a child as that can want money for, is more than I can comprehend.” added he, as he left the house.

“ Is it money you are asking for, Nenna mine ?” said her mother.

“ Ess, chère maman ; give Nenna four sous, please ;” said the child

“ What do you want them for, my Helena ? Are they for the poor sick fruitière yonder ?”

Little Helena shook her head ; but continued to hold out her hand for the money.

“ Not for her ?” said Gabrielle.

"No; papa takes care of her; she don't want any more than he gives her," said Helena, with a little knowing look; "he never lets poor people want money—I've heard you, mamma, say so. He's a good kind papa. But Nenna wants you to give her four sous for her own self, chère maman."

"Little coaxer!" said her mother, giving Helena the money; which the child had no sooner obtained, than she put up her mouth with her usual little speech:—"Kiss Nenna 'fore she goes!" and her valedictory nod, and "Good-bye!" and then trotted demurely out of the house-door, which, as is usual in southern places, stood wide open all day.

Gabrielle,—accustomed to see her little daughter step across the door-sill whenever it pleased her to go and play with the neighbours, who loved the child's innocent prattle and its pretty face, and who encouraged her to come and linger about with them,—said no word to prevent Helena's departure, imagining that she was only bent upon some ordinary expedition, a door or two off.

The little girl, however, went in a very grave and orderly manner straight down the street; then, at an equally determined pace, she turned the corner; and so on, until she came to the market-place; where she made her way to the flower-stall, at which she had observed her father make his purchase on the previous day.

She made her selection with a very discreet air, resting her chin upon the ledge of the board, and peering carefully over all the heaps it displayed; and when she had fixed upon the brightest and gayest bunch there, she pointed it out to the presiding marchande de fleurs, requested her to reach it down to her, and delivering the *prix-fixe*,—the requisite four sous, she trotted off again with a sobriety of pride in her bargain that would have done honor to a grown lady returning from market.

Not very long after this transaction, as Doctor Dubrusc was sitting as usual in his solitary mansarde, poring over his book, he heard a stamp,—creak,—stamp; stamp,—creak,—stamp; coming up his crazy stairs, as if some foot approached, that was only satisfied when its fellow foot was planted safely on each stair, as it was gained, at a time. He listened; then he heard a pattering to and fro on the landing-place outside his

room door, as if a pair of little feet were trotting about in some uncertainty. A pause; then came a dubious pat, as of a small open hand; then the spread fingers were closed, and a more assured thump, as of a little clenched fist, made itself heard.

"Come in!" said Doctor Dubrusc.

Nobody came in, and nobody answered; but a dull, though somewhat heavier thump than before, was to be distinguished on one of the lower panels, as if some short individual had applied the most ponderous portion it could find about its person in a still more vigorous appeal against the door.

"Come in, I tell you!" repeated Doctor Dubrusc.

"I can't!" said a childish voice; "I can't reach the lock! Come and open it for me!"

In astonishment more than in hesitation, the old doctor remained seated where he was; while he heard the dull thumps renewed; lumping and bumping between every word, as if the short individual were determined to push its way in, and take no denial.

"Come—and open—the door! Come (thump), and open (lump), the door (bump)!"

Then followed a series of sullen, silent, resolute thump-lump-bumps, that threatened to effect a breach in the worm-eaten door that guarded the entrance to Doctor Dubrusc's den, spite of the diminutive size of the battering-ram that was now applied so unrelentingly against the crazy portal.

"I do believe it's that persevering toad of a child!" exclaimed the old doctor; beguiled by wonder into a longer speech than he had uttered for years.

But though Doctor Dubrusc said this amidst a torrent of pishes and pshaws, it was remarkable that his face glowed with a look that it had not worn for many a day; and his furrowed cheeks, lean and sallow with hours of solitary study and brooding disappointment, were lit up with an expression that made them look almost smooth and comely.

He arose from his chair, with this look beaming in his eyes, while on his lips lingered:—"Hark how she keeps on! She'll have the door

down! She'll burst it in! And then the brat'll fall through, and hurt herself!"

It was curious that this idea did not appear to afford the old doctor so much pleasure, as, to judge by his mode of speaking of her, it might have done; on the contrary, he hastened his steps towards the door, though he continued to murmur, "I never met with so persevering an animal as this child is, in the whole course of my life!"

Considering that Doctor Dubrusco had met with few children in the course of his life, and even among those few, had been slow to form any acquaintance with their dispositions and habits, it was not wonderful that he had never happened to encounter one so persevering as his godson's little daughter.

But in truth, Helena was singularly given to persist in any point that she had once resolved upon; and without being either obstinate or wilful, she was remarkable for perseverance, and unswerving pursuit of that upon which she had once set her heart.

And so, day after day, did this little creature come trotting out to bring the old man (to whom she seemed to have taken a strange fancy) a nosegay from the market; day after day, she would come tramping up the old creaking stairs; day after day, she bumped at the door until Doctor Dubrusco came grumbling to open it for her, when she would toddle in, give him the flowers, hold up her mouth, saying:—"Kiss Nenna 'fore she goes," and then toddle out again, nodding and bidding good bye.

Whether it was that this brevity of speech and visit on her part, appealed to the doctor's own taste for limited intercourse, it is impossible to say; but certain it is that these interviews took place, to the mutual satisfaction of the old man and the child, without intermission from the day her father had first introduced Helena there, until the one when the meetings came to an unavoidable close,—as sad, as it was abrupt.

One morning, when the little girl, having been able to obtain no answer to her repeated calling and thumping, had succeeded in bunching the door open, she went towards her old friend the doctor, whom



she found seated in his usual place by the table ; but instead of leaning forward over his book, he was resting against the back of his chair, his head drooping upon one shoulder. She spoke to him, offering him her flowers ; but he neither answered, nor looked towards her, nor stirred at all.

She thought he was asleep ; but finding she could not wake him by calling to him, or plucking him by the skirts, she went and got some big books, which she piled up by his side, until she had made a heap high enough to let her get up and reach his face. When she touched it, she found it cold as the marble brink of the fountain in the market-place, and then she knew that he was dead !

Helena's screams soon brought the people who occupied the remainder of the house into the mansarde of their fellow-lodger ; and they were speedily engaged in endeavours to restore the old man, who, they hoped, had only fainted. One of them hurried for medical assistance, and soon returned bringing Helena's father, Gerard. He immediately pronounced that life had been for some time extinct ; and, appointing some one to watch the body, until the proper authorities could be informed of the sudden death of Doctor Dubrusc, in order that steps might be taken for the funeral, Gerard took his little girl home in his arms.

On looking over the papers of his deceased friend, Gerard found, within a leaf of the book that lay open before Doctor Dubrusc at the time of his death, one which proved to be a will, the body of which was regularly and formally drawn up, signed, and attested.

It appeared, by its date, to have been executed soon after the doctor's last visit to Perpignan. It spoke in some bitterness of Monsieur Gerard's cooled friendship ; of its truly surmised cause ; of the probability that his godson would follow in the steps of his father, and never seek nor require his aid ; and then the will went on to bequeath the whole of his property, which was of large value, to the foundation of a school of medicine in his native town, Narbonne.

In a codicil, also regularly executed, and dated immediately subsequent to Gerard's arrival in Narbonne, he rescinded his original bequest,

in his godson's favor, making him his sole heir and legatee. After that, lower down, and seeming to have been added when his pupil had gained a numerous circle of patients,—which the old man supposed would prove only the commencement of so large a practice that there was every prospect of his godson's accumulating a large fortune of his own,—was written, in form of a codicil, but unsigned, and unwitnessed, this sentence:—"Gerard won't want it. Let it be for the school of medicine." Still lower, on the parchment, appeared, in unsteady characters, the words:—"If Helena, Gerard's daughter, should——"

The pen seemed to have been flung aside, or dropped, here, as if the writer had felt unequal to the task of penning more at the time; and Gerard could not help thinking that it was in the act of inscribing these very words, that his old friend had been seized with the attack of illness which had ended in death.

Gerard, with his characteristic probity, resolved that the wealth of Dr. Dubrusc should be devoted to the purpose originally stated in the body of the will; taking no advantage, which perhaps might have been legally claimed,—or at any rate, litigated, on the strength of the first codicil, which was formal in all respects. He could not have felt honestly happy in availing himself of the kind intention of his godfather, while a doubt existed as to whether that intention had been altered. Whether the alteration might not have been made under a false representation of Gerard's circumstances, seemed to him a question nowise affecting the case; that his godfather's wishes in the disposal of his money should be strictly and exclusively fulfilled, was his sole consideration.

He accordingly set zealously to work to promote the foundation of a school of medicine from the funds which his friend's property produced; and in discovering how large a sum this really was, he could not refrain from a bitter smile at the thought of the mistaken worldliness which had actuated the Perpignan banker in his secession from amity with the eccentric old doctor.

But while Gerard's sense of honesty thus bade him yield all claim upon his godfather's legacy, and taught him to ensure its appropriation

elsewhere, he was at that very time so far from not needing it himself, that there was no period of his life when its possession would have been more useful to him. So little prospect was there of his making a large fortune, that his income was next to nothing from his custom of giving his chief attention to the maladies of the poor. By constant devotion of his time to them, instead of seeking richer patients, he had contrived to be but a poor man himself, though increasing rapidly in experience and ability.

For Gabrielle and himself this was enough ; neither he nor Gentille-et-sage caring for more than mere competence. But just at this period an object presented itself more and more strongly to their wishes, which rendered a sum of money indispensable.

Gerard and his wife had once in each year indulged themselves with a visit to the farm—to the village where Monsieur le Curé lived—to all their favorite haunts thereabouts. They had often agreed how pleasant a thing it would be, if ever they should be able to return and make this spot—the scene of their youthful happiness—the home of their old age.

Of late, this scheme had won still more upon their fancy ; and they longed to see their vision of retirement realized, while they were still of an age to enjoy it fully.

To enable him to carry out this plan at once, Dr. Dubrusc's legacy offered itself in opportune temptation ; but Gerard's principles of honor were not of that kind to be affected by a chance, however opportune, however tempting. He had no sophistry that might sanction ill-doing, either from a conviction of expediency, or from a pretence of pure motive. With him right was simply right ; wrong, simply wrong. He therefore renounced all thought of Dr. Dubrusc's money, as if there had never been any question of its by possibility accruing to him ; and only began to consider whether he might not manage to earn some of his own, without infringing on the claims which his poor patients had on his time and skill.

He was earnest in this desire, on Gabrielle's account, as he saw how much pleasure the plan afforded her, and he omitted no exertion which

might tend to the object in view; but, just then, the wealthier inhabitants of Narbonne happened to enjoy provokingly good health; besides, though he had obtained an extensive renown among the pauper population of the town, and though his name was high in those quarters where squalor, filth, poor diet, and want of fresh air, made disease rife, and had demanded and received his best skill, yet his fame had not spread much beyond such precincts, and hitherto, the principal people in Narbonne knew little of the clever physician who dwelt among them. However, Gerard strenuously pursued his aim, and worked harder than ever in his profession, with the hope of earning enough to maintain his wife, his child, and himself, at no very distant day, in the old pavilion of the farm, as their pleasant home ever after.

There was a spacious public garden a little way out of the town of Narbonne, where Gentille-et-sage, with little Helena by her side, often spent a large portion of the day. Here, with a view to her child's health, and her own (which had for some time banefully felt a slow but sure effect from the banishment from native and pure country air, as well as the constant confinement within the walls of a town lodging), would Gabrielle and her little girl sit; the mother working, or hearing Helena say her lessons. Sometimes the child would clamber about the back and sides of the seat—which was a sort of long wooden chair with arms, that might have accommodated half-a-dozen persons; sometimes, a game of ball, or battledore, or bilboquet, would engage the attention, and exercise the limbs of the little Helena; while the mother watched her active happy child, her fingers employed in knitting some winter comfort for its father.

One afternoon, when Gabrielle and Helena had stationed themselves in their favorite nook—one particular corner of the long wooden seat, which was shadily situated under a tree,—a Bonne and her charge, a fine little boy about a year or two older than Helena, approached the spot, and sat down near them.

Gabrielle's basket, knitting-ball, and one or two other articles belonging to her, lay on the seat beside her. She would have drawn them towards her, to make room for the strangers, but as there was plenty of space beyond, she left all still.

Presently the little boy collected a quantity of pebbles from the gravel-path, and came towards the bench with his treasure in his arms. He deposited the heap on the seat, and then commenced clearing a space farther on, by brushing away Gabrielle's basket, ball, &c., with his arm, taking no heed that the articles were suddenly tumbled on to the ground by this unceremonious proceeding on his part.

For some time, little Helena contented herself with silently remedying the mischief, by picking up her mother's scattered property, and replacing it on the seat; but after repeating this process once or twice, and finding that it by no means mended matters, as the boy invariably brushed them down again, she said:—"Take care, little boy; mamma's basket will be broken."

"I want room to build a castle;" replied the boy, giving another clearing nudge. Gabrielle removed the basket to the other side of her, and put the knitting-ball into her apron-pocket, without speaking, that she might observe the children.

"What pretty hair you've got!" said Helena next; after having looked with admiration at the boy's curls, which hung down, glossy, dark, and thick, upon his shoulders. "How bright, and how long, and how soft it is!" added the little girl, touching it, and smoothing it down with her fingers.

"Don't! you'll tangle it;" said the boy, drawing away his head.

"Fie, master Bertram!" exclaimed his Bonne; "let the little girl admire your beautiful hair!"

"I shan't! Let it alone!" replied master Bertram.

After a pause, during which Helena had shrunk to a little distance, whence she tried to peer at what he was doing, she said:—"Are you building a castle?"

"Yes; don't you see I am?"

"I can't well see so far off; may I come nearer?" asked she.

"Take care you don't jog, then;" said the boy.

Helena comes a little closer; gets a better view of his operations; becomes greatly interested in the tottering fortalice, which with much careful piling together of pebble-stones is gradually rearing its walls

beneath the boy's hands. She leans forward, watching breathlessly; when, being a little too near for master Bertram's convenience, his sturdy little elbow is suddenly stuck in her chest, to remind her to keep farther back.

She obeys the warning for an instant; but forgetting caution in her eagerness to watch the progress of the castle, she leans too forward, and again receives a hint in her chest that she is in master Bertram's way. The blow this time is directed with such unmistakeable earnestness of reproof, that the little girl reels back, falls, and bruises her arm. The Bonne exclaims; Helena's mother picks her up and asks her if she's hurt.

"No, he didn't mean it; did you, little boy? Here, kiss it, and make it well!" said she, holding out her arm, where the skin, soiled and grazed by the gravel, bore sufficient evidence of her hurt.

"It's bloody and dirty; indeed I shan't kiss it," said the boy, turning away to finish building his castle.

Again the Bonne said:—"Fie, master Bertram!" And again she was satisfied with saying it, and with the slight effect it produced upon master Bertram himself. For presently, Bertram was as busily engaged as ever in the erection of the pebble stronghold, and Helena was again leaning over him, forgetful of the late consequences of her vicinity to the sturdy little elbow. It made one or two lunges at her, from which she had the presence of mind to withdraw in time; but as she always had the hardihood to return to her post of observation, the boy at length said:—"Don't worry, little girl. Don't you see the wall of my castle is nearly built up to the top? Don't jog so. Go and pick up some more stones for me. I shan't have half enough for the high tower I mean to build here."

And accordingly, for some time after that, Helena patiently trotted to and fro collecting stones in the skirt of her frock, and bringing them in heaps to Bertram, who went on with his edifice now, in peace, and much faster; and he signified his approval of this state of things by graciously accepting her contributions, bidding her deposit them on the bench ready to his hand, and then to go for more.

The two children went on thus for some time, until the castle was completed to master Bertram's satisfaction ; when Helena's proposal to cut out some paper dolls with her mother's scissors, and to place them inside the pebble fortress as its Baron and Baroness, and suite of retainers, was negatived by master Bertram's " No, no ; that's stupid work ; dolls are only fit for girls ! What's this ?"

" That's my bilboquet ; you can have it, if you like, to play with. And here's a ball ; or here's a battledore and shuttlecock ; if you like them better." Master Bertram seized the offered toys ; and became amicable with his new acquaintance ; letting her be his playfellow, by permitting the little girl to run and fetch his ball when he tossed it up high, and it fell at an inconvenient distance ; or to pick up the shuttlecock, when it dropped upon the ground in consequence of his failing to hit it, and by other such little sociabilities, and condescending equalities which he established between them in the games they had together.

Meantime, while familiarity was growing between the two children, the Bonne seated herself rather nearer, on the long bench, to the corner where Gabrielle sat, and entered into conversation with her.

The Bonne began with the theme always most agreeable to a mother's ear ; one, in which she rarely discerns hyperbole.

" Ah, madame," said she, " what an amiable child is your little daughter ! What grace ! What sprightliness ! And what beauty. An absolute nymph ! And what goodness ! What sweetness ! What patience and forgiveness of pain and injury ! An absolute angel ! Ah, madame ! How fortunate you are, to possess so much loveliness, and so much virtue united in the person of that seraph, your child ! How rare is such a union ! There is master Bertram, for instance. He is beautiful as the day, but his temper is deplorable. He has the adorable grace and loveliness of Cupid himself, but he has not that gentleness, that softness which inspires love. Alas, no ! he is rough and selfish !"

" He has been spoiled, perhaps—indulged too much ?" said Gentille-et-sage ; " and yet," added she with a little sigh, " indulgence ought not to spoil a grateful disposition."

" You are right, dear madame ;" said the Bonne. " A good heart is

not spoiled by having its own way. But where every kindness is received as a right—where attention and affectionate service are claimed only as feudal dues—when faithful domestics are treated like slaves—ah, madame—then, indeed, too much power entrusted to childish hands is injudiciously fostering native haughtiness, caprice, and selfishness, and encouraging tyranny.”

The sentimental and sententious Bonne went on to explain to Gabrielle, that her charge, master Bertram, was sole heir of an ancient family, and only child of the count and countess of Rousillon. That he was inordinately indulged, and that, in consequence his natural defects—those of pride, self-will, want of generosity, and disdain of those beneath him in birth—had been enhanced rather than repressed. She spoke of his mother, the countess, as a virtuous gentlewoman; and of his father, the count, as a noble gentleman, a brave soldier, and one in high honor at court, possessing the confidence and friendship of the king himself. She told Gabrielle that his lordship, the count of Rousillon, was at present suffering from a disorder which had originated in a severe wound in the chest that he had received on his first battle-field, some years since; and that he had quitted his chateau in Rousillon to sojourn for a time at Narbonne, in the hope that he might receive benefit from the change of air, which had been recommended to him. The count had been accompanied hither by his countess, who was a devoted wife and mother, and by his little son, from whom his parents could not bear to be separated.

Many times, after that day, Gabrielle and Helena met the Bonne and her charge in the public garden; and, Gabrielle's pleasant manners soon winning the good graces of the Bonne, as little Helena's good-humour rendered her an agreeable play-fellow to master Bertram, it came to pass that the countess, ere long, heard a good deal from her son of the little girl he had found in the gardens, and from her Bonne of the little girl's mother, who seemed to be quite a superior kind of person—quite a lady, indeed, though only a poor physician's wife, as she had by chance discovered her to be.

The countess of Rousillon, whom anxiety for her husband's reco-



very, made eager to seize any chance of cure, was struck by hearing that the stranger's husband was a physician ; and she was just thinking of joining her little son in his visit to the public garden that day to learn more concerning this unknown doctor, when her thought was confirmed into a determination to seek him, by a singular chance.

It happened that the countess, in her charitable kindness, having afforded relief to a poor woman who begged of her in the street, learned that the sick husband of the mendicant had been attended in his illness by a certain good young doctor, who, in consideration of the destitute state of his patient, would take no fee. "Ce bon monsieur Gerard would have given us money, instead of taking any from us," said the woman ; "but I pretended we didn't want it—for I know he does—almost as much as we—having a wife and child to support, and not earning a great deal to support them with. No, no, he's too generous and good to the poor, to have made any thing of a purse ; so, rather than take from him, I said we had enough to go on with—(may le bon Dieu forgive me for lying!)—and I came out into the streets to beg, when you, madame, kindly gave me this."

By a little questioning, the countess soon discovered that this good young doctor, with a wife and child to support, was no other than the husband of the interesting stranger whom her Bonne had mentioned to her ; and farther, the poor woman went on to say so much, of her own accord, respecting the skill, and care, and attention, which this good young doctor had bestowed, and the wonderful relief his treatment had yielded her suffering husband, that the countess resolved to lose no time in applying to him in behalf of her own.

Gerard, upon being consulted on the count of Rousillon's case, with his usual integrity, gave it as his opinion, that from the nature of the wound itself, and partly from the injudicious treatment it had hitherto received, he could not hope to perform a complete cure ; that his lordship would in all probability be subject to relapses during the remainder of his life, even should he survive the present crisis ; but, he modestly added, if the count would consent to place himself in the hands of an obscure practitioner, he thought he could undertake to relieve suffering, and avert immediate danger.

The result was the fulfilment of his promise ; and the count, restored to more robust health than he had ever dared to hope might again be his, was enabled, at the end of a few months' sojourn at Narbonne, to return with his wife and child to their estate at Rousillon.

The noble family, on taking leave, testified their gratitude to their benefactor, by loading him with affectionate proffers of friendship, and assurances of gratitude ; by an earnestly-expressed hope of seeing him at no very remote period, as a guest at the chateau de Rousillon, and by a handsome sum of money, proportionate to their estimation of the benefit they had received at his hands.

The chateau de Rousillon being situated at no very great distance from Gabrielle's native home, Gerard imparted to his new acquaintances the hope he had of accumulating sufficient to come and reside permanently in their vicinity ; and, in the anticipation of one day becoming neighbours and friends, they parted mutually pleased with each other.

Time wore on, and still Gerard was working hard with his cherished object in view. Like many men who propose to themselves the acquisition of competence, of retirement with independence, they leave undefined what is in reality to form this competence, this independence. They assign no limit to the yearly income which is to suffice for all their wishes ; they vaguely speak of waiting until they shall have earned enough to live upon, without previously calculating what annual amount will supply means of subsistence, or computing the sum requisite to produce such annual amount ; they talk of moderate desires, simple tastes, inexpensive pleasures, without reckoning costs, or asking themselves what is, in fact, the style of living which will fulfil their ideal of enjoyment in existence.

And thus went on Gerard year after year ; without perceiving that life itself was passing in the acquirement and prospect of a living. His was a probation—an awaiting of some expected future, some visionary period—rather than an actuality, a positive state of being. In that anticipated epoch he dwelt, not in the present lapse of time ; he noted not that the cheek of his wife grew ever paler and more attenuated with

abiding in a pent town, while he contemplated her ultimate removal to her native country air and home; and Gentille-et-sage was just the unselfish being to forbear urging her own condition upon his notice, whilst he himself was well and contented. For in the vision of this ultimate retirement with his beloved Gabrielle, in the present work of attaining this proposed future good by the prosecution of his profession, in the daily thought and occupation it afforded him, and in the sight of the daily benefit it effected, he was both well and contented.

The sum he had gained by his attendance on the count Rousillon, was the foundation of his fortune; the care of so illustrious a patient brought him patronage from others of equally high rank; while the wealthy but untitled herd, followed in the track, where nobles had been their precursors. The young doctor became the rage—the fashion; he became as noted as he had been neglected; and at length the very title was awarded to him, which he had once dreamed might be his; for he became known as the eminent physician—the famous Gerard de Narbonne.

Alas, for poor short-sighted human nature! It sacrifices its best years in struggling for that which when obtained, time has rendered valueless! It neglects the enjoyment of daily life, toiling to achieve a remote existence, which is poisoned in its approach!

Gerard now possessed a surname which might grace the wife for whose sake alone he prized its honors; he had amassed a fortune large enough to empower him to establish her in ease and even luxury wherever they might choose to fix their abode; but in the very moment of his awakening to a consciousness that he had attained both these desired objects, he became aware that she, for whom he had coveted their possession, could no more hope to share them long with him.

Gerard had given instructions that the pavilion should be prepared temporarily for their reception, as he meant to defer refitting, enlargements, and all other improvements, until they themselves should be on the spot to decide upon the necessary alterations. He was in all the delight of prospectively enjoying the happiness which such a plan opened to them both; when, on proposing an early day for their de-

parture to take possession of their old new home, he found that Gabrielle was compelled reluctantly to acknowledge that she was too weak to undertake a journey just then. She spoke cheerfully of shortly being better able to bear the fatigue; but Gerard, once his attention drawn to the subject of her health, perceived with alarm many symptoms, which had never struck him till now. His observation had been so concentrated upon the cases of his patients; his thoughts had been so much occupied elsewhere, that he had failed to perceive the illness which made its approach beneath his very eyes, and lurked insidiously beside his own hearth.

Gabrielle had always concealed her growing failure of strength under a sprightly demeanour, and as much activity of carriage as she could assume; while her natural ease of manner, simplicity, and gaiety of heart, had seconded her innocent deceit. Her husband, looking into that smiling face, and within hearing of that cheerful sweet voice, did not surmise the lassitude of limb, and debility of frame, that in secret oppressed her. We all know, how the countenance of those we daily see, let them be loved as intensely as they may,—nay, the rather for that intensity of love—fails to strike us as changing in appearance, as long as affection is still its prevailing expression. The fading lustre of the eye is unnoticed, while love lends its own light to the look which meets ours; the lines that draw and contract the mouth are unseen, when smiles play around lips uttering nothing but kindness and cordiality. We forget to look for traces of indisposition, where all bespeaks something far more welcome to our sight; and our own natural shrinking from aught sinister to them, refuses to acknowledge the approach of danger, helping to mislead us into a fatal confidence. Comfort and assurance of heart dwell in the gaze of those we love; and thus it comes, that those who are nearest and dearest to each other, are not unfrequently the last to perceive what it most concerns them to know—threatened ill health.

Totally unaware of the blow about to be dealt him, until the very moment of its stunning fall, Gerard had hardly been aroused to perceive the approach of the foe; he had scarcely, with shuddering ao

knowledged the presence of peril, when he was smitten with the full force of its consummation. Gabrielle's declining symptoms were abruptly aggravated by an attack of fever ; and she died on the very day of their proposed return to their native home.

Her husband sank prostrate under this unexpected stroke of fate. His usual strength of mind utterly forsook him. He yielded, without a struggle to his grief, and lay overwhelmed and unresisting, struck to the earth by a misery so sudden and so complete. He felt alone in the world. She, who had alone, of all the world, understood and entirely responded to his nature ; she, whose image had blended so completely with his every thought, that (with the paradoxical mood of intimate affection) he had come to pay her as little outward attention as he did to his own semblance ; she, who had become so integrally a part of himself that he gave her no more external regard than he did himself, was now torn away for ever. What wonder that the poor remainder, the writhing wounded other self, should lie there in anguish as acute as if actually severed, disrupted, and rent asunder—henceforth a bleeding mangled fragment of being ?

He had cast himself upon the ground close beside the bed, upon which she had breathed her last, and from that moment had never raised his head. He had not swooned ; he did not shed a tear, or utter a sob ; but there he seemed flung a broken desolate man, bereft of that which had given him heart and vitality. He had no consciousness of time, of aught existing. The poor neighbours whom the young couple had attached by their kindness, and gentle courtesy, and unostentatious benevolence, offered some respectful attempts at consolation and sympathy ; but his apathy of misery awed them, and they pursued in whispers and with noiseless steps their offices about the dead, while, after their first unsuccessful proffer, they only from time to time ventured stealthy glances of compassion towards the prostrate sufferer.

Little Helena crept towards him, and sought to relieve his grief and her own, by sharing its pain together ; but he took as little notice of her as he had done of the neighbours, and the thought of his child seemed to be lost in that of the wife who had been snatched from him. He actually was, as he felt, thenceforward alone in the world.

The neighbours feared, that when he should see them, in accordance with their national custom, ere twenty-four hours had elapsed, withdraw the body for interment—he would be moved to some violent demonstration of despair; but no, in beholding her death, he had felt the full sting of her loss, and the mere corporeal form, the earthly remains of her he loved, seemed no longer to him to be Gabrielle—that creature whom he had worshipped—that being who had been a part of his own.

When night came, he still remained there, a heap of silent sorrow—for he had somehow formed a fierce determination never to occupy a bed more. They had placed food by him—for they had not dared to urge it upon one who had mutely refused, with the sullen, incapable look of a young bird in bondage. They had left him at length alone, to deal as he best might with his strange misery; his little girl only, crouched in one corner of the room, watching him in hopeless ignorance of how to offer aid, yet unable to abandon him, and instinctively lingering near him, as if her very presence could help to guard him from farther evil. She watched until her strained eyes became stiff and weary; and then the childish lids gave way, drooped, and closed in sleep—profound as it was involuntary. She had thought that sorrow for her dead mother, and anxiety for her unhappy father, would have surely kept her awake; but to youthful sorrow and anxiety it is mercifully granted that they shall be powerless against drowsiness, and they have thus the boon of promoting their own remedy.

Through the watches of the night thus remained Gerard and his young daughter; the one wrapped in a deep slumber, the other in his profounder grief. A lamp lent its feeble rays to the chamber, which seemed a sepulchre—so lately had it held the dead, so completely did it bury the hopes of its principal occupant. The drooping figures of the father and child looked like sculptured mourners, monumental images of grief, so mute, so motionless were they.

Day dawned, and found them still thus. But as the sun arose in his majesty, and poured his cheering beams into that desolate chamber, Gerard's brain seemed suddenly to acquire activity and perception in estimating the circumstances of his loss. He uttered a sharp groan as the

painful process of resuscitation took place in his hitherto spell-bound thought. The events of his life presented themselves in strange distinctness before his mind. He beheld as in a vision the whole train of incidents which had marked his intercourse with his wife from their first meeting to their recent separation. He involuntarily retraced scenes, words, looks, long passed away, but which had unconsciously engraven themselves upon his memory, now to be recalled unbidden, yet with singular vividness. As they passed in review before him, many a pang of remorse seized him, as some fancied negligence, or some occasion of omitted kindness on his own part, smote him. With the sensitive self-accusation which always accompanies reflection upon our conduct in connection with a beloved object lost to us for ever, a thousand of such instances arose in all the torture of unavailing regret to goad his heart. Above all, he reproached himself bitterly for the blindness with which he had suffered the tokens of her declining health to escape his observation, while engrossed with the sole pursuit of what should secure her repose, enjoyment, and prolonged life. He felt that in absorbed prosecution of a visionary scheme, he had lost sight of actual happiness, and that he had sacrificed substance to shadow.

From the depth of his remorse arose two clear resolves, as expiatory offerings to his troubled conscience. He determined that he would rouse himself from the selfish lethargy of grief, and by devoting himself with more fervour of zeal than ever to the cause of the poor, render tardy homage to the angel nature which might be supposed to rejoice in such a consecration of his energies; and the other resolve was, that the wealth, which had been amassed with an aim so frustrated in its accomplishment, should be scrupulously dedicated to the use of the same suffering class—the neglected of men, the pitied of God and his angels.

With the courage which a new-formed resolution imparts to the soul of man, Gerard arose from the ground. With the same intense thought of *herself*, which had not permitted her husband to regard the remains of Gabrielle as the being he had loved, he glanced not towards the spot where the body had so lately lain, but looked straight up into the

blue heavens, where it seemed to him she now was. But with the engrossing impression that he was now alone, and completely alone in existence, neither did he once glance towards his child, or perceive that she was there, or for an instant recollect that there was such a being in the world. Gerard was constitutionally a man of strong feeling, and by habit a man of concentrated feeling. He was at present wholly absorbed in his solitude, his bereavement, and in the train of thought, emotion, and resolve it had engendered; with the abstraction of one thus immersed, therefore, he went forth from the chamber, bent solely upon his new-conceived purpose, and totally unmindful of another duty which still more imperatively claimed fulfilment at his hands.

The little girl awoke as her father quitted the room. She shivered with the chill of the morning air, with the cramped unrestful position in which she had sat for some hours, and with a sense of utter abandonment and desolation. She staggered to her feet, and called feebly after him, but no voice answered. She listened to his retreating steps, but no sound reached her. She thought of attempting to follow him, but she knew not where he was gone. She wrung her hands, and looking helplessly round, she saw the bed upon which her mother had so lately lain cold and dead, and then she flung herself down headlong upon it, sobbing, "O, Mother! Mother! Mother!"

Very desolate and forlorn was the condition of this poor young girl. Accustomed to the warmest evidences of affection from earliest infancy, her childhood had, till now, been an uninterrupted course of happy existence. She had never known what it was to lack sympathy, or encouragement, or endearment from her mother, who was as tender as she was cheerful.

Gabrielle was one of those beautifully-constituted beings, whose sprightliness detract no jot from their sweetness. She was as gentle as she was gay; she was as loving as she was light-hearted. She had been a fond, an indulgent friend to her little Helena, as she had been her play-mate and companion. The young mother and daughter had frolicked together as if they had been of the same age; and the child, though an only one, had thus never known want of fellowship. Now,



who was as much alone as her unhappy father ; for he saw not how a consideration of her feelings, an inquiry into her sorrow, might serve to alleviate his own, and promote the consolation of both her and himself.

Gerard devoted himself with all the energy of his nature to his self appointed task, in which alone he believed he could find solace. The greater part of every day he was absent from home, indefatigable in administering the resources of his art ; the few hours he was in his own house being passed in study, shut up by himself in a small room which contained his books. His mode of life was ascetic. He slept upon the floor, and made his sparing meal upon scarcely more than a crust. The only indulgence he permitted himself was coffee, which was brought to him daily, towards the dusk of the evening, by Helena. There was a homely peasant woman who had been their servant ever since Gerard and his wife had settled there ; and she still remained, preparing such meals as he would take, and contriving that his child should carry in the only thing for which he showed any preference. He continued to drink coffee, as it enabled him to work late into the night ; and Nicole had taken it into her worthy head, that by sending his little daughter into his room with the coffee, he might be won to notice her.

But day after day she stood there, with her patient eyes, and in timid silence, unobserved by her father, who would remain absorbed in his work, until some stray waft of the steaming berry scented beverage, or some pause in his writing, or some slight noise of the spoon against the cup and saucer she held, would induce him to stretch forth his hand, and take the coffee from her, but without so much as lifting his eyes from the book or paper before him. Helena had always been taught, by her mother's example no less than by her precept, never to disturb her father when he was studying. She had, therefore, frequently before waited upon him thus in silence, standing by him until he should become aware of her presence, and take from her that which she had brought ; but never before had she felt so painfully his abstraction. He would formerly say no more than he did now, it is true ; but he would give her a little silent nod, or a pat on the shoulder, or a touch under the chin, even if he did not smile, or look towards her. Now, however,

neither nod, nor touch, nor smile, nor look ever reached her; no signal that she was even known to be there was given; no token that her presence was perceived, save the final stretching forth of the hand to take the cup from hers.

She would stand there watching that grave profile, almost stern in its absorbed downward gaze, and ache with longing to see it change its expression, and turn towards her. She would stand holding the coffee, fearing lest it should get cold, before he thought of taking it; she would watch the curling steam, and note each diminishing upward curl of vapour, as the liquid gradually lost its heat. She would stand there with all sorts of strange fears and fancies crossing her mind. She would wonder whether her father ever meant to look at her or speak to her again. She would at one time follow his hand with her eyes along the paper, and thrill with impatience to see it stretched out towards the coffee that she might be released; at another, she would think so closely and so anxiously about the time when the hand should approach her to take the cup, that her heart beat with expectation, and she would start violently when the instant arrived. Sometimes she thought of setting down the coffee on the table, and leaving it there; but besides the fear that it might remain there untouched, and that he should thus miss the only thing he cared to take, there was another undefined dread mingling with as vague a hope, which whispered her not to put the cup down, but to tarry till his hand received it. At others, she thought she would summon courage to speak to him; and when she was away she thought she would surely do so the next time she went to him; but the next time came, and she stood there as patiently, as silently, as ever; until at length it grew worse by delay, and it became impossible even to think of addressing him. At last so many nervous terrors beset her as she stood there motionless beside him, that the hour for taking in her father's coffee came to be looked forward to with almost as much dread, as it had formerly been wished for.

But though Helena would tremble and become very pale, when she went to Nicole to fetch the cup, still she never ceased punctually and constantly to go to the kitchen when she knew the coffee was ready,

take it steadily in her hand, and proceed straight to her father's room. The good-hearted servant-wench, when she observed the little girl's agitation, asked her if she should take it in for her. But she said :—" No, no ; give it me, Nicole ; I'll take it myself ;" and though her tremor every day increased rather than diminished, nothing could persuade her to relinquish the task she had undertaken.

" I'll tell you what, ma'amselle," said Nicole one day abruptly to Helena, as she was preparing to take in the coffee, " if you don't speak to monsieur, I shall. I can't see you going on in that way, shaking, and looking as white as a sheet. We shall have you getting ill, or dropping the coffee-cup, and smashing it all to bits, or some mischief or another. So mind, if you don't speak to him, I shall ; and tell him a piece of my mind too !"

" No, no, Nicole ; you mustn't disturb him—you mustn't speak to him—promise me, Nicole ;" said Helena eagerly.

" Well then you just do—or I shall ; mind that !" said Nicole ; and as Helena said something promissory, going in with the coffee, the kind-meaning servant-wench added, as she followed her with her eyes :—" I can't see what's the good of learning, for my part, if it an't to teach people the use of their senses. Here's a man poking over his books, and can't see what's just under his nose ; a pretty doctor ! ferreting out how to cure everybody's disorders, and never finds that his wife was dying, and his child's dwindling away, for want of a kind word, and a look, and a helping hand, in time. I should like to know how my pot-au-feu would get on, if I was to be readin' and studyin' about it, instead of putting the beef in, and paring and cutting the carrots and turnips. Precious soup we should get, if we were to depend on learning, for it ; pardi !"

Meanwhile, Helena had gone in to her father's little study, and was standing there as usual at his elbow with the cup of coffee. She tried not to listen to the beating of her heart, and to muster enough voice to speak ; but still she stood there mute and motionless. Her eyes were fixed upon her father's high temple, which was barer than usual, from the hair having been somewhat pushed back when he leaned his head

upon his hand just before. A line or two of silver threaded among the dark clusters of hair that were raised from the brow; and as the eyes of his young daughter traced the course of those heralds of thought, and care, and premature age, she unconsciously uttered a deep sigh.

It was at this very moment, that her father reached out his hand for his coffee. The sound caught his ear; he started, and raised his eyes to her face.

It was colourless; and two dark rings surrounded those meek patient eyes that were fixed upon his with a look which childhood should never wear; the lips were wan, and quivered a little, as they stood apart in timid yet eager expectation.

"Helena! my child!" exclaimed Gerard, with a look as if he had awakened from a dream. "Where have you been?"

"Here, papa!" said she.

Her father passed his hand across his forehead; and seemed as if for a moment he fancied she had been standing there ever since he had last beheld her, with that enduring perseverance, that dumb unreprouched constancy, which spoke its involuntary appeal to his heart in those beseeching eyes, those pale cheeks, and tremulous lips.

He drew her towards him, and pressed her head against his bosom. "My child! My dear Helena!" were all the words he could find to express what he felt towards his forgotten daughter; his self-reproach, his reawakened interest, his comprehension of her patience, his admiration, his love. But what need was there of words, where so much of tenderness was expressed in his looks, in his voice, in his gesture? Helena, as she lay within his arms, wept gentle tears of comfort, and joy, and satisfied affection.

Gerard now understood something of what had been his little girl's sufferings, whilst he had been absorbed in his own; he saw that her solitary grief had preyed on her health; and in alarm lest another victim should be the consequence of his neglect, he hastened to devise means for removing his child from a position which he perceived was utterly unfit, and which might be productive of fatal consequences. He

wrote to his friend and patroness the countess of Rousillon, enlisting her sympathy in behalf of his motherless girl, and entreating her counsel and aid. He begged that she would extend her former kind intention towards himself to Helena, by receiving her for a time, at the chateau de Rousillon, that change of scene might efface the sad impression which had been made on her young mind, and rescue her from a situation so perilous to her health and happiness as association with a broken-hearted man, lost in his own eternal regrets. "I have now but one solitary aim on earth;" thus the letter concluded. "It is that I may render myself worthy of joining her who is now in Heaven, by self-denial, humility, and faithful labour; and by a life dedicated to the relief of my poor fellow-sufferers on earth. A man thus devoted to a sacred task, is not a meet guide for youth. The two duties cannot co-exist. The requirements of the one infringe on the exigencies of the other. Let your charitable heart, therefore, dear lady, prompt you in behalf of my innocent child; lost, if you do not step to her aid. My only plea in asking this boon at your hands, is her own desert, which will, I know, requite your goodness as it should be requited. The grateful devotion and affection of a young true heart will be yours. To these are added the prayers and blessings of

Your ladyship's unhappy servant and friend,

GAUTIER GERARD."

The countess's reply was a warm compliance, brought to Narbonne by Rinaldo, her steward, who was charged to escort Helena back to the chateau de Rousillon. On the arrival of her young guest, the countess could not avoid being struck with the change that had taken place. The lively, chubby, rosy child of but a few years old, had grown into the pale quiet girl—fast-growing, hollow-eyed, and lank. Traces of premature care and suffering sat upon the young face, and the effect of her white cheeks, and thin arms, was touchingly heightened by the contrast with the mourning frock she wore.

The lady of Rousillon received the poor motherless girl with a gentleness and pity that went straight to Helena's heart, so sore with its late unhappiness; and the young girl was still hovering near her kind

new friend, when Bertram entered the room. He had been out in the park, with his dogs, one or two of which followed him into the saloon where his mother sat.

He was now a fine tall lad ; and swung into the room glowing with exercise, in high spirits and good humour, flinging his hat off, and discovering a face sparkling with animation, features regular and commanding, and hair bright, thick, and curling.

As his mother's eye rested upon her handsome son,—a picture of healthful beauty, her heart swelled with happy pride ; she thought of the contrast he presented with the poor little pale thin creature at her side, and she drew her kindly towards her.

“ Come here, Bertram ;” said his mother. “ See who is here. Do you not remember your acquaintance of the Narbonne gardens, little Helena ?”

“ Is that little Helena !” said Bertram. “ I never should have known her !”

“ Did you remember me ? Did you think about whether you should have known me ?” said Helena.

“ I was absurd enough to think of you just the same as you were ;” answered he. “ I somehow fancied, when I heard you were coming to Rousillon, that I should see just the same rosy dumpling of a child that you were then, forgetting that we had both grown bigger since, and that of course you would be altered, as I am.”

“ I don't think you're altered ; I should have known you any where ;” said she. “ I remember your hair exactly ; and the high eyebrows—and the color of your eyes, just as I recollect them, when you used to be watching the shuttlecock fly into the air.”

Helena, in looking at Bertram, and tracing her recollection of his features, was hardly aware of what made her wince, and shrink, as the two large dogs which had accompanied him into the room, were now sniffing and snuffing and trying to make acquaintance with the strange little girl, by poking their cold noses against her bare arms, and pushing their rough snouts up to her chin, and other slight amenities. somewhat startling to a child of her age, unaccustomed to the proximity of large hounds almost as big as herself.

"Bertram, my dear," said his mother, "hadn't you better send these dogs out of the room, or call them off, for I think they're annoying our petite amie here."

"Here, Nero; come here, sir; lie down, Juba;" said Bertram, slightly whistling to his favorites. "Are you afraid of dogs? An't you foud of 'em?" added he to Helena.

"Are you?" said she.

"Fond of them? O yes! I like to have them always with me. That's why I like to be out in the park, because there nobody minds 'em; the saloon isn't thought their fit place, is it, mother? I know you only allow them to be here, because you love to please me, more than you care about the dogs, like a good kind mother as you are. Don't you?"

His mother smiled; but after a little lounging about, Bertram swung out of the room again, whistling his dogs after him; and Helena sat reproaching herself with having driven him away, by her folly in being unable to help starting when the dogs touched her. She resolved to break herself of such a stupid trick, and to try and make friends with the noble animals on the first opportunity.

The count Rousillon was absent from the chateau at this period. He was at Paris, in attendance on the king, who esteemed him highly, and was fond of his society. A few days after Helena's arrival, a messenger came to Rousillon from the count, bearing letters and greetings to his countess, with a present to his son of a handsome fishing-tackle, which had often been the object of Bertram's wishes.

There was a fine piece of water which adjoined the chateau, and which in one part of its stream formed the moat that surrounded the turreted irregular walls. Bertram had frequently expatated to his father on the capabilities afforded for angling in this spot, and the indulgent parent now remembering, in absence, his son's desire, sent him the means of its gratification.

When Helena learned what the packet from Paris probably contained, she begged of the countess that she might have the privilege of carrying it at once to Bertram, who was out in the park.

"My page shall take it to him;" said the countess.

"Do let me take it, madam;" urged the little girl. "I know it will give your son so much pleasure, and would give me so much, if I might be the bearer."

The countess nodded and smiled; and away went Helena.

"See what I have here for you!" she cried from a distance, as she perceived Bertram among the trees. "My lord, your father, has sent Baptiste from Paris with this box for you! And we think it must contain the fishing rod and flies you wished for so much; and my lady allowed me to bring it to you, that you might open it at once, and see what it is."

"Set it down on the grass, and undo the fastenings," said Bertram. "I hope it really is the rod! Oh yes! And what a capital one! And what a good line!"

"And look at these curious flies!" exclaimed Helena.

"I'll put one on the line directly," said Bertram. "I must have a throw. I know there must be millions of trout here. Hush, don't make a noise; don't talk. Hush, Helena."

A moment after, he himself loudly exclaimed at his dogs, who were snuffing to and fro, taking a busy interest in all that was going on, and at length uttered the sharp bark of excitement and sympathy with their master's new pursuit, which had provoked his ire at the interruption to his sport.

"Confound those dogs!" he exclaimed; "I wish they were hanged or drowned out of the way. It's impossible to fish, while they're yelping about one."

"Mightn't they be put out of the way, without hanging or drowning?" asked Helena, with a smile; "you may want them to-morrow, you know, when you're tired of angling; and then you would rather find them safe in their kennel, wouldn't you?"

"How you talk, Helena;" said he. "If they're to be taken to their kennel now, I must go with 'em, and leave my fishing; for they won't mind any body but me; and they won't leave me for any body else's bidding."



" Won't they?" said she ; " let's try."

The young girl uttered a little melodious whistle which she had practised in imitation of the one she heard Bertram use with such good effect in calling his dogs. Then she went a short distance, slapping her frock as she had seen him do upon his knee, and mimicking as well as she could the imperative " Here, Juba, here! Hie along, Nero!" with which Bertram was accustomed to enforce their obedience. Finding that they still lingered round their master, she drew from her pocket a piece of rye-cake which she had found effectual during her late assiduous training of the dogs and herself to a mutual good understanding. In the present instance, the lure proved successful ; for wagging their tails, and following Helena with wistful eyes, they drew off the field, leaving Bertram in peaceful possession of the banks of the stream.

Here she found him, on her return, engrossed in the pursuit of his new pleasure. And during the whole afternoon, and for many following days, he still eagerly enjoyed the sport ; Helena lingering by his side, helping him to fix his flies, to watch the bites, to land the fish, to carry home the basket, and in a thousand ways rendering herself an acceptable companion.

One morning, they had just succeeded in hooking and landing a fine trout, that had enhanced the pleasure of his capture by making it a matter of difficult achievement ; now starting away as if he would snap the line, now darting through some tangled sedges where he might twist it, now floating teasingly near, now giving them a run of several yards along the bank, now waving slyly down by the weedy bottom, now glancing recklessly close to the crystal surface, and in short keeping his foes in all that breathless suspense, and dubiousness of ultimate triumph, which constitutes the charm of the pursuit,—so bewitching to an angler, so incomprehensible to other people.

Helena had secured the flapping victim in the basket, and was anticipating the pleasure of Bertram's displaying this prize so his mother ; when, having adjusted a fresh bait, and thrown his line again across the stream, he suddenly uttered an exclamation, which caused his companion to look round. She found that the end of the rod, with its ap

pendent line, had snapped off, and was now floating away towards a plot of rushes and river-weeds that grew in the water near to the opposite bank, at a considerable distance from the spot where they stood.

"O it will be lost!" exclaimed Helena. "Your rod will be spoiled, and useless, without the top. Let us try and get it back. How can we manage? What had we best do?"

"It's gone—it's hopeless!" said Bertram. "It will be quite floated away, by the time we can get round to the opposite shore; or lost among those flags and weeds. Provoking!"

"We can but try;" said Helena. "I'll run round through the wood over the bridge, while you remain here to watch it, and to point it out to me, when I get to the opposite side."

"No, no; it's almost out of sight now—it's of no use. I must give it up."

"We can but give it up, when we have done all we can;" said Helena, and she was just running off, when Bertram said:—

"I tell you, it's of no use, Helena; I can't stay here watching all day for a thing that's already out of sight. I shouldn't so much mind the loss, for I've had almost enough of angling; but I shall be sorry to have to own the rod's spoilt, when my father comes home. Provoking!" muttered he again, as he looked in vain towards the weeds near which the broken rod and line were fast disappearing.

"The count's kind gift! His beautiful present!" said Helena, with her eyes fixed in the same direction.

"Well, it can't be helped, at any rate;" said Bertram, as he walked away, adding:—"I'll go and take Nero and Juba out for a good long walk. I haven't had a ramble with them this many a day; ever since I've been looking after the trout."

Helena remained for a few minutes longer, still looking intently across the stream, which spread broad and far just there, forming a small lake among the grounds of the chateau; then she suddenly turned, and walked fast along the bank, beneath the trees, till she came to some broken ground, which adjoined the more level park, and where the stream dashed and foamed among the underwood, from some rocks that

rose abruptly there about. This tumbling torrent was crossed by a rustic bridge at its foot. Over the bridge Helena passed swiftly ; and tripping along the briery pathway on the opposite side of the stream, made her way with a rapid step.

On reaching the bank, near to which the plot of rushes grew, she peered carefully about, in the hope of descrying the object of her search, but no vestige of rod or line was there to be seen. " If I could but get among those weeds—close to them, I could look better ;" thought she. " If I could but swim !" A moment after, she exclaimed, half aloud :— " The boat ! how came I not to think of it ?"

She retraced her way as speedily as she had come ; and then hastened on to a spot in the park, where she knew a small pleasure-boat was moored. She soon succeeded in undoing the fastenings, and in paddling herself across the stream, back to the plot of rushes. Here she spent some time in searching minutely among the flags, and at length she became unwillingly convinced that the missing rod was not there.

She was reluctantly turning the head of the boat to recross the stream, when its current drew her attention to the fact that the rod had probably floated on farther, quite away from this spot. " The stream flows from the torrent in the dell, across this broad piece of water, towards the moat ;" thought she. " I'll follow the course of the stream ; perhaps I may find Bertram's rod still."

She pushed the boat on in that direction, peeping into all the sedgy nooks, and grassy crevices, along the shore, in vain ; until she entered the moat which washed the walls of the chateau, entirely surrounding them. These walls were built irregularly ; forming all sorts of odd angles, and crannies, and close recesses. In one of these, floated by the current, and washed far inwards, lying in a tangled heap, Helena spied the lost line, with the fragment of rod. She steadied the boat as well as she could across the narrow inlet, which was formed by two meeting angles of the edifice ; for the space thus left between the walls that rose sheer from the water, was too small to admit the head of the vessel. Helena stretched herself as far over the side, as possible ; but she could not nearly reach the floating object, even with the tips of her fingers.

How tantalizing it was, to see it lie there, within a few feet of her, but as much out of her power, as when out of sight !

She seized the oar, with which she had paddled herself thither ; but she not only nearly lost her balance, trying to wield so heavy an object, but she had the mortification to perceive that instead of gaining any hold of the line with the unmanageable end of the oar, she only succeeded in pushing it farther than ever beyond her reach, until it washed away right up to the extreme end of the recess, where it lay bobbing and floating in coy retirement,—obvious, yet unattainable.

Helena felt so frustrated and baffled in the very view of success, that she could have shed tears of vexation ; but recollecting just in time for the honor of her childish wisdom, that such a proceeding would advance her no jot,—at the very same fortunate moment popped into her head another idea no less sagacious. This was, that she would try and make one of the dogs swim across the moat and fetch the line out of the recess. Then remembering that she could hardly make the dog comprehend what he was to seek, she determined to row back and bring the dog with her in the boat to the spot, where she might point out to him the precise object she wanted him to fetch.

Her experiment was crowned with complete success. She returned, accompanied by Fanchon, one of the smaller dogs, Bertram having taken with him his two favorites ; and, with its help, she succeeded at length in securing the top of the fishing-rod and line. Her first impulse was to take them to their owner, in the hope of pleasing him by the news of their recovery ; but remembering that his zest for angling had suffered an abatement, she resolved to keep them quietly for the present.

Another letter arrives from the count, stating that he is still detained from rejoining his family, by the wishes of the king, whose gracious desire for his longer stay is not to be withstood. The count speaks of a valued friend of his, the lord Lafeu, who has been desired by his royal master to prepare for a diplomatic mission to some neighbouring state. This friend being anxious, during his absence, to obtain honorable protection for his daughter Maudlin, who lost her mother when an infant, the count has invited the young lady to pass a few weeks at the chateau de Rousillon, on a visit to his countess.

Mademoiselle Lafeu arrives ; and is greeted with all distinction and affectionate welcome. She proves to be a lively girl, with an air of decision and court-bred ease about her manners that bespeak her to be an inhabitant of the capital.

French words best describe the distinguishing characteristics of this young French girl. She was *insouciant*e, in her gaiety of spirits ; *nonchalante*, in her indifference to the opinions of others ; she was *assez spirituelle* ; *tant soit peu espiègle* ; and had much *aplomb* in her tastes, her judgment, her convictions, or rather in her mode of answering them all three, whenever, however, and with whomsoever she might choose to assert them.

She formed a striking contrast with the provincial-bred Helena, who was quiet, retiring, and undemonstrative in speech. The one was accustomed to utter every thought aloud the instant it was formed ; nay, sometimes, before she had thought at all upon a subject, she would express very decided sentiments regarding it : while the other would speak no word upon matters which had not only engaged her serious consideration, but upon which she was prepared to act with energy, firmness, and pertinacious constancy.

Maudlin Lafeu would eagerly discuss veriest trifles as if her whole soul were wrapt up in them, and the next hour, prove by her actions, that she cared no iota for any one of the things for which she had been so earnestly arguing ; Helena was chary of alluding to her own views, even upon topics on which her mind was made up with a consistency and steadiness hardly to be expected from a girl of her age. Maudlin was sparkling, animated, and full of vivacity ; Helena was tranquil, and somewhat reserved, though not shy, or awkwardly bashful. She had timidity, though no want of resolution. A diffidence of self, combined with remarkable self-confidence. A mistrust of her own merit, with a consciousness of moral power. An unassured belief of intrinsic worth, with a strong faith in her own principle of right. A humility that taught her to assign blame to herself rather than to others, combined with a high internal sense of her true claim to regard.

In externals there was the same dissimilarity between the two young

girls. Maudlin was brilliant in complexion, had eyes bright and restless, with lips wreathed in smiles; while Helena was pale, her eyes were soft and thoughtful, with a look of steadfastness in resolve, and her mouth was sedate, though the lips were full, and so coral and red, that they afforded the point of colour, in which her face would otherwise have been deficient.

To complete the contrast, Maudlin was dressed in the height of the then Parisian fashion, a rich father's liberality enabling her to indulge in every extravagance of adornment; while Helena, a poor country physician's daughter, wore a simple black frock of the plainest make, and of the least costly material.

On the morning after Mademoiselle Lafeu's arrival at Rousillon, the countess, having done the honours of the house, by showing her young guest over the chateau, deputed her son to escort her through the park and the rest of the domain, which was extensive, and very beautiful.

With more eagerness of manner than he usually displayed, when the gratification of any other than himself was in question, Bertram complied. He led the way, talking animatedly with the young lady, who, interrupting him in the midst of something he was saying, turned to Helena, with:—"Will not you come with us?"

"Go, ma petite;" said the countess, in answer to the mute enquiry of Helena's eyes.

They had crossed the drawbridge over the moat, and were just entering the park. Bertram dwelling with much complacency upon the noble growth of the trees, upon the valuable timber they would yield, upon the beautiful site of the chateau, its picturesque structure, its best points of view, and upon the territorial grandeur of the estate generally, when he turned slightly to Helena, and said:—"I should like the dogs to be with us."

Helena replying, "Ay, they would enjoy this ramble," tripped back to fetch them.

"Where is she gone to?" asked Mademoiselle Lafeu.

"Gone to fetch Nero and Juba, my dogs, they are such fine fellows; I should like you to see them;" answered he.

"Should you? But I am sorry Mademoiselle Helena should have the trouble of returning for them," said Maudlin.

"O, she don't mind it; and the dogs are very fond of her;" replied Bertram.

Mademoiselle Lafeu seemed about to say something more, but was prevented by Helena's running up, with the dogs leaping and bounding each side of her.

They walked on again; Bertram by the side of Maudlin Lafeu, talking and laughing in high spirits, and using his best efforts to entertain her. Helena followed a little in the rear, with the dogs still frolicking, and gamboling, and jumping about her; while the young lady frequently turned to address some remark to her, as if wishing her to take part in the conversation that was going forward.

Presently, as they emerged from the shade of the trees, Helena perceived that the glare of the sun seemed oppressive to Mademoiselle Lafeu, who had only the small flat hat or cap worn by French ladies of the period, and which afforded little protection to the eyes or the complexion.

"You feel the rays too hot and too bright for you, Mademoiselle;" said Helena. "Will you use my broad straw hat, which makes a good screen for the eyes?"

"Do;" said Bertram.

But Maudlin declared she would not deprive Helena of it, who would then be as badly off as herself.

"But you must not risk such tanning as this;" said Bertram. "Helena will go and fetch you a veil, or a fan, from the chateau."

"Yes, that will be the best;" said Helena, as she darted off in quest of them; while Bertram added some gallant speeches about the brilliancy of the complexion that Mademoiselle Lafeu was so ruthlessly exposing to injury, which she interrupted by saying:—

"Is this your country good-breeding, Monsieur Bertram? You pay a few fiddle-faddle compliments to one young lady, while you permit another to run about on your errands—or what ought to be yours,—for why could not you go yourself for the fan or veil which you think I ought to have?"

"O, Helena don't mind it," repeated Bertram, laughing.

"Perhaps not; but *you* ought. If you pretend to be a gentleman, as I suppose you do, how comes it that you let a young lady wait upon you?"

"She's not a young lady;" said Bertram hastily. "She's only a poor girl, a protégée of my mother's. A country doctor's daughter that my good mother took a fancy to, because the father happened to cure mine, a long time ago,—for which service he was well paid, by the bye,—and because the girl herself has lately lost her mother."

"Tolerably good claims, too, to consideration;" said Madame Lafeu. "But whatever may be her birth, she deserves politeness from a young gentleman, one would think, from the mere fact of her being a pretty girl."

"Pretty!" said Bertram;—"what, with that pale face? She was pretty as a little child; but she's quite altered—an absolute fright now, with her white cheeks, and those dark rings round her eyes."

"Poor girl! Perhaps she lost her good looks with grieving for her dead mother. For good looks she has, depend upon it; I can perceive them through all that sorrowful one; and some day or other, you'll see, she'll prove my words, and come out a beauty."

"Not my sort of beauty;" said Bertram, fixing his eyes with an admiring look upon Maudlin's brilliant countenance, but with a boy's bashfulness soon withdrawing his gaze, and stammering out:—"I don't see any beauty in linen cheeks for my part; give me lovely red and white, and a pair of bright happy eyes. Such as, I trust, some day or other, to see in perfection among you Parisian Belles."

"The sieur Bertram tells me he is dying to see Paris;" said Maudlin to Helena, who now returned with the veil and fan. "Why does he not persuade his father to bring him the next time he comes thither? You must help him to gain the permission, I believe, by pleading his cause with his mother, who will plead it again with his father, and then the affair will be settled."

"It's of no use any one pleading;" said Bertram testily. "My mother would long ago have given me my wish, but my father is obsti-



nately bent upon my not visiting the capital yet. He has violent prejudices against Paris as an abiding place for youth. Thinks ill of the young men there as examples, and I know not what of scruples and strictnesses, which surely are old-fashioned, over-rigid, and misplaced, now-a-days."

"This is so beautiful a place, I can hardly fancy sighing to leave it, even for dear delightful Paris!" said Mademoiselle Lafeu. "And you must have plenty of amusement here, too, to compensate for the court gaieties, and the society of the capital. What a fine place for a gallop on horse-back, a row on the lake, a falcon match, a trial with the bow and arrows, or for hunting or fishing, or the thousand enjoyments which you country gentlemen can command. There must be capital fishing in that piece of water. Do you know, I'm a bit of an angler myself? When I have been en campagne with my father, at our house at Marly, he has taught me to bait a hook and throw a line, so that I should scarcely be afraid to challenge such proficientes as you and Mademoiselle Helena doubtless are."

"You like angling?" said Bertram. "How vexatious that I should have no rod to offer you. Mine is broken—but—how I wish I had it now!"

"I have it safely for you, I'll fetch it;" said Helena eagerly. "I got it back—it's mended; I'll bring it to you directly."

"Do, do, Helena! But how on earth do you mean? How did you get it back?" said he.

In a few words, she explained her recovery of the detached portion of his rod and line, and then hurried away to fetch them.

Highly pleased, he began to question Mademoiselle Lafeu on her knowledge of the sport, and to express his delight at the prospect of enjoying it with her. She answered by dwelling upon Helena's having taken such pains to gratify him, and by reproaching him for the slender gratitude he had shown for her friendly zeal.

"If you go on praising it so, you'll make me detest it, instead of teaching me to feel grateful for it;" said he. "I hate things or people that are belauded and cried up by every one. My mother tells me so

much of Helena's good behaviour that I'm rather sick of it; and now you are doing the same, and giving me a downright surfeit of her merits. She's well enough, but she's no such paragon as you'd all make her out to be."

"You are a spoilt young man, and have your own way too much, and are too little contradicted, I see;" said Mademoiselle Lafeu. "If I were to take you in hand, I would soon effect a reform."

"I think I am very well as I am, and want no reform;" said Bertram laughing; "but still, you may take me in hand, if you like; I don't know that I should object to that; especially when the hand that is to take me in it, is so white and so soft," said he, with another boyish struggle between admiration and embarrassment, as he took her hand and attempted to kiss it.

"One of the first things I should expect you to alter, would be your conduct to women," said Mademoiselle Lafeu, with the little air of superiority which girls of her age allow themselves to lads of his; "you should be less forward to me, and more polite to Helena; I would have more deference, more fitting attention to each. See, where she comes, with your fishing-tackle; and yet you do not hasten to meet her, and relieve her of the burthen. You a cavalier fit for a Paris circle, and so insensible to a woman's due!"

"On the contrary," said Bertram, with his careless laugh; "I'm quite sensible of her peculiar excellence; I'm thankful to her, as I am to my dogs, for what they do for me; I'm bound to acknowledge her ministry, as I am to my hounds for their attachment, and their faithful fetching and carrying. I'm a judge of dogs, you know—and she's a good spaniel."

During the visit of Maudlin Lafeu, Bertram heard a good many truths with respect to his haughty conduct, told him with no sparing of his self-love by the young Parisian; but they served little else than to pique him into extra admiration of herself; while they rather increased than diminished his contempt of Helena, whose modest zeal showed like servility against Maudlin's freedoms; and where humility seemed only conscious inferiority both of beauty and station, when seen in contrast

with Mademoiselle Lafeu's high-bred ease, court manners, and various graces of person and demeanour.

Bertram was a spoiled child by birth, by fortune, and by circumstance ; and like many spoiled people, he felt little preference for those who spoiled him. It seems an instinct, teaching the humoured person to disregard those who work this evil, at the very time that he avails himself of their indulgence. He uses and abuses the ministrants to his will, while he feels an involuntary respect for those who inconveniently yet boldly oppose its tyrannous dictates. He disdains and tramples on those whose value he acknowledges by accepting their service, while he courts and renders homage to those who treat him with indifference, and whose sole claim to superiority may be their own assumption.

Time passes on. Bertram's boyish desire to visit Paris is yet unfulfilled ; for his father, firm in his conviction that a court is an unfit school for youth, as the capital is an unfit asylum, until his son's principles shall be more formed, and his studies farther advanced, has sent him to college for a few years.

The king still frequently detains his favourite by his side ; and the count, anxious to secure for his wife affectionate companionship in her solitude at Rousillon, undertakes the entire charge of Helena. He writes to her father, entreating him to commit her to the countess's and his own care, engaging to provide her with masters and all requisites for a solid education.

Gerard, strictly observant of that moral devotion, in which alone he finds peace for his wounded spirit, and consecrating the whole of his earnings—accumulated and present—to the needs of his poor patients, reserves to himself the mere pittance requisite in his self-imposed asceticism, and is in fact, bare of all, save renown in skill, and the attachment of grateful hearts. Thus destitute of resources, a voluntary pauper—a devotee to penury in his own person, as in his tribute to the exigencies of a sacred cause—Gerard willingly consents to a plan that secures for his child an education and a home, which he himself has no means of giving her.

Helena accordingly remains at the chateau de Rousillon, growing in

knowledge, accomplishment, and virtue, while the improvement in her health, spirits, and mental culture, brings corresponding increase of beauty; and, on the verge of womanhood, she possesses as many attractions of worth and excellence, as she presents those of person and matured loveliness, which her early childhood promised.

She has courage, prudence, constancy in an eminent degree. She is stable in resolve; faithful in duty; invincible in attachment; and she is as full of womanly sweetness and gentleness, as if her character were not compounded of such firm elements. True strength of mind is less inconsistent with softness of heart than is generally or willingly allowed, by those who injudiciously or interestedly persuade the sex that weakness—moral, mental, and physical, is their most winning characteristic. Feeble-mindedness, indecision, vacillation, cowardice, want of solid principle, lack of energy, infirmity of purpose, supineness of limb, debility of muscle, enervation of frame, and the thousand foibles of soul and body that are supposed amiable, will often lead to a selfish hardness, and an inflexibility of egoism any thing but womanly; while a loving nature will not unfrequently inspire the most heroic acts of fortitude, dictate the highest deeds of bravery—bravery in achievement—no less than in endurance, and yet detract no particle from the sweet grace of feminine reserve, nor abate one blush of sensitive modesty.

Such was Helena's nature; full of the gentlest strength of love; the most unflinching capability of sacrifice; the deepest tenderness, and the bravest courage, the maidenliest diffidence, with the most lavish generosity; the truest and most steadfast affection, with the most passionate warmth.

But as yet, little occasion for the development of these qualities in Helena presented itself. Till such occasion should arrive, she seemed a quiet, earnest, obliging girl, faithfully attached to the countess, who ever treated her with well-nigh a mother's regard.

The count Rousillon, when able to be at the chateau, was kind and paternal in his manner to Helena, and esteemed her highly for her own merits, for the credit her accomplishments did to his having charged himself with her breeding, and for the sake of the pleasure which her society and affection afforded to his countess.

Bertram, on the recurrence of his vacations, spent them, by his parents' wish, at Rousillon; and on each of these occasions he failed not to call upon Helena for her sympathy with his own indignation at being compelled still to defer repairing to Paris, where he might spend his holidays so much more to his liking.

True to her friendship, at the expense of her growing love, Helena failed not to condole with him on these repeated disappointments, and even to help him all she could to obtain the desired permission, although it would destroy her own fondest prospect,—that of seeing him at Rousillon. For the intervals when he was absent, were occupied in thoughts of his last visit, of what he had said, of how he had looked, of what he had chiefly liked; or in dreams of his next-approaching one, of what he would say, of how he would look, and of what he might like, that she might prepare it for him against his coming.

At length a period arrives when she is able to greet him with something that she knows will please him. She is so eager to give him this gratification, that she watches by the park-gates for his arrival during the whole morning that he is expected at the chateau. The welcome sound of his horse's feet reaches her ear; she springs forward, when the abruptness of her appearance startles the mettled animal, who rears, and plunges, and it requires all Bertram's good horsemanship to keep himself firm in his seat.

The sight of his danger, the fear that he will be thrown, makes Helena turn deadly pale; but she does not utter a single shriek; only, after an instant's dismayed pause, she throws herself before the horse's head, regardless of her own imminent peril, and endeavours to seize the bridle.

"Stand out of the way! Stand back! You will be trampled down!" shouts Bertram. "Leave him to me; let him alone; I'll manage him! So then, so then, Charlemagne! So then!"

When he had succeeded in reigning in the steed, and reducing him to quietude, Bertram had leisure to observe who it was that had thus crossed his path.

"Is that you, Helena? How could you be so absurd as to start out

in that sudden way just before him? Any horse would have shyed at such a thing, especially a skittish high-blooded creature like this. So then, so then, my beauty!" said he, patting the arching neck of his favorite, that still quivered and throbbed in every one of its swelling veins.

"I had some tidings for you, that I knew would please you—and I could not help coming out here to be the first person to tell them to you. It was very rash and foolish of me, to rush out so unawares upon poor Charlemagne. Poor fellow! Poor fellow!" And she patted the horse on the same spot where his master's hand had so lately been.

"Well, but what are your tidings, Helena? You don't tell them to me, after all;" said he, as he rode on slowly, she walking by his side.

"My lord the count arrived here from Paris, yesterday, and ——"

"My father at Rousillon!" exclaimed Bertram; "why didn't you say so before, Helena?" And the young man was about to ride on impetuously.

But Helena called to him that he had not yet heard what she had to tell; and with a muttered "pshaw," he checked his horse, until she should come up with him.

I heard the count tell my lady yesterday, that he had lately made the acquaintance of two young men, whom he thought would make admirable friends for his son. They are brothers of the name of Du-main, have just obtained commissions in the army, and are in high favor with his majesty. He said that their excellent qualities made him take all measures to secure their intimacy for you, against you go with him to Paris; and from what more fell from him on the subject, I cannot help thinking, my lord means to remove you from college, and introduce you at court, the very next time he returns to attend the king."

"Do you really think so, Helena?" said Bertram with sparkling eyes and heightened colour. "This is indeed good news! I long to see my father, and learn if it be true."

He flung himself off his horse, as he approached the chateau, and throwing the bridle to Helena, said:—"Just lead Charlemagne round to the stable for me; I cannot lose a moment in seeing my father."

Bertram hurried away ; while Helena kept her eyes fixed upon his handsome agile figure as long as it was in sight, and wondered at the blank that seemed to fall upon her spirit as he disappeared.

“ Why am I so unhappy, when he is so elated ? ” thought she ; “ Ought I not to rejoice that he is pleased ? What delight shone in his eyes as he bent their hawk glance upon me while I spoke the words. And what eyes they are ! ” She threw her arm over the saddle where he had lately sat, and looked up as if she could still see the eyes dancing and sparkling with joy at her tidings. “ He is happy to go ; how selfish of me then, not to feel glad that he is going. Glad that he is going ! Glad at his absence ! Ah, how can I ? Glad ! ” she repeated in a soft sad murmur, as she hid her burning cheek against the neck of the horse.

The noble animal turned its head towards the young girl, as if in dumb sympathy with the low sobs she uttered, and the tears she could not repress, which trickled down the glossy skin of its throat.

She spoke fond words, caressing and patting the intelligent creature ; bidding it bear safely him whom they both worshipped as their ruler, their guide, their dear master ; and whispering many a gentle entreaty that it might not be long ere the good steed should bring back his lord to Rousillon, where loving hearts awaited him, that bore him stronger and more constant affection than all the friends in Paris, young or old, man or woman.

The countess's page at this instant came running towards Helena, bidding her hasten in to his lady, who was in sad distress at a sudden attack of illness which had seized the count Rousillon, only a few minutes after his son's arrival.

Giving Charlemagne's rein to the page, while she hastily dried her eyes, and endeavoured to assume as much calmness as might be, that she should be the fitter to support and assist the countess, Helena hurried to the saloon of the chateau, where she found the late tranquillity in which she had left it, exchanged for a scene of the greatest confusion and anxiety.

On a couch lay extended the count of Rousillon, his eyelids closed,

his features convulsed and distorted, and his head supported on the bosom of his wife, who, with her usual composure, the result of a placid temperament and a well-disciplined mind, was administering restoratives; although her trembling hand, and pallid cheek betrayed the inward agony she was suffering. Beside the couch, and holding his father's hand, knelt Bertram, while behind it stood Isbel, the countess's woman, who was holding the essences and remedies with which she supplied her mistress from time to time. Close by, stood Rinaldo, the steward, who was receiving his mistress's low-voiced orders to despatch messengers post-haste to Narbonne, to fetch Gerard, while others were sent elsewhere in the meantime for medical assistance nearer at hand. In one corner of the room was Lavatch, the clown, lustily crying and sobbing in the sincerity of his heart, for his master, to whom he was fondly attached.

Helena joined the anxious group, and was soon busily engaged in her own quiet steady manner, assisting, relieving each in their several duties, and doing much by her judicious suggestions, and calm activity, to contribute to the ease of the sufferer.

Her father, Gerard's arrival was looked for with the greatest solicitude, as the harbinger of safety to the count. They all, the countess especially, had such faith in his ability, it seemed as if his mere presence could avert danger, as if his fiat could assure life.

At length he came. For a time, his skill, together with the powerful remedies he brought with him from Narbonne, as best suited to the nature of the seizure which he learned to have been the count's, served to restore the lord of Rousillon to something of his former health. But he soon relapsed, languished, and remained for several weeks in a state between life and death. During this period, he was assiduously nursed by his countess and Helena, dutifully attended by his son Bertram, and treated with the utmost of Gerard's care and skill.

Indeed, only resources of art such as were known to this eminent physician could have preserved him so long alive. Like a lamp spent of oil, his flame of existence flickered from day to day, only held suspended by the cherishing hand of friendly care, zealous to screen from rude approach—to protect from extinction.



Each day brought messengers from the court, charged with assurances of sympathy and solicitude from the king, towards his esteemed and faithful servant. Relatives and allies in Paris sent frequent despatches indicative of their interest in the progress of the count's disorder, and their hopes of his recovery. But royal kindness, friendly demonstrations of attachment, conjugal and filial attention, his physician's zeal and ability, were ineffectual to rescue or to save; after a protracted languishment, the count Rousillon expired, surrounded by those he loved, and respected by all who knew him.

Gerard, who had a suite of apartments devoted to his use during his sojourn at Rousillon, now talked of retiring to his duties at Narbonne. The countess, much as she would have desired to retain so valued a friend near her, could not withstand the plea that his poor patients would have already missed him, and needed his presence. But as it was fixed that when the period of mourning for his father should have expired, Bertram should go to Paris and pay his respects to the king, under the auspices of the count's old friend, the lord Lafeu, the countess made it her entreaty to Gerard, that he would still indulge her with the society of his daughter Helena.

He could not withhold his consent to the bereaved countess in her sorrow; although he had learned to perceive the solace which his daughter's companionship would now afford to himself. In his late renewed intercourse with her, he had had opportunity of becoming acquainted with her true worth. In the sobered and time-softened grief of his own heart, in the comparative leisure of thought which his situation recently permitted, he had been able to estimate the many excellencies of heart and mind which distinguished his Helena, and he had now felt that her presence would be as great a comfort as it had formerly been an increased distress to him. But Gerard was not the being to allow a selfish motive, however powerful, to influence him, where the happiness of a fellow-creature was involved in any sacrifice he could make; therefore, with a suitable acknowledgement to his patroness for her friendship towards him and his, he prepared to return alone to Narbonne.

On the eve of the day fixed for his departure, he sought Rinaldo, the

steward, and bade him make his excuses to the lady of Rousillon, or her son, should either of them enquire for him when the family assembled to dinner, and to say that he had private business a league or two from the chateau, which might probably defer his return until eventide. When Rinaldo gave this message to his mistress, Helena happened to be within hearing; and on questioning the steward farther respecting her father, she learned that which made her feel involuntary disquietude respecting his sudden and unannounced absence. Rinaldo, who was a faithful and attached servitor, and a remarkably discreet, observant man, owned to Helena that he had remarked tokens of agitation in the countenance of her parent, and that his voice was perturbed, although both face and tone seemed to be held in restraint, as if he would fain have assumed a calm demeanour.

Helena, with earnest thanks to Rinaldo, besought him to add to his kindness, by telling her in which direction her father had taken his way through the park that morning; for, perceiving the countess and her son engaged together in conversation, she knew she could be spared, and determined to await in the path by which he should come back, the return of her father, that she might the sooner satisfy her anxiety respecting him.

The afternoon was lovely. As Helena crossed the drawbridge, the stream, which supplied the moat, spread widening through the landscape, and its waters, sparkling and glistening in the rays of the sun, gave movement and brilliancy to the scene. Beneath the lofty trees of the park, the slanting beams shed golden light, diffusing a rich glow upon the velvet turf beneath, making the green freshness more apparent, whilst it cast twinkling shadows, and shone in ruddy patches upon bark, and branch, and bole. Beneath the shade, stood herds of deer.—the late count having been at some pains to introduce the breed upon his estate;—some were standing at gaze, with their soft yet lustrous eyes reflecting the brightness of some straggling sun-beam; others reclining their dappled bodies on the grassy sward; some with their patient mouths, ruminating; all whisking and vibrating their never-wearied tails, in ceaseless rebuke of the flies, that hummed, and floated, and glanced, and darted in the sunny air.

With the mottled denizens of the park, as with all the animals about the domain, Helena was on excellent terms ; the lordly stag would scarce withdraw his branching antlers from her reach, or the timid doe start from her side, when she approached their haunts, and stood among them, with some tempting morsel in her hand for them, or a gentle caress, or a coaxing word of salute.

But now she tarried not to fondle the deer, but kept still on, hoping to meet her father soon.

But the golden sun-rays ever slanted more and more ; the rich haze on the landscape faded ; the glory settled downward, toward the horizon ; the sky paled its azure hue ; the trees wore a veil of purple ; the grass was bespread with dewy sheen ; and the still breath of evening crept over all.

By and bye a star twinkled forth ; then another ; and again more ; and then the moon arose ; and yet Helena was seeking her father ; and yet he came not.

She had reached the extremity of the park, and was hesitating whether she might not miss him, by passing through the gate, and proceeding farther, when she perceived approaching at a distance a figure that she at once recognized to be his.

She hastened towards him uttering his name.

He did not answer ; his face was rigid and deathly white ; for an instant he looked wildly in her face ; then suddenly he caught her in his arms, and burst into a passion of tears.

To behold the weeping of a man is always terrible ; to behold that of a father, to feel his frame torn and shaken by the strength of an irresistible emotion, to find herself clasped to his bosom convulsed and swollen with the fierce strife between anguish and the desire to control its expression,—how overwhelming to a daughter, a being like Helena !

She strove to compose him, to control her own agitation that she might the better soothe his. At length he found voice to say :—

“Be not alarmed, my Helena ! Forgive me, my child ! It was beyond my power, or you should not have witnessed this ! But it has saved your father, Helena ; it has relieved his bursting heart, which

else must have broken ; and you will pardon your own pain, that it has assuaged his."

As they returned together, she gathered from his broken words that he had been drawn by an invincible desire, to visit once more the old pavillon (the farm itself had long since passed into other hands, on the death of Gabrielle's father), before he quitted, probably for ever, the vicinity of a spot so hallowed to his remembrance. The scene itself, however, had awakened so many tender memories, so many bitter regrets, had reopened such cruel wounds, that Gerard had been thrown into a kind of swoon, from which he had only recovered to stagger forth in renewed misery from a place that was fraught with so much anguish of recollection. He had made his way back somehow, scarcely restored from that fainting-fit, when the sight of his child and *hers*, had mercifully brought forth the gush of tears which had in all probability preserved him from delirium or death.

But the blow had been dealt ; the sentence had passed. Although the timely advent of his daughter had averted the immediate result, yet Gerard had in reality received his mortal stroke in that old pavillon-chamber. On reaching the chateau, he withdrew immediately to his apartment, and would not permit his daughter to remain by his bedside, though she entreated him long and urgently to let her stay with him.

On the next day, which had been fixed for his return to Narbonne, he was compelled to acknowledge that he was unable to attempt the journey, being too ill, indeed, to rise from his bed. Helena hung over him, and besought him to tell her what might be devised for his relief.

"There is no medicine now that can give me life," said he. "One there is, indeed, which might relieve this oppression—but it is no matter, it cannot avail to baffle death—it could only postpone his coming ; his summons is already issued. Grieve not, my child, my Helena ; it carries no terrors with it to me. The grave to me has long been a wished-for haven, a peaceful refuge, where I may hope to rejoin my lost one, and with her to abide evermore in that joyful realm beyond.

Helena by every winning persuasion, by every gentle art, taught her by her loving perseverance of nature, strove to discover what and where

this medicine was, that she might seek it, to lighten, if not destroy, his disease ; and at length Gerard told her, by way of putting a stop entirely to her anxiety on the subject, that it was in a certain medicine-chest in his little book-room at Narbonne.

Far from ending her solicitude on the point, this intelligence only awakened an invincible desire to obtain the medicine, and she inwardly resolved to set out for Narbonne herself in quest of it. She no sooner beheld her father sink into a doze, than she stationed Isabel by his bedside, with an injunction to watch, while she herself went to the countess of Rousillon and implored her permission to depart at once in search of the medicine-chest her father had mentioned.

The countess applauded her pious resolve, but showing her that her duty claimed her attendance by her father's side, even more than her journey in quest of the remedy, promised Helena that she would send her steward, Rinaldo, to Narbonne for the medicine-chest.

Upon her knees, Helena thanked the good countess for her sympathy and help in a daughter's distress ; and once more repaired to her father's bedside.

During that day, and part of the next, Gerard remained in a sort of stupor. From this he awakened somewhat better, and spoke to his daughter in a cheerful strain of hope and comfort. He bade her regard his approaching death as he did, as a removal from suffering, as a period to grief, and as a commencement of future joy. He told her that her promising virtues and many excellencies gave him assurance that their present separation would be but for a time. He spoke to her candidly of the good he perceived in her, taught her how best to cultivate and increase her natural tendencies towards it, and admonished her how best to avoid those points where her virtues might lead to error.

" You possess firmness, steadiness, constancy, my child," said he ; " beware that they become not hardness, unrelentingness, obstinacy. You have perseverance, indefatigable and indomitable courage, in pursuing an object that you conceive to be right ; be well assured that the object you seek is right, lest your perseverance involve you in evil, and

your courage be but rash encounter of peril and ultimate wrong. Your spirit of persistence may be productive of the highest good, so that you let it not degenerate into obstinacy, wilfulness, or headstrong, irrational inflexibility. Be sure that your motives are pure, your means innocent, and your aim a hallowed one, and then give full scope to your native disposition; then let nothing abate your courage, then pursue the dictates of your own resolved heart unswervingly, unflinchingly, invincibly. I have that faith in your nature,—which is essentially loving and generous, as well as persisitive,—that gives me confidence, you will secure your own welfare, win your own happiness.”

“Would that you might live to witness it! To behold the result of your own instructions, my father!” said Helena. “Why cannot you survive to see the maturing of your child’s destiny, to give her fresh precepts for making it a blest one?”

“That I might help towards such a consummation,” said he, “I could have wished my strength prolonged; but it is not to be. My breath is failing, and the revived speech that has been granted me, is nearly exhausted.”

“That remedy, that medicine, dear father, which you spoke of,—”

“Ay, it might have lent me strength to speak longer to thee, my child; and for that it had been welcome. But it is at Narbonne; and it is but spent breath to sigh for that which is far away. I, who must husband every moment’s breathing now, for thy dear sake, my Helena,” said her father, with a faint smile, “will not waste a single gasp in vain aspiration.”

Helena returned his smile with a gay and hopeful one, as she whispered:—“What if instead of being far away at Narbonne, that medicine-chest,—which contains, I trust, health, and strength, and life for my father,—were now on its way hither? Actually coming?”

“Is it so, my Helena?” said her father, as if his effort at cheer for her sake, and the prospect of aid in his attempt, gave him renewed energy. “Is it indeed so?”

“Ay, my father; this is one of the instances of your Helena’s perseverance, which I hope may deserve your approval, in spite of its having

been maintained against, or rather without, your authority. I was so determined to obtain it, that I would have risked abandoning your sick-bed, rather than not have it here; but my dear lady, the countess, in compassion for my anxiety, and in eagerness to secure aught that might avail you, has sent Rinaldo to Narbonne for the medicine-chest; they expect him here every hour."

A glow of satisfaction dwelt upon Gerard's features as his daughter said this; and for some time after she had spoken, he lay silent, with the same expression of content upon his face. He seemed to be endeavouring to gain strength by rest and silence that he might speak farther without exhausting himself entirely. He held out his hand to Helena for hers, and laid it upon the pillow, beneath his cheek. After a time he said:—

"Besides the boon of respite to myself, which that medicine-chest contains—a respite now welcome to me on thy account—it holds other things which make its coming a satisfaction to me. In that box lie many valuable secrets, the hoarded sum of many years' experience and practice. Recipes of various kinds for various disorders, jotted down at divers times by myself; several rare unguents, drugs, and carefully-extracted essences; some subtle mixtures, distillations, and condensed spirits; together with explicit declaration of their curious qualities and sovereign effects; and also the mode of using these recondite medicaments. Besides this, my own words, should they be permitted, shall explain to you the healing properties and peculiar nature of the several contents of this chest, which I bequeath to you my Helena. It is the fitting inheritance of a poor physician's child; may it prove a legacy eventually prosperous to her, as it has been hitherto advantageous to her father. The abstruse calculations, the profound research requisite in their formation, with the active duty and beneficial results attendant upon their application and administration have been a solace to him in periods of misery, when no less engrossing a pursuit would have sufficed. My art and its ministry have been a refuge to me, when all else upon earth failed me. May its bequeathed treasures, the sole ones I have to bestow upon her, prove the basis of good fortune and the source of felicity to my Helena!"

Rinaldo soon returned to Rousillon, bearing with him the precious medicine-chest. The remedy, from which Gerard augured relief, is efficacious. His death is deferred until he has fulfilled his desire of acquainting his daughter with the contents of the box, and of making her mistress of the numerous valuable secrets belonging to each. It seems as if life were but lent him until this task is effected, and as if life were valuable to him but so long as it may serve this end; his purpose once accomplished, he resigns life as a burthen, and his parting breath exhales with the satisfaction of having devoted it as he could desire. To his daughter—to the daughter of his Gabrielle—he dedicates his last sigh; and he bids her farewell in the hope of future and eternal reunion with those two sole objects of his earthly affection.

The countess of Rousillon, practised in equanimity by past griefs, not by want of sensibility, consoles the orphan by more maternal kindness than ever. To her care and protection Helena has been consigned, with a dying father's blessing on the long course of benevolence which has already attended his child, and with his full confidence in its gracious continuance. The countess and Helena support each other under their respective losses, by mutual sympathy, tenderness, and affection.

The period of mourning passes in acts of charity and kindness towards those without the walls of the chateau, and in gentle words and deeds among each other, the surviving home-circle within.

The months creep by, and the time approaches for the departure of Bertram. Helena's sorrow is twofold; but although grief for her father's loss serves to screen that which she feels prospectively, yet conscious love bids her hide the tears which have so natural and so obvious a source, lest their double origin be suspected. She dares not trust herself now with Bertram; and though she feels every moment's absence will be bitterly regretted hereafter, when a compelled separation will prolong the present voluntary one, yet she shuns his presence, and inflicts this additional pain on herself, partly to inure herself to the coming one, partly to hide the secret which she instinctively feels is ever ready to betray its existence.

She seeks every pretext for keeping her chamber; or wanders away



solitarily through the park, where she may indulge her melancholy with unobserved sighs and tears, and unheard plaints at her lowly fate, which forbids the hope of linking it with one so far above her.

“ And were I not so humble of degree,” she would murmur, “ yet still I am surely unworthy of him in this selfish passion which would detain him here to waste his youth and nobleness in obscurity. Spirit like his, pines for broader range than the tame sports of the chase ; rank and wealth such as he owns, demand a wider field of benevolence and influence than a country estate ; and why should the personal graces which adorn him be denied to the court of his sovereign, and be doomed to rust here unseen ? Not unseen ? ah, not unbeheld, unnoted, ungloried in ! Only too dearly prized—too fondly worshipped ! And if but by one sole worshipper, yet the plenitude of her idolatry might replace a train of less adoring devotees. How shall I bear his absence ? How do I even now advance its season, by stealing from him, and abstaining from the joint pain and delight of watching his face while yet it is near me ! The time will come when I shall vainly wish to look upon the well-known features ; and when, though pictured faithfully in memory, I shall pine to trace them in their living beauty. Is it that I know my unhappy love is painted on my own face that I fear to trust it within his ken ? Traitor to its mistress, it denies her the only joy she knows, by revealing the too great depth of that joy. Unworthy face ! that lacks beauty in itself, and betrays the suffrage it yields to his ; yet denying by its treachery, the view of the very beauty and sweet favor whose superiority it avows. And when the daily presence of that sweet favor is withdrawn, shall I not feel like some benighted traveller who has neglected the waning hours of light, and now wanders on in chill and darkness, bereft of the blessed sun, who sheds his rays, and dispenses warmth, and light, and comfort elsewhere ?”

Helena was strolling in the park while thus she mused, lamenting ; the deer gathered round her, in expectation of their accustomed notice ; but she paid little heed to them now, so occupied were her thoughts.

Presently she heard approaching footsteps ; and on raising her head, she was aware of an extraordinary figure that made its way

towards her, bowing, and congeeing, and recommending itself to her notice.

It was that of a personage equipped in the most extravagant fashion. His suit was of saffron-colored taffeta, snipped and slashed, and guarded with showy gilt lace, and hung with a profusion of glittering buttons and gaudy scarfs. A pair of bright red hose garnished his legs, which, with his arms, were bound with fluttering bows and ends of ribbon, that made all his limbs seem gartered alike. By his side hung a long sword; in his belt stuck a dagger; and he wore a plumed hat very much on one side, with a spruce defiant air, as if announcing the reckless, roistering, bold soldado.

"Madam," said he, raising his hat, and advancing towards the spot where Helena stood; but cautiously and dubiously, with an eye cast upon the stags and their towering antlers, which plainly indicated the source of his hesitation. "May I beseech of your ladyship's goodness to inform me whether this be, as I suppose it is, the chateau and domain of count Rousillon?"

"It is, monsieur," answered she.

"And may I crave farther to know of your fair grace, whether his lordship, the count Rousillon, be at present at the chateau?"

Helena was about to reply, by mentioning the count's death; but bethinking her that Bertram was now count of Rousillon, she answered:—"Unless the count has ridden forth, since I left the chateau, he is probably at home now;—but if you proceed to the gates, sir, the servants will inform you whether his lordship is able to receive you."

"I am charged with a letter to him from a dear college friend of his, madam, introducing to his acquaintance my poor self, whom you are to know by name as Parolles, and by profession as a soldier. Of appertaining accomplishments which may claim your ladyship's favor, I shall say nothing, as I trust to time for their discovery, or of deeds, as I think fame may one day blow their record hither; but I will rest my present hope of a gracious reception, on your ladyship's own indulgence, of which I behold assurance in that fair form and benignant aspect"

Helena bowed somewhat loftily to this flourish.

"I would ~~crave permission~~ tender my homage at once on your ladyship's fair hand," said Monsieur Parolles, "but that I cannot reach you, surrounded as you are by those antlered deer, in manner of Diana, the huntress-goddess. My warfare has hitherto been with man, and not with stags; with ramparted fortalices, not with embattled antlers; otherwise I would make my way to you, through these living defences, with my own good sword."

"You might not be permitted to assault the inoffensive herd, monsieur;" said she. "The deer are held protected at Rousillon."

"I crave your ladyship's pardon;—but—which way lies the chateau?" said he, with another furtive glance at the deer.

"Yonder, monsieur;" replied she. Then, observing his dismay at finding that she pointed in a direction where a large troop of stags stood immediately in the path, she added, when she had uttered a clear ringing sound of call, to which the deer were accustomed as a signal to gather close round her:—"You may pass on, monsieur, there is nothing to fear!"

"Fear, madam!" exclaimed Parolles, as he hastily picked his way forwards; "fear! But I shall find meeter opportunity, I trust, of convincing you that fear and I are unacquainted, save as I inspire it to my foes."

"I have a notion that monsieur is less to be dreaded as a foe than as a friend;" thought Helena, as the soldado disappeared. "It is not the friendship of such a man as that, or I'm greatly mistaken, that the count would have sought for his son."

Monsieur Parolles, having recovered greater dignity of step, after he had lost sight of the deer, lounged on until he came to the drawbridge, against a side-post of which leaned a tall, gangling lad, eating grapes with great voracity, and chucking their stalks into the moat; while near to him stood a bright-eyed, cherry-cheeked damsel, who was holding the basket of fruit which supplied the lad's enjoyment.

"Now rest thee content, Isabel," he said, while he slightly varied his occupation of chucking the grape-stalks away, by chucking the damsel under the chin; "be not impatient; I have promised to ask my lady's

good leave, and it shall not be my fault, if I do not shortly marry thee!"

The damsel was about to reply, but looking up suddenly, and seeing Parolles approach, she tripped away abruptly, while the grape-eater turned to see the cause of her startled withdrawal.

"Save you, fair sir;" said he to the advancing stranger.

"Save you, good fellow;" replied Parolles.

"None of mine, sir;" said the tall lad. "I hope I know my place better than to claim fellowship with such a sober-suited gentleman. My bauble and coxcomb would sort but ill with such apparel as that;" said he, pointing to the frippery which decorated the person of Parolles; who replied:—

"I see, friend, now; thou'rt the fool here."

"Ay, sir;" said Lavatch; "and no great argument of your wit that you found not that out before. It is the part of wit to find out its counterpart in others, giving it honor, where it exists; as well as readily, though pityingly, to discover its lack, where it exists not. I warrant me now, the fool could sooner track out what amount of folly lies in the gallant soldier, than you, the gallant soldier, can perceive folly where it dwells openly,—in the fool."

"Go to, thou'rt privileged;" was Parolles' only answer.

"Marry, sir, and the privilege of a jester is like to have good scope when such visitors approach the chateau;" returned the clown. "We have been dull enough of late; mourning the dead is no season for jesting. When good men die, and sincerity mourns, light-hearted folly hangs its head for lack of employment, and takes to weeping for company."

"And so, my lord, the late count, was sincerely lamented, was he, knave? Think'st thou, in truth, no gleam of satisfaction lightened the heir's regret, eh? No redeeming solace in the fact that the young lord was now the old lord's substitute,—that the late count's title devolved upon the present count?"

"Faith, sir, I cannot tell; the long-deferred hopes of heirship may have such freaks of gladness; jolly survivorship, that comes unexpect

ed, y into the property may wick from his place as chief-mourner, at grave faced sympathy, watching the funeral train. Inheritance is a sore test of truth. The legatee-expectant tears his hair and beats his breast, till the will be read; then adieu to lamentation, and curses ensue. Reading at dead men's wills is rarer than thanks; and few people leaves testaments that pleasure all friends. He who would live well with his relations after his decease, should make no disposal of his goods. Let him, if he would have posthumous peace, leave his survivors to fight out their respective claims, and battle among themselves their administration to his unbequeathed chattels. If he settle their dispute beforehand by a will, they assault his memory, and abuse him, instead of each other.

"I met one pale face in the park, that bespoke true sadness at heart, matching the outer garb;" said Monsieur Parolles. "It was that of a young lady. Daughter or niece to the late lord Rousillon, I take it? Though I never heard that the young count mentioned a sister. He spoke but of a mother."

"Marry, sir, the lady you met was no relation of our house. She claims no title to the name of Rousillon. All her having is, that she's good and fair; all her descent is, poverty and an honest name; all her title is, Helena, the doctor's daughter."

"Poor! A doctor's daughter!" exclaimed Parolles; "truly, she gave herself as many airs as though she had been Cæsar's heiress; and could not have spoken more haughtily, had she owned, not only the whole herd of those confounded horned beasts—those outlandish branch-headed animals—but the park where they range. She pointed to the chateau with as magnificent a gesture as if she had been its sovereign lady mistress."

"It's strange what lofty style modest merit will oftentimes use, when repressing presumption;" said the clown. "Besides, timid virgins gain confidence from Valour's presence; and it might have been that your worship's soldierly aspect inspired ma'amselle Helena with courage more than ordinary—with enough to confront even audacity itself."

"My address had nothing in it of presumption or audacity either, sir

knave;" retorted Parolles. "I accosted her with only too much respect, I find, now that I learn what her claims really are."

"By my troth, sir," said Lavatch, "simple worth, poor honesty, native goodness, fair innocence, and such like claims to regard, are none with those who know what is due to wealth, rank, and station. We men of the world hold them at their true value. We use them both as they ought to be used. Honesty and innocence, joined to poverty and beauty, we make our prey; while wealth and high birth we adulate, and contrive that its bounty shall requite our fawning. Is't not so, monsieur?"

"I have not time to stay dallying here with thee, fool;" said Parolles. "I will find fitter time to argue conclusions with thee. For the present, I shall desire thee to convey this letter to thy young master, count Bertram of Rousillon; and to inform him that its bearer is monsieur Parolles, a gentleman, and a soldier; and one, moreover, that is known unto a mutual friend—the writer of that epistle."

"I will send the letter by the page to my young lord;" said the clown. "A fool's office is to find occasion for mirth, and to furnish matter for entertainment from his own poor mother-wit, not to bandy to and fro the conceits of strangers, and play the go-between to other folks' brains. Though the paper may be the work of folly, as well as the herald and harbinger of folly, it shall not be the work of the fool to carry it to my lord."

Monsieur Parolles' letter of introduction,—which set him forth as a valiant and experienced soldier, a man of great knowledge, versed in several languages, and a generally accomplished person,—was favorably received by the young count; who welcomed his visitor with warmth accordingly, retaining him at Rousillon as his friend and companion, until his departure for Paris, and inviting him to go thither also.

After Helena's first meeting with the new visitor at the chateau, she was a little surprised at the alteration in his mode of accosting her, which was subsequently as impertinently familiar, as it had then been observant and deferential; but divining the true source of the change, she was as much amused as surprised.

The countess had just left the saloon, leaning on the arm of her son, whom she was about to present with a valued memorial of his late father. It was a ring, an heir-loom in the family, which she had hitherto preserved in a casket in her own private chamber, whither she now led the way, with Bertram, that she might give him some loving counsel at the same time that she bestowed the jewel.

Helena was busied in arranging some carnations and myrtle in a vase near the seat which was usually occupied by her benefactress, who was fond of flowers; and Parolles was lounging in a window-seat close by, occupied in no more serious employment than tapping his fingers with the point of his sheathed dagger.

"The young count will be glad to be absolved from attendance on the maternal apron-string, though his present fealty is touching to behold;" said Monsieur Parolles. "We shall both be glad of enfranchisement from women's society—which hath its charms, doubtless—but which is apt to be insipid after a time, to us who pant for congenial intercourse with masculine minds, for manly pursuits, and stirring scenes, and ambition, and wars, and active life. The only drawback I shall feel, will be commiseration for the regret we shall leave behind us; the gap which our loss will create in the circle here."

"Monsieur Parolles hath the compassionate tenderness which best assorts with bravery;" said Helena. "Valour such as his, must always be pitiful."

"It is as remorseful to its victims, as it is fearful to its opponents;" said he.

"Fearful, certainly, with them; who else?" rejoined Helena. "Courage such as yours, monsieur, fears none so surely, as those who show it a bold face at first."

"Poor devils! they fear what they might trust, if they knew its chivalrous consideration for the fallen;" said Parolles.

"They might safely confide in its forbearance, I've no doubt;" said she.

"You show some acquaintance with true valour, my princess of gen-

tlewomen, and deserve its commendation in return; I can tell thee, I approve thy perspicacity exceedingly."

"I hope it will always serve me to distinguish true valour from its counterfeit, monsieur Parolles;" said she, curtsying to him.

Some days elapsed; and then the lord Lafeu arrived, bringing with him a gracious mandate from the king, containing his majesty's desire to see the young count Bertram of Rousillon at court.

The countess receives the valued friend of her husband with highest tokens of respect and cordiality, although he is come with the express purpose of taking away her son, so doubly dear to her now, since she has lost his father, whose image he is in shape and feature.

Previous to their setting forth, the whole company assembles in the saloon at Rousillon. The countess presents her favorite Helena to the excellent old lord Lafeu, who speaks kindly and encouragingly to the maiden.

For poor Helena is endeavouring to master her emotion, to conceal her overwhelming grief. Now that the time is actually come, for parting with the object of her secret passion, she knows not how to suppress her sobs and tears; and is relieved when the countess's timely allusion to her father's loss, affords a pretext for allowing them to flow unrestrainedly.

She weeps, and says:—

*"I do affect a sorrow, indeed, and yet I have it too."*



The rest of Helena's fortunes is set forth where 'still the fine's the crowd.'



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**DESDEMONA : THE MAGNIFICO'S CHILD.**

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TALE IV.

DESDEMONA; THE MAGNIFICO'S CHILD.

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"A maid  
That paragons description, and wild fame;  
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,  
And in the essential vesture of creation,  
Does bear all excellency."

*Othello.*

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THE gondola glided on. Beneath its black awning,—extended at full length upon its black leather cushions,—lay a young man, clothed in a suit of deep mourning. But in his face there was nothing that assorted with these swart environments. No shadow, save the one from the sad-colored curtains, darkened the countenance, which was radiant with hopeful happy thoughts. No regret for the past, no misgiving of the future, cast a single cloud athwart the sunshine of his fancy, reflected so beamingly in his look. For though the suit he wore was for a father, yet so harsh a parent, so unreasonable a tyrant had that father been, that his recent decease was felt to be emancipation from slavery, rather than a loss and a sorrow. Death had freed the young man from a more intolerable bondage than that of body—thralldom of spirit; and he was now hastening to claim the dearest privilege of human liberty—choice in love, in marriage,—which had hitherto been denied to him. In deference to his father's will, in dread of his father's power,—which would not have hesitated at aught that could secure their sway,—this young man had carefully concealed an attachment he had conceived for a very beautiful girl of humble fortunes, and the marriage to which this attach-

ment had led. But now, that he was free to avow his choice,—to confer on her the rank which was hers by right, but which she had consented to waive until such time as he could safely proclaim it hers,—he lost no time in seeking her, that she might share his home, his name, and the titles and honors with which his father's decease had invested him.

Yet, with the true romance of a young lover, he preferred even now seeking her in the quiet unostentatious style with which he had hitherto stolon to the humble quarter where she lived. The secrecy that he had till now been compelled to observe, was still maintained from choice. The simple gondola, unblazoned with the arms of his family, and propelled by a single boatman,—his own confidential servant, suited best with the coy reserve of love, jealous of betraying its cherished privileges to worldly or indifferent eyes. With the lingering fondness we feel for things which have afforded us a secret pleasure, even at the moment when we are about voluntarily to yield them, this young husband still clung to the mystery which had lent such a charm to the furtive interviews which had until now been the only ones he could allow himself with his Erminia ; and on the very occasion when he was about to bring her forth to the world, the coroneted wife of a Venetian magnifico, he yet once again indulged himself with a meeting which should retain the old charm of secrecy and silence, all enshrouded from observance, either of form and ceremony, or of idle curiosity. The coming time, when he should present to his friends this wife in all her magnificence of beauty—so well fitted to adorn the magnificence of wealth and station to which she would then be raised—was not without its promise of pleasure ; but meantime, his fancy found still choicer pleasure in dwelling upon all the circumstances of simple happiness which had hitherto marked his wedded life.

He closed his eyes, and leaned back upon the gondola-cushions, as the boat glided on in smooth unison with the current of his thoughts. Luxuriously, placidly, they flowed on, picturing the successive events of his recent existence. His memory presented none but pleasant images. He retraced the first time he had beheld his Erminia. He remembered well the sultry afternoon, when, returning by an obscure and unfrequent-

ed canal, from a long course he had been taking in his gondola, he observed her seated by the side of her old blind father, just within the tawny shadow of the curtain which screened their doorway. He remembered how he had thought her of a saint-like beauty, as she leaned towards the old man, with her soft full eyes fixed upon his sightless ones, in tenderness, in sympathy, in anxiety to discover how best she might minister to his comfort or his joy. As the folds of the heavy curtain fell around her, and cast the reflection of their warm orange hue upon her upturned face, and shed a deep golden suffusion round her rich hair, and over her bending figure, she had seemed an incarnation of immortal goodness and grace. He remembered even the small window, above the doorway, with its stage and trellis of commonest wood; yet filled with luxuriant leaves, and blossoms, and branches, some trained, some drooping and flaunting, that bespoke taste, and womanly arrangement, and love of natural beauty, which could bring plants to aid in concealing the almost squalid plainness of their dwelling. He remembered his unwonted timidity, which bade him hesitate, ere he stepped from the boat, and ventured to approach the old man, with an offering of some flowers which he had just brought from the pleasure gardens that his father possessed on the nearest shore of the main land. He remembered the courteous action, almost mingled with condescension, with which the old blind man had accepted the gift; approving their beauty, which the redolence of their perfume rendered perceptible to him, and thanking the profferer for enabling him to enjoy a pleasure rare indeed to a dweller in the city of the sea, and doubly welcome to one whose pleasures of sense were so limited. The manner in which the blind man expressed himself, had struck the younger one, as betokening rank and breeding far superior to his apparent condition; while the gracious beauty of his daughter seemed no less indicative of a higher grade than their coarse garments and obscure dwelling proclaimed. He remembered how soon after that first interview, he had sought another. He remembered the moonlight night when he had first encountered her alone; when, catching a glimpse of her within the little embowered window, he had succeeded in persuading her to allow him a few moments'

converse. He well remembered how these moments had been hasty and reluctant at first; how they had gradually been permitted to lengthen as he lingered; how they had subsequently swelled to hours, as he learned from her her story, and that of her father, who had been born a nobleman, and created an admiral; but who, from reverse of fortune, and a haughty spirit that could neither seek favor unjustly withheld, stoop to beseech where he ought to have commanded, nor consent to wear a title when he had lost the means that should enable him to support it with dignity, had proudly retired to a life of indigence and obscurity with his only daughter Erminia. The young man learned from her, that soon after the reverse of fortune, two far worse blows had befallen them, in her father's blindness, and in the news which reached of the death of their beloved Gratiano, her brother; a youth full of promise, who had fallen in his first naval engagement. From all that Erminia said, the young man gathered that her father had lost nothing of his proud spirit with his altered fortunes; that the old nobleman's patrician blood mantled high as ever; that the old naval officer's sense of dignity abated no jot of its keenness and consciousness; that the penniless blind man, who depended on his daughter's needlework for the bread he ate, entertained a no less exalted notion of what was due to his own honor and to hers, than he had done when in the plenitude of his wealth, and surrounded by every distinction of birth and renown.

Hence it came, that the young man had truly guessed how fruitless it would be to endeavour to gain this proud, though indigent father's sanction to the private marriage into which he hoped to persuade the daughter. He felt that it was not more vain to attempt obtaining his own father's consent to a match with a girl of Erminia's lowly fortunes, than it would be to induce hers to listen to anything like a proposal for a union that was to remain unavowed; he therefore dedicated all his efforts to prevail upon the maiden herself to bestow her hand upon him in secret, and to preserve the knowledge that she had done so, from every one, including even her father. He remembered how many reiterated pleadings, evening after evening (always choosing the twilight hours for stealing thither, when the old blind man had retired to rest,

that he might have uninterrupted communion with his mistress), it had cost him, ere he could induce her to listen to his scheme, even after he had obtained from her the confession that her love equalled his own. He remembered how firmly she had withstood his most persuasive arguments, his most urgent appeals. He remembered how her refusals had waxed fainter and fainter, as her conviction grew of the constancy as well as fervour of his attachment. He remembered how her steadiness had been unable to remain proof against the sight of his pale face after a fit of illness that had seized him, and detained him from their usual meetings for more than a week's interval. He remembered how he had, with the pardonable craft of love, laid his malady solely to the amount of protracted anxiety, and of the suspense in which his affections were held, so long as she refused to become his wife. He remembered well the blushing consent that ensued; the stealthy repairing to church; the privily-pronounced vows, before a priest won to concealment; the stolen joys of subsequent meetings,—enhanced to the young man's sense of delight by their difficulty, their romance, their mystery: for his father was jealous of his paternal controul, and interfered unremittingly in the disposal of his son's time.

And still as the gondola glided onwards, the young man's thoughts recurred to each happy recollection associated with his married love. He saw her still, as she looked, that blissful hour, when, whispering the blushing avowal that he had truly surmised the cause of her altered mien, he learned his prospect of becoming a father. He saw the smile with which she raised her head from his bosom, and told him playfully she had never thought to contemplate her father's want of sight as aught but an affliction; but now she was tempted to regard it as fortunate for himself, inasmuch as it prevented his discerning a change in his child, which might have inspired painful doubts of her honor and his own, ere the time should arrive when all would be cleared by the avowal of her marriage. The young man's heart leaped as he remembered that now this time had arrived, and that the avowal would take place before the birth of her child should impugn Erminia's fair fame either with her father or with any one else. He thought of the joy this would be to



her ; and he urged the speed of his boatman, that the sooner might be imparted those tidings which were to make her and all she loved so happy.

But the gondola had been gliding on and on, all the time of his reverie ; and it had now nearly reached the distant canal, on the banks of which, Erminia and her father dwelt. Suddenly, the young man bade the gondolier pause, and allow the vessel to float softly up the narrow inlet towards the house. One more stealthy proceeding on the spot which had been the scene of so many, ere the young man exchanged for ever mystery for display, secrecy for courted observation, privacy for a worldly life of show, and riches, and high station. He determined once again to steal quietly to the lowly dwelling, as he had so often done before, and indulge himself by seeing his wife before she was aware of his approach. There was a nook near, from whence he could clearly distinguish her, as she sat within her chamber, through the embowered window already mentioned. He had frequently taken pleasure in watching her thus, himself unseen, that he might mark her placid look, as she sat, half hidden among the green leaves, at work, unconscious of his vicinity ; and contrast it with the glow that lighted up her face when he entered her presence, and she beheld him. He could not resist the impulse which bade him lurk there now ; but he had no sooner raised his eyes to the trellised window, than a sight met them, which blasted them as if by a stroke of lightning.

Could it be ? Was it indeed his own Erminia, his wife—his chaste treasure—his modest beauty—she whom he believed to be spotless as unsunned snow—could it be she, whom he now saw enfolded in a stranger's arms, clasped to his bosom, with caresses which she returned with no less warmth than they were bestowed ? Yet again he saw those hateful embraces. Still she clung round the man's neck, and pressed her lips passionately to his ; while still he rained kisses on her eyes, her cheeks, her throat.

The young husband, with one bound, made his way to the prow of the gondola, seized the boathook from his attendant's hand, plunged it into the water, with a single stroke pushed the vessel to the landing-place, and sprang ashore.

He darted up the narrow staircase, and burst into the chamber. With one torrent of incoherent reproach and grief he relieved his full heart; and, scarcely heeding that his abrupt appearance and vehement words so overwhelmed his wife with terror, that she stood speechless, gazing at him, unable to articulate one word, he flung out of the room again as suddenly as he had entered, rushed down stairs, leaped into his boat, and signed to the gondolier to speed away.

The instant her husband disappeared, Erminia dropped to the floor in a swoon. The stranger hung over her:—"Sister, dear sister!" he exclaimed; "is this to be our meeting after all? Am I miraculously preserved from death, only to return and behold thee die at my feet,—before my very eyes? Sister, sweet Erminia! look up! Speak! Look up! He is gone! Do not shudder thus. Speak, dear Erminia."

Her brother raised her from the floor, and tenderly supporting her as he knelt, endeavoured to restore her to animation; but she no sooner gave tokens of coming to herself, than the image of her husband in his transport of grief and wrath seemed to strike her back into senselessness, and she was still lying thus, half prostrate, her head supported against her brother Gratiano's bosom, an occasional convulsive shudder alone giving token that she lived, when the old blind man, her father, appeared at the door of the room.

The sound of his child's fall, when she swooned, had roused him as he sat below; he had groped his way slowly up the stairs, and now stood there calling upon her name, who lay unconscious of his presence.

"Erminia, my child, where art thou? Why dost not answer? Has aught happened? Art thou ill?" said the old man.

"Softly; she has fainted; but I trust to recover her soon;" whispered Gratiano.

"Merciful heaven! What voice is that?" exclaimed the blind man. "Can the dead speak? Can the waves give me back my son? My boy! Gratiano!"

With distress the youth now perceived, that his intention of gradually preparing his father to the knowledge that he was still alive, had been frustrated; while the spasmodic working of the old man's face,

as he eagerly turned his sightless eyes, and stretched his trembling hands towards the voice, showed the powerful effect his so suddenly coming to this knowledge had upon him, and how necessary it was to devise some means of soothing his agitation.

Gratiano gently rested the still-shuddering frame of his sister in a reclining position, speaking a few words the while, in as composed a voice as he could command, to his father ; but the mere tone seemed to renew all the blind man's excitement, and it was not until his son had come towards him, had suffered him to strain him in his arms, to feel his face, his hands, and again to embrace him closely, that the father seemed capable of attaining conviction of the reality of his son's restoration to life and to him.

"But where is Erminia ? She should know of her brother's return. Where is my child, my Erminia ? Did not some one say she had been ill ? That she had fainted ? But where is she ? Lead me to her !" The old man spoke in great perturbation ; his hands shaking, his lips quivering, his face twitching violently.

"Dear sir, be calm ; for her sake, be calm ; she is very ill—she is still in a swoon ; when she comes to herself, let her not find you thus."

Gratiano, thinking that possibly the best means of allaying the blind man's wild alarm, would be to give him a tangible object of anxiety, and trusting also that its being familiar to its touch would make it a source of comfort, led his father gently to the spot where Erminia lay, and by her side they both knelt down, the old man bending over her, touching her pale face and hands softly, and murmuring words of wonder and lament, while her brother renewed his efforts to restore her to consciousness.

But nature herself aided him ; in the imperious demand to bestow life, the young girl was recalled from her death-like trance. Pang succeeded pang ; each throe was followed by another ; while the effort to stifle her groans could not prevent their reaching the ear of her old blind father, who wrung his hands, wept piteously, vainly seeking to help his daughter in her extremity, now wondering its cause, now deploring her plight.

Gratiano, who had run to obtain assistance, now returned with one or two women, neighbours, who hastened in with him, and proceeded to minister to the sufferer, and aid her in her hour of peril.

An hour of peril that hour of travail was ; a painful hour, a sad hour, an hour never to be forgotten by the youth ; for, as he received the new-born babe in his arms, and drew near to the spot where his father sat, in the hope that this new call upon his tenderness might serve to rouse the old man from his grief, he perceived with dismay that he was rigid and motionless ; that he had expired in the very moment which had just given birth to his grandchild.

In the distress, the anxiety, the eagerness, the perplexity of the scene, the old blind man had tottered disregarded, to a corner of the room, where he had come to the terrible half-knowledge of his daughter's secret ; and so, smitten to the heart with the thought of shame, dishonour, disgrace, he had clasped his hands, bowed his head, yielded to the stroke, and died as he sat.

With the unnatural calmness that such extremes of distressful chance sometimes produce, Gratiano replaced the baby in the woman's arms ; and then raising in his own his father's dead body, he bore it reverently and quietly from the room, lest his sister should come to the knowledge of this fresh calamity.

But she was happily out of reach of the consciousness of that, or any other misery. She had sunk exhausted, into a kind of stupor, which held her for many hours.

It was not until the first grey dawn, on the following morning, that she awoke to a perfect consciousness of her condition. Her brother, Gratiano, who sat watching by her bed-side, took her hand, spoke soothingly to her, and was relieved to find how composed her manner now was. Her voice was calm, as she replied to his fond enquiries ; her face was serene as she spoke ; and there came a radiant smile over it, as a little cry reached her ear.

"Hark ! it is mine—it is my child !" And the young mother looked fondly and fully happy, as they brought the babe, and laid it to her bosom.

"Dear brother ! Dear Gratiano ! How good, how tender you are to

your Erminia;" she said. "To have you thus and now returned in life is doubly and trebly a boon. You will restore your sister to happiness, as you have already by your care redeemed her from death. You will go to him—you will let him know how—I see it all now—I understand his error—you will explain to him, you will tell him; will you not, my brother?"

"I? Whom do you speak of? To whom should I go?" faltered Gratiano.

"To my husband—to Brabantio. I understand his mistake—I writhe to think of his agony in believing his Erminia false. O hasten, dear Gratiano, to relieve his suffering—to let him know the vruth."

"His agony? his suffering?" said her brother; "what agony did he not inflict?" And he beheld again his swooning sister, his sorrowing blind father, the distressful travail, the new-born infant, and the old man struck with death.

"He was deceived—he could not guess the truth—he knew not you were my brother—he thought Gratiano dead, as we all believed;" said she eagerly. "But how did my father bear the blest news of your being still in life? I remember, we agreed, I was to break it to him gently, lest the sudden bliss should be too much for the dear old man. And see, he will have another happiness, in his Erminia's ohild; for we will have no reserves now, and I will obtain my Brabantio's leave to tell my father all.

Thus the young mother prattled on, full of the hope which sprang from her own new happiness in the child that was born to her; while she bent over it hoveringly, caressingly, as it lay softly breathing beside her.

"Is it not beautiful, dear Gratiano? What will be Brabantio's joy to behold it! How will my dear old father love to press it in his arms,—to feel its soft cheeks and hands! I long to see my father—you have not yet told me how he bore your tidings, Gratiano. How is he? Where is he?"

"I have laid him on his bed—he is quiet now—best let him rest, dear sister; we all have need of rest;" said Gratiano in a low voice.

" True, I am selfish in my own content ; I forget that you have been watching, my brother. Take some sleep ; and when the sun is high, and you are well rested, you will go and carry comfort to Brabantio—you will take joy to my husband's heart ; will you not, Gratiano ?"

" Sleep you, my sister ;" he whispered, as he leant down, and kissed her cheek.

" I cannot sleep without your promise, dear Gratiano !" smiled she. " Give it me."

He gave her the promise, and soon had his reward in seeing her sink into a slumber, peaceful, sweet, happy. He felt that he needed some such reward ; for the promise he had given, was most reluctant.

" And yet," he thought, " who has she but her brother to see her righted, to see her restored in her husband's esteem, avowedly an honorable and honored wife. It must be done ; and yet to seek that ungoverned madman, to ask his quiet hearing while I speak,—his hearing, whose imperious irrationality deigned not even to await an explanation of what he beheld—voluntarily to meet again him, whose rashness periled my sister's life, his own child's existence, and actually,—if not directly,—caused my father's death, is a hateful task. But it is for her. Let me school myself to its patient fulfilment."

When Erminia next awoke, it was broad day ; yet she still found her brother keeping faithful watch beside her.

She thanked him for his fond care ; but her wistful eyes, fixed on his, seemed to remind him of his promise,—seemed still to demand one act of devotion in her behalf which should outweigh in her estimation all that he had yet done ; which should be of more worth to her than any personal tendance. however fond, and without which, all his ministry towards herself would prove comparatively valueless,—useless.

He saw that her solicitude on this point would render vain any other means he might take to keep her as free from agitation of mind and body as her state required ; he saw too, that her anxiety on this subject, her longing to have her husband's misapprehension rectified, her desire to be reconciled to him, to behold him, absorbed all other considerations, even to the exclusion of farther thought respecting her father ; yet he dread-

ed that at any moment the idea might recur to her, and then, should he not be at hand to prepare her gently for the old man's sudden death, she might learn it with fatal abruptness from some one less cautious than himself. He resolved therefore, at all events, not to set out on his quest of Brabantio, until he should have previously possessed her with the knowledge of their loss.

Carefully, gradually, by gentle degrees, he led her to the fact. He awakened alarm ; he allowed her to surmise that all was not well,—that the news of his son's unexpected redemption from death had dangerously affected their father,—that he had been seriously indisposed,—that he was not better—that he was worse—that he was dead.

Amidst the grief which this intelligence occasioned his sister, Gratiano rejoiced to perceive that no suspicion reached her of the share which her own condition had had in dealing the old man his death-blow. His son's unhopcd-for reappearance in health and life thus suddenly, seemed to afford her sufficient ground to account for their father's fatal seizure ; and her brother sedulously avoided any mention that could undeceive her.

Soon however, her first concern resumed its dominion ; and Gratiano could perceive that again the thought of the husband surmounted that of the father ; her anxiety exceeded her grief ; still, though he could not but be content that aught should subdue the poignancy of her sorrow, yet with the inconsistency of affection, he half grudged that she should owe the mitigation of her distress to such a source : it seemed like deriving comfort from the thought of him whose intemperate fury had been the origin of all their misery.

But there was no resisting those pleading eyes, that ever meekly yet earnestly sought his, beseeching him to commiserate a wife's impatience to be restored in grace, esteem, and honor, to a husband's loving arms.

Could he withhold so dear a boon from one so dear to himself, when it was in his own power to compass her desire, and bestow what would make her so supremely happy ? At whatever cost to his own feelings, it should be done ; he would seek this rash husband without delay, and carry him joy and comfort, that hers might be secured.

With a few words to his sister, telling her his errand, and bidding her be of good cheer until his return, Gratiano left her; hurried to the nearest landing where gondolas were plying, hired one, leaped into it, and bade the boatman convey him to Signor Brabantio's palace on the grand canal. As the vessel cut through the water, the gondolier, with the loquacity of his calling, descanted upon the wealth, rank, and sumptuous style of the young magnifico, who had recently come into the possession of all the family dignities and possessions, by the recent death of his father.

"He does not want for pride, though, any more than his father before him, they say;" said the man; "or for a spice of arrogance to boot, and a haughty disdain of those beneath him, to the back of that. But thus it is; the tyrannous father makes the slavish son, so long as the old one lives, only that he may be the tyrant in his turn ever after."

As the humble hired gondola turned into the grand canal, and neared the dwelling of Brabantio, Gratiano found the palace steps surrounded by a rich train of boats filled with officers of different grades, followers, attendants, and all the retinue of a Venetian nobleman drawn up to await his coming forth.

Presently the magnifico appeared at the door of the hall of entrance, and as he paused for an instant on the marble esplanade which headed the flight of steps leading down to the water, that he might give some parting orders to a domestic, Gratiano pushed his way through the crowd of attending gondoliers and stepped upon the lowest stair of the step.

His approaching figure caught the eye of Brabantio, who no sooner glanced towards him, than the blood which flew up into both the young men's faces, showed their mutual recognition.

But as the magnifico, endeavouring to master his emotion, began to descend the marble flight, with as lofty a step as he could assume, Gratiano advanced, and showed plainly that he was about to address him; which Brabantio perceiving, stopped short, and hastily laid his hand on his dagger.

"Beware, my lord, of violence, which you will repent hereafter, more than any one;" exclaimed Gratiano.



"Thou art unworthy my weapon, fellow;" said the magnifico; "stand from my path, or one of my knaves shall rid me of thy presence."

"For Erminia's sake, I bear thy injurious words, rash lord;" said Gratiano; "but for her sake also, hear me in return."

"Dar'st thou name her, villain—and to me?" said Brabantio, turning as white with rage, as he had before flushed scarlet with surprise.

"Hear me, my lord; give me five minutes' private audience;" Gratiano said, thinking of his sister, and compelling himself to patience.

"Not for the wealth of Venice would I hold one moment's parley with thee;" retorted Brabantio; "stand back, I say! or by St. Mark, I'll have thee forced back into the canal, and drowned like a dog as thou art."

"Nay then, thou shalt hear me declare aloud, what, in pity to thyself, I would have told thee less publicly, proud lord; learn all in one word—I am Erminia's brother"

"Her brother! He is dead!" exclaimed Brabantio; but on uttering his last sentence, Gratiano had turned on his heel, and was retreating to the gondola in waiting for him, when the faltering words "I beseech you, stay, sir; in pity to my wonder, let me know this strange mystery;" reached his ear, and made him retrace his steps.

The magnifico waved the bystanders aside, and hastily led Gratiano into the palace towards his own private room.

Here all was explained; all revealed; and with so little of reproach, save what the bare narrative of the past night's events could not fail of carrying to the heart of Brabantio, that he was fain to confess Gratiano's generosity, and to own that such forbearance inspired even greater compunction than the bitterest blame could have called forth.

He would have grasped the youth's hand, as he besought his forgiveness for the insult he had offered, for the injury he had caused; but though Gratiano accorded a frank pardon for those wrongs which regarded himself, he could not help shrinking from clasping palms with a man whose ungoverned temper excited his contempt, and whose precipitancy had occasioned irreparable evil.

But in Brabantio's eagerness to hasten to his Erminia, to behold his

wife, and ~~the child she had~~ brought him, her brother's reluctant hand passed unnoticed; and he thought but of urging that they should lose no time in returning to relieve her suspense.

No more welcome proposal could have been made; and Brabantio and Gratiano once more repaired to the marble landing, stepped into the nobleman's gondola together, and took their way towards the humble dwelling so soon to be no longer that of Erminia.

The very first hour she could bear removal, Brabantio's impatience to see her his acknowledged wife, and installed in the rank and dignity which belonged to her of right through him, caused her to be conveyed with their infant daughter to the palace on the grand canal; but no persuasions of his sister or her husband could induce Gratiano to accompany them thither. He retained the old humble dwelling which had been his father's and Erminia's in the days of their penury, saying he had a sort of fancy for it as a quiet bachelor abode.

But he did not long occupy it. On the very night of the grand entertainment which was given by Brabantio in honor of his daughter, the infant Desdemona's baptism, Gratiano quitted Venice. Without explanation, without leave-taking, he disappeared; and for many years, was neither seen nor heard of there.

Meantime, the joy of Erminia, save for this one exception, seemed complete. Restored to her husband's good graces—the brief forfeiture of which appeared only to enhance the delight of their present possession—happy in his society, living with him in honor and dignity, sharing with him his noble name and high position, watching with him the infant perfections of their child, the life of Erminia was now as uninterruptedly bright, as it had formerly been chequered, anxious, and sad. Brabantio was proud of her; proud of her beauty, which reflected credit on his choice, and offered sufficient warrant for the imprudence of a youthful and private marriage; proud of her grace, her benign aspect, her air of refinement, her gentle birth and breeding, which rather shed additional lustre on the rank to which he had raised her, than received aught from its bestowal upon herself; proud that she plainly showed, what was indeed the truth, that her marriage had only replaced her in

that station to which her parentage entitled her, though from which misfortune had for a time withdrawn her; proud that her every look and gesture bespoke her to be of equal nobility with himself.

In every costly gratification, in every luxury of attendance, of dwelling, of attire, of ornament, her husband's desire to consult her taste and pleasure was unbounded. He loved to see her profuse in expenditure, and environed by every thing that could proclaim his wealth, and his wish to make it contribute to her enjoyment. He rejoiced in displaying her as the magnifico's bride, as the lady of the Venetian nobleman, as the wife of the senator, the grandee, the man of rank, of opulence, of distinction. He liked to make her the medium of exhibiting his magnificence, his affluence, his power and importance in the state. He chose that the splendour of the lady Erminia's household, the lady Erminia's retinue, the lady Erminia's garments and jewels, should surpass those of any other lady in Venice, because the lady Erminia was the spouse of Signior Brabantio.

But though surrounded by all these evidences of a husband's proud affection and respect, and of his desire that she should appear thus their object in the eyes of the world; yet there lurked half unconsciously in Erminia's heart, a feeling that she would have been contented with far less glare and ostentation in her lot. She was by nature gentle and modest; contented with little, while eager for much; careless of worldly possessions, though solicitous to possess the first treasure in the world; indifferent to money and money's acquisitions, covetous of happiness and affection.

Yet though her modesty would have led her to prefer less parade with more of domesticity in her way of life; still, that very modesty prevented her wish from assuming shape and substance, since it would have militated against what was so evidently her husband's desire; consequently there the preference remained, lurking, unavowed, almost unsuspected, even by herself, while she continued to lead the kind of existence which seemed one of happiness, since it was such to Brabantio.

As long as he appeared pleased, how could she be otherwise? And

for some time, nothing occurred to mar his content, or disturb his complacency. Amid a round of gaiety, of brilliant entertainments, of successive festivities, of growing emoluments and honors in the state, the magnifico's satisfaction seemed full to repletion; but perhaps it was this very plentitude which led to satiety, and then induced waywardness, and at length brought on recurring fits of his old temper, which had once produced such unhappy results. He had inherited a naturally laughty disposition from his father; his position fostered pride and wilfulness; unthwarted by fortune, idolized by his wife, he could scarcely fail to gain fresh conviction of his importance and irresponsible power; insensibly he became more and more capricious and domineering; he indulged his arrogance; he allowed himself to use expressions of disdain, to give way to bursts of choler upon trivial occasions; and in short forgot to keep that strict guard upon his temper, which he had once promised himself he would maintain, after the memorable occasion when his impetuosity had nearly poisoned his whole existence, and that of the beings most dear to him.

So complete was the infatuation of Erminia's fondness for her husband, that she remained unaware of this growing evil in his humour; it was so gradual in its increase, too; it so imperceptibly became his habit; and besides, she herself never being its object, it presented itself so much less palpably than it might otherwise have done to her perception, that she was still unconscious of Brabantio's change of mood.

She never dreamed that the ingenuous young man who had first won her heart in the obscure retreat where he had discovered her, content to sue for her love, to woo her humbly and perseveringly, and to make her his wife in unostentatious privacy and retirement,—who had consented to visit her by stealth, and abide in patience the release from a stern father's coercion, had in fact now become scarcely less imperious, or less of a domestic tyrant than that father.

But though unconscious of the change itself, its influence acted upon her. She did not trace the cause, but her gentleness merged into timidity; her submission into passiveness; her modest doubt into self-mistrust; her eye, which had formerly sought his in happy confidence

acquired an anxious expression ; the smile which once sat on her lips, subsided into a sweet but pensive seriousness ; without losing her native serenity, she was rarely gay ; and though she was placidly cheerful, she never now felt joyous. That hilarity of spirit, that buoyancy of heart, which the mere sight of a beautiful object, or the hearing of a generous deed, or the reading of a poetic passage, or the contemplation of Nature's face, will inspire at a moment's bidding within the breast of youth, guiltless and innocent, were never again to be Erminia's ; the capability of such pure and glad emotion had fled, but she knew not that it was her husband's frown, her husband's contracted lips, her husband's harsher tone when addressing a dependant, issuing a command, or reproving an error, which had banished her girlish lightness of heart.

She thought rather,—if a thought of the kind ever crossed her fancy,—that her new gravity was owing to her new duties in the character of wife and mother ; while she gazed upon her husband, and pressed her child to her breast, with delighted acknowledgment that she welcomed the cares inseparable from such duties, as still dearer than her lost gaiety.

She had given her child, the little Desdemona, as nurse, a woman, whom she had chosen rather for her good qualities, and in commiseration for the misfortunes she had endured, than for the reasons which sometimes influence a lady of high rank in the choice of a nurse.

This poor woman, Marianna Marini, had been the wife of an industrious fisherman, whose dwelling was in the neighbourhood of the lowly one which had formerly sheltered Erminia and her father. Marianna had, in fact, been one of those who afforded neighbourly succour to the lady, in the hour of her hasty travail ; and when Marini's vessel foundered at sea, and he himself was drowned, Erminia took the widow and two children to her own home, appointing Marianna nurse to the young Desdemona, and allowing Barbara and Lancetto to run about the house until such time as one could be promoted to the office of waiting-maid about her lady's person, and the other should be old enough to fill the post of page.

It happened, that just about the time Marianna received the charge

of her child from Erminia, a nurse had been recommended by some lady of high rank, the wife of one of Brabantio's friends; but, hesitating not an instant between the grandly recommended person and the one from whom she had once received signal service, and who was now in want of her support, the lady Erminia dismissed the aristocratic nurse, and retained the fisherman's widow.

This was done of her own accord, and without a thought that her decision could by possibility displease her husband; but when Brabantio learned that the attendant proposed by the lady of a brother magnifico had been rejected in favor of a widow-woman who was known to no one excepting to his wife in the days of her poverty, he loudly expressed his disapproval of what had been done.

He did not tell Erminia that the sight of Marianna was odious to him, as recalling a period of their existence which he wished could be for ever blotted from his memory; but he said that he did not choose risking the affront which might be taken by one of his lady-friends, should any recommendation of hers be slighted. He therefore desired that the fine nurse should be immediately sent for, and installed as head-nurse to his child.

Erminia yielded to her lord's will on the instant. She only rejoiced that while he had commanded the recall of the one woman, he had issued no sentence of banishment against the other; and she determined to avail herself of this tacit permission that Marianna might remain, feeling secure that her attachment towards herself, would ensure her obeying without a murmur the decree that limited her exile to the nursery, though it withdrew her from the nominal appointment.

The widow's submission was rewarded. She patiently allowed her rival to step into all the honors of chief nurse to the magnifico's little daughter; and while Madame Veronica bore the babe on all state occasions, paraded it before the guests, and carried it into the saloon when its father desired to behold it, Marianna was content to perform all the services of washing, dressing, and tending the little creature as its faithful under-nurse. This arrangement suited all parties. The indolent madam enjoyed the emolument and ostentation of official charge; Mari-

anna secured the personal care of one whom she doubly loved—for its own sake, and for its mother's ; Brabantio no longer beheld bearing his child one whom he held in disgust, from her insignificance of degree, and from her significance of association ; while Erminia was content to see her child in the arms of a state-nurse for a few moments in the day, knowing that it rested the remainder of its time either in her own, or in those of one who loved it well-nigh as dearly as herself.

And tender indeed was the cherishing of this humble under-nurse. While the little one's mother was led constantly abroad by her desire to comply with her husband's love of grandeur and display, the part of a mother was fulfilled by Marianna. The baby thrived upon her fostering: it grew agile and sprightly upon her active dandling, and tossing, and ceaseless carrying up and down an open corridor, and large vaulted hall which lay on one side of the palace, apart from the grand entrance. It read dotting indulgence and affection in the fond looks of Marianna herself—those looks which a babe's eyes first seek, as its earliest hint of the exhaustless treasures, and all-wondrous attractive beauty of love ; instinctively hailing at its outset in life, the most precious boon life affords.

It learned the joys of mirth and laughter and childish sport from the antics which Barbara and Lancetto, the widow's children, alternately played for its amusement. They would dance, they would play at bo-peep, they would jingle keys, chink coin, flash bright colours, play at ball, or shuttlecock before it, and invent all manner of devices to amuse the eyes and ears of the baby Desdemona.

Barbara, one of the lightest-hearted, merriest, most frolicsome sprites that ever flew about in the shape of a young girl, skipped and bounded, for ever near ; singing blithesome songs, and scraps of dance-tunes, and odds and ends of mariners' ditties, and gay ballad rhymes. Lancetto, the boy, was more quiet in the entertainment he was able to afford the child ; for when himself a mere child, an accident had destroyed his sense of hearing, and he had ever since become a shy shrinking lad, creeping about almost as silently as though he had been dumb as well as deaf.

Yet he spared no pains to entertain the little creature to the utmost of his ability ; which was not so limited as might have been supposed,

from his defective sense. His quiet methods of engaging the child's attention, and amusing her fancy, had some magic of their own which won her liking beyond all others; and while the deaf boy stood beside his mother's knee, and went through his store of tricks to divert the infant on her lap, the joyous crowings, and elastic springings of the young baby sufficiently testified baby's delight.

While the abrupt play and ringing voice of Barbara would sometimes make the child (who was sensitive and impressible to a remarkable degree) start, or blink, or laugh almost convulsively, with the sudden appeal; the gentle contrivances of the deaf boy for her amusement would never fail to charm her into pleased attention.

It was somewhat singular to observe, how intensely the delight of the child delighted the boy; it almost served to render him his lost sense, and to endue with a strange acuteness what had been so blunted.

For when the babe crowed, his keen watching of the sparkling eyes, the smiling lip, the strained hands and springing form, conveyed so true an impression to him of her joy, that with it came, as it were, some faint echo of that sound—all slight, gentle, and minute as it was. But there were one or two sounds, besides this, that did reach Lancetto's hearing. His mother's voice, his sister's singing, certainly possessed significance for him. He unquestionably knew when the one spoke to him, or when the other carolled her gay airs. He would answer Marianna when she addressed him; and check himself in speaking, if Barbara began to sing. It might be that some expression of her face, some look, some gesture betrayed to him by association what was going on; but it seemed also as if there were some few sounds, clear, distinct, low-toned, and low-pitched in key, which could reach the sense that was irresponsive of all others.

As the little Desdemona grew older, when jingled keys and other baby tricks lost their fascination, Lancetto would persuade his mother to let him take her and her young charge abroad upon the waters of the lagunes, in a gondola; which he, as a mariner's son, had early learned to manage with skill.

There was a private landing, on a by-canal that ran at the back of



the palace, leading to the water from the corridor already mentioned; here the under-nurse and her charge could embark, avoiding the grand entrance with the state gondolas and liveried gondoliers, in attendance there; and thus, under sanction of the lady Erminia's permission, the young Desdemona enjoyed many a pleasant excursion upon the placid waters, amid the cool breezes of evening, accompanied by the faithful Marianna, sung to by Barbara, and rowed—if rowing, the propelling of a gondola may be called—by Lancetto.

But one unfortunate evening, these unpretending progresses were put a stop to, by Brabantio's happening to meet the simple craft, thus freighted; he himself being in company with a gay party of signiors and ladies of his own rank. Mortified to find his only daughter thus unostentatiously attended, he signified his high displeasure that such should be the case; and when he found that this formed her usual equipage, and that she was in the habit of taking her airings with no lordlier style, he immediately appointed what he deemed a retinue better befitting her rank, desiring that in future she should occupy a gondola emblazoned with the arms of their noble house, and guided by six gondoliers in rich liveries, whenever it was thought fit for her to go forth and take the air.

As usual, this mandate of Signior Brabantio's was obeyed to the letter; but to the letter only. In the spirit, it was soon broken through. Like all households where will is the mere dictator,—where despotism reigns,—where orders, rational or irrational in their results, are issued, without appeal from their fiat,—obedience was professed, while subtrefuges neutralized its effect; it was ostensibly observed, secretly contravened; outwardly acted, quietly obstructed in the working.

The lady Erminia, long accustomed to comply implicitly with her husband's commands, had learned, as tacitly, to evade their consequences, where they happened, which they frequently did, to prove inconvenient, and when she could do so without open opposition. Instead of the honest remonstrance, the modest yet plain representation,—which surely beseech a wife, when reasoning a point with a husband, whose indulgence and justice equal his right of rule, and who will grant patient hearing

to one whose interest in the ultimate good established should be no less than his own,—there was in the lady Erminia's conduct a subserviency, a temporizing, which will too often take the place of candour in a timid woman. When such a woman is treated authoritatively, without the rational confidence which should give weight to authority, and which is needed by a timid nature to encourage it in a return of confidence, and in the sincerity it would fain preserve, she is apt to become a moral coward, an equivocator—well, if not a deceiver.

In the present instance, Erminia acted as her whole course of married life had taught her to act. Instead of representing to her husband that their little daughter had become much attached to her nurse; that she liked being with none so well as with her children, who had been accustomed play-mates from babyhood; that if she were to take excursions upon the water, in company only with Madame Veronica, the head-nurse,—whom the combined effects of *rosa-solis*, good living, and state nursing had rendered plethoric and dull,—and surrounded only by the strange faces of the six appointed gondoliers, it was probable that the good effects which might be hoped from the air and exercise, would, if thus administered, be counteracted, and the young Desdemona's health suffer in consequence; instead of telling Signior Brabantio all this, she resolved,—as many a prudent wife would have done, trained in the same school with the lady Erminia,—to let the child take an occasional trip in the state-gondola, attended by her state-nurse, and rowed by the state gondoliers, *of an evening*; while she still permitted her to go out with Marianna, Barbara, and Lancetto in their old quiet way—but *of a morning*, quite early, at an hour when the breezes played as healthfully, as freshly, as coolly, before the sun had gained his strength, as at the time he was sinking to rest—and moreover, at an hour, when there was not the slightest chance of Desdemona's encountering her father's gondola on the lagunes.

As the child grew in years, more of her time was spent with her mother, and less with her nurse. Signior Brabantio's demands on his wife's company to the various festivities and public entertainments which he attended, grew fewer and fewer; he was content to see her keep

www.elibros.org.in her years of their marriage; and the only domestic and equal business with her power time to devote more to her husband's. His attachment towards it enticed to the task of cultivating and cultivating her husband's taste; and thus increasing with some useful passages and teaching her all gentlemanly goodness, excellence, of style, and some useful practical acquaintance more.

Her mother's education had been given to her in the days of her father's prosperity; and had therefore been as simple as were her natural gifts and capacity for profiting by his liberal cultivation bestowed. She was a mistress of surpassing skill in the use of her needlewoman—her various tastes being as varied in kind and design, as they were beautiful in execution; and she took delight in imparting her knowledge of these things to her child, that she might in time render her as much an adept as herself.

But in educating her child there was one thing, which it had been well could the lady have omitted: it was the one thing needful in her own nature, as it was that qualification in her daughter which was alone wanting to make her as perfect a being as ever existed. Could the lady Minnie have taught her the honesty as well as the modesty of innocence—the unflinching candour which ought to belong to goodness and probity, Missy inspired the courage of transparent truth, she would have invested her daughter with a panoply that would have proved her best protection against the diabolical malignity by which she was one day to be assailed, and borne her scathless through the treachery which wrought her fate.

The lady Minnie, however, was not likely to communicate to her child, that of which she herself was not only unpossessed, but unconsciously devoid. She had not the remotest notion that her husband's violent temper had destroyed in her that firmness and fearlessness which should accompany rectitude; she knew not that his imperious disposition had banished from her openness of speech or action; that she no longer had unobscuring sincerity in words, or unconstrained frankness in deeds; and that, in fact, although she had preserved her integrity of purpose, yet that she had forfeited her straightforwardness, her uprightness, her honesty of soul.

The same exquisite gentleness formed the characteristic of the daughter as of the mother; and that which might have been stimulated and strengthened into consummate beauty of character, was, by example, and by circumstance, suffered to degenerate into the single point of weakness which marred its perfection.

Accustomed to see her mother yield in silence even to things in which she did not acquiesce; to see her avoid doing what she tacitly seemed to agree to; to see her evade what she would not object to, and, although she never blamed or opposed in speech, yet quietly condemned and set aside by act—or rather by non-performance; apparently consenting and approving, but in fact frustrating and censuring by a system of silent passiveness; the little girl insensibly acquired just such a system of conduct. It suited with her native disposition,—still, gracious, and serene; full of quiet sweetness, and unruffled calm. It secured her from the chance of opposition of contest in will; it preserved her from the risk of exciting a father's displeasure, or of disputing his pleasure; for involuntarily it was felt that his displeasure could be excited, were his pleasure disputed; and although neither mother nor daughter ever breathed even to themselves—far less to each other—a hint that they held him in awe; yet by mutual though unexpressed consent, they let nothing reach his knowledge that could by possibility prove distasteful to him. They hardly knew it—but so it was; they feared him more than they loved him; they dreaded his disapprobation, more than they hoped to win his approval. Over-strained respect engendered reserve. Had he been contented with a little less submission, he might have commanded more reverence; had he exacted less obedience, he might have obtained dearer regard; with somewhat less implicit observance, he might have had fonder affection. As it was, they honored him as a husband, a father; but to neither of them was he a friend. They were sincerely attached to him; they had no duty dearer, than to do him homage; no wish nearer their hearts, than to do him pleasure; but they never dreamed of asking him to share theirs—they never expected him to derive joy from their joys,—they knew that no such sympathy, such equality, such mutuality of feeling existed between him and them; and accordingly, their regard for

him assumed the quality that was thus engendered. Brabantio remained paramount in the affections of his wife and daughter, but he did not possess their confidence. None of that loving trust, that spontaneous cordiality,—which should pour itself freely into the bosom of a woman's dearest male friend,—subsisted between them ; but not one of the three was conscious of its non-existence. They each thought that love—perfect love, dwelt amidst them ; but love, to be perfect love, must be free, unreserved, unfearing, equal.

One instance of the effect produced on the lady Erminia by her lord's character, has been already cited in the circumstance of her withdrawing from his sight the nurse obnoxious to him, while she quietly retained her in a subordinate situation about the household ; another, in the fact of her adhering to the form of his command respecting her daughter's evening airings in the gondola, while she permitted the infringement of the command itself, by conniving at morning excursions that were not likely to come to his knowledge. In like manner, she indulged her love of unostentatious deeds, her desire to do good privately, by many a secret charity, and kindly visit among the poor ; towards whom her own temporary adversity had taught her commiseration and interest. But with instinctive perception, she discerned that this wish of hers would meet with no response from her husband : she felt that his tastes had no affinity with good deeds done in secret, with charity bestowed privately and unostentatiously ; and moreover, she felt that he had no liking or interest for the poor ; nay, that he shrank, and held himself aloof, from any contact or association with those beneath him in station.

Accordingly, Erminia contented herself with pursuing her own quiet way, carrying comfort and relief to many a destitute family, and suffering fellow-creature ; while she took care so to time her charitable visits, as that they should neither interfere with the hours which Brabantio passed in her society, nor in any way come to his knowledge. She availed herself of Lancetto's aid in conveying her to and from those obscure quarters of the city, whither her benevolent visits chiefly led her ; while the unused landing from the corridor at the back of the palace, afforded her the means of unobserved egress and regress at any hour she found most convenient for her purpose.

On these pious errands she was frequently accompanied by her young daughter, whom she thus trained in kindly sympathy and compassion, initiating her in the sweet comforts that are to be drawn from bestowing comfort on others.

In mildness, in patience, in pity, and tender ministry to the wants and sufferings of her less fortunate human brethren, this young creature was nurtured; and the mother, in teaching her child thus to know virtue, and to taste its own ineffable rewards, taught her also to know and reverence herself. In learning to emulate the virtues of her mother, the young Desdemona learned that mother's true worth and excellence—and she loved her little short of idolatry.

The lady Erminia and her child now spent no hour apart. It is probable that Brabantio's love of parade and retinue might still have maintained Madame Veronica in her office of head-nurse about his daughter's person, even after Desdemona's age placed her beyond the want of any such attendant, had not plethora put a period to that stately dame's services and life, while a sudden fever removed the faithful Marianna from her post, about the same time. But no need had the little girl now of either state-nurse, or under-nurse; her fond mother supplied the place of all other ministrants, in the ceaseless dedication of her thoughts to the one object of all her care, all her joy. She was happy in being thus able to monopolize her daughter, while she devoted the whole of her own time to her welfare; in having her ever with her; in letting her receive from her own hand alone, those services which she would have grudged being obliged to share with menials in offering to the child she so loved.

The little Desdemona repaid this devotion with her whole heart. She never voluntarily quitted her mother's side; and hour by hour would she sit close to her, getting her to tell the long stories she loved so to hear of those old bygone times, that had a sad and quiet beauty of their own; when her gentle mother had been a girl herself, and had lived in retirement and even penury, with her old blind father.

Her child loved to hear of the sightless eyes, that still turned affectionately though vainly towards the voice of her, whose best reward for a life of unaccustomed toil, was to look upon those eyes, which though they

could yield no look in return, yet in their vacancy, and in the slightest flutter of their lids, were dearer than all beside. The child loved to hear of the young nobleman, so handsome, so refined, that came to her mother's solitude, gilding it with a strange new light ; investing it with a mysterious charm it had never known ; of the absorbing feeling which took possession of her, teaching her that all she had hitherto known of affection and attachment and devotion towards those she loved, was faint in comparison with what she now felt for him ; of the romance of their secret marriage ; of the young wife's pride and enthusiastic faith in the noble qualities and exalted worth of him who had thus made her one with himself. The child loved to hear, too, of that gallant boy, the young brother, who, in the days of their prosperity, besought his father's leave to quit their luxurious home for the sea, on which he hoped to gain as glorious laurels as his sire had won before him. She listened breathlessly, eagerly, to the tale of the father and daughter's protracted suspense during that season when hope strove against misgiving, hearing no news of the absent Gratiano ; and to the account of the terrible moment when they were compelled to believe the truth of the intelligence that reached them of his having perished. She never wearied of hearing about that fateful day, when the young seaman suddenly reappeared before his sister's wondering eyes—when, in the midst of their agitated meeting, they had been surprised by the abrupt entrance and as abrupt vanishing of the young husband—when the unexpected knowledge of his son's being still alive had caused the old man's death—when she herself had been born, in the midst of that mingled joy and sorrow—all the events of that strange day, in short, she took ceaseless delight in hearing. And then, she and her mother would pause, in wonder, and regret, that the young seaman should so soon again have quitted the sister who took so true a joy in his return ; and then Desdemona would utter longing wishes that she could behold and know the gallant sailor-uncle, whom she loved for the sake of that mother over whom she had hung in the hour of her own birth.

But years passed on, and still they saw or heard nothing of Gratiano. On the death of Marianna Marini, her daughter had been promoted

to the long-promised post of handmaiden to the lady Erminia. Like many vivacious people, Barbara felt sorrow keenly. The shock of her mother's sudden death had deprived her of rest, and appetite. Her strength and spirits forsook her; she moped, grew thin and pale, and seemed wasting away visibly. The lady Erminia, with her usual gentleness and consideration, thought nothing so likely to revive the drooping girl as placing her about her own person, where she could the more readily receive sympathy, with kind and affectionate words that might as nearly as possible replace the mother's fondness she had lost. That mixture of protection and caressing familiarity which subsists between an Italian mistress and maid, was precisely the treatment best calculated to soothe and restore Barbara from her present mood. The duration of her grief, therefore, was not so long as its first vehemence seemed to forebode; she gradually recovered her spirits, cheered by the gentle kindness of the lady Erminia and her daughter. In the passionate gratitude and attachment she felt towards them, subsided the bitterness of her sorrow; and by degrees, her cheek resumed its color and roundness, her step its alertness, her spirits their natural gaiety; once more her song was heard blithe and ringing as she tripped about the house, sweet and subdued in her lady's presence, or cheerily carolling as her lay kept time to her fingers in her silk spinning.

Not so with her brother Lancetto. The lad had demonstrated little or no violence of emotion at the time of his mother's death; but ever since then, an additional shade of sadness had clouded his face and hung its weight upon his limbs. Ever quiet, and shy, and shrinking from observation, the increase of inertness was less perceptible in him than it might have been in one more naturally active; but still to a watchful eye, he would have given evidence of change—of the change worked by uncomplaining regret, that gnaws inwardly, and shows only in languor, depression, and apathy. The deaf boy crept about silently; disregarded by others, and disregarding them; but then he had never been remarkably talkative or sociably inclined, so that his comrades scarcely perceived that he was more silent, or sought their society less than ever. They merely left him to himself, and gradually came to take no more



notice of him than if he had been hewn out of marble ;—one of the sculptured figures that ornamented the great hall of the palace.

Perhaps his sister might have learned to note that Lancelto was more shy, more retiring, more quiet, and more sadly silent than he had ever been before ; but it happened about this time that her head and heart were filled with quite another matter.

She had fallen in love. There was a certain handsome young gondolier, named Paolo, who had found out that Barbara, the lady Erminia's handmaiden, had not only the sweetest voice, but, to his thinking, the neatest figure, the trimmest ankle, the most sparkling eye, to be found in all Venice, where such pretty gifts abound ; and Paolo had not only made up his mind in awarding to Barbara this preeminence, but he had found means to acquaint her with his opinion, to inform her of the effect this discovery had upon his heart, and to entreat that she would try and discover some personable points in him which she might deem worthy of matching with her own matchless perfections. Some such sentiment—slightly incongruous as it might be in its expression—he contrived to put into easy singing verse—Italian in its ease, its singing chime, and its slender regard to sense, so that it was but full enough of love—*amore and cuore—bellezza, dolcezza—doloroso, amoroso—vezzosa, graziosa—&c. &c.* ; and then he sang them and thrummed them beneath a certain window that he trusted might be hers. By good fortune the window not only proved to be Barbara's, but the voice, the guitar, the sense—or nonsense—of the rhyme, the good looks of the singer, and the pretty flattery of his song, altogether appealed so irresistibly to the young girl's fancy, that she became as much enamoured as himself ; and it was an understood thing between them that as soon as Barbara should have her mistress's sanction to her marriage, they would be united. Meantime, however, the handmaiden was too happy in her pleasant service, too much attached to her lady, to be in any great hurry to leave her ; she accordingly took no pains to obtain that sanction ; but contentedly enjoyed her present life, divided between the pleasures of waiting on her beloved mistress, and the pleasures of courting, with her handsome lover.

Pleased to see her favorite restored to her native gaiety, the lady

Erminia took kindly interest in the affection that subsisted between the young couple, and would sometimes rally her attendant upon having won the liking of the best-looking youth in all Venice, and smile at the dimpling and blushing with which Barbara acknowledged that she thought so too, even while she coyly pretended to care little for good looks, not she; but that she pitied him for being so desperately in love with herself; for she understood that while half the girls in Venice—forward creatures!—were plaguing him with their admiration, and running after him, yet that he couldn't forsooth fancy any body but his own little Barbara.

“But I tell him, my lady, that he must wait, if he must needs have her, and nobody less; for she can't leave her lady yet awhile, to please him, nor twenty such young fellows—good-looking as he may be—or as he may think himself—or as those bold creatures teach him to think himself!”

“Thou wilt allow they've good taste, at any rate;” said the lady Erminia archly; “Paolo is as likely and handsome a man as we shall see in a summer's day! They certainly have good eyes in their heads; eh, Barbara?”

“Good eyes, my lady? Not a bit of it! Not one of 'em! Besides, if they'd ever such good eyes of their own, what right have they to be letting them follow his, and judge his? What are his eyes to them, I should like to know. I wish they'd let his eyes alone!”

“I don't doubt it Barbara;” said her lady; “but as long as his eyes are as handsome as they are, how can'st wonder that others will find it out, beside thyself?”

“I, my lady? I never said I found them handsome, did I?”

“But thou think'st so; eh, Barbara?”

“They're well enough; they're large, and dark, and full of—at least, I believe so; I hardly ever looked at them long enough to know much about them.”

“But perhaps, others have had more courage, and looked at them a little longer, and taken more interest in finding out that they're large, and dark, and full of—eh, Barbara?” said her mistress; amusing herself

with her handmaiden's pretty affectation ; "and if so, these others may be less able to withstand the attractions and influence of Paolo's handsome eyes than the hard-hearted little Barbara."

"I'm not hard-hearted, my lady."

Her lady smiled. "No, in good sooth, Barbara, I do not think thou art."

"No, indeed, my lady ; I only wish, as I said before, that they'd let Paolo's eyes alone"

"And not 'make eyes' at him, as we say ; nor feel inclined to scratch thine out, eh, Barbara ; because he happens to fancy no eyes so well ?"

"Just so, my lady ; I wish they'd only leave both our pair of eyes alone—they're quite enough for each other."

"I've no doubt of it, Barbara ;" said her mistress, with her quiet smile. "And now go see whether my lord be about to attend the senate, and my daughter be ready to come from his room hither. If so, set the embroidery frame ; and then we shall not need thee for an hour or two, which thou may'st idle away, an thou wilt, in looking from the windows of the corridor, that if a certain pair of handsome eyes should be looking up in hope of a glance from thine, neither his nor thine may be disappointed."

Barbara tripped away, blushing, and biting her lip to hide a smile, and humming an air with a little mocking toss of her head, as if truly she cared no jot for the disappointment on either side ; nay, that it could be none to her.

There was a good deal of truth in what had been playfully said, touching the extended influence of the handsome gondolier's eyes. They had caused many a heartache among the damsels of his acquaintance. He was by no means a flirt ; had taken no undue advantage of the personal merits he might boast ; but the hearts of fair Italians are apt to be susceptible, and cannot readily resist the fascinations of a pair of handsome dark eyes, even if they use no other eloquence than their own beauty of form and color. Paolo's had never expressed love, until they encountered pretty Barbara ; therefore they were not to blame for the many conquests they had involuntarily achieved ; and though he was

not entirely unconscious of the several likings he had inspired, yet he had never sought one, until his whole heart became absorbed in winning Barbara's.

It was therefore hard upon him, that the liking of one among these damsels, was so pertinacious, that no cold averted looks, no neglect, no pointed indifference on his part, could suffice to discourage her from persecuting him with evidence of the attachment she felt. This girl, Nina, had all along made no secret of her hope, that by the constancy and fervour of her own passion, she should in time win him; and it was therefore with dismay that she learned he was not only still indifferent to herself, but that he had fallen in love elsewhere. She watched him now, more closely than ever, and it was not long before she made the discovery she sought yet dreaded. She learned who had succeeded where she had failed; she found out who had entire possession of that heart, which she had been unable so much as to touch; and with the fury of despair, she vowed to exchange her love for hate.

She now dogged his steps with no less pertinacity than before—though with quite a different motive. Formerly she had followed him, seeking to attract his notice, to win his regard; now she lurked unseen, furtive, watchful for some opportunity of effecting her vengeful purpose. But she thought herself more determined than she was; she fancied wrath had taken firmer place within her, and inspired a stronger and more fatal intent than it really had. She believed that she had fully resolved rather to kill him than to see him wedded to another; that rage had destroyed all tenderness towards him; but she still hesitated to strike the blow which was to end his life and her torture. At length she determined on making one more appeal to him, ere she gave up all hope, and sealed his fate and her own. It was a stormy interview, although it took place beneath the cloudless azure of a Venetian sky, and on the peaceful bosom of the Lagoon.

Nina had perceived Paolo's vessel taking its way across the broad waters, towards the Lido; she had flung herself impetuously into her father's boat, and, herself a gondolier's daughter, well accustomed to manage the oar, followed in his track.

The young man seeing himself pursued by a gondola propelled by a woman, had paused, wondering and curious, that she might come up with him, and discover who she was, and what she wanted : but when he saw it was Nina ; and her wild words, furious yet imploring, reproachful, bitter, menacing, beseeching, passionate and impassioned, all by turns, told her errand, and the lingering hope with which she had sought him, he regretted having permitted her to overtake him.

Mildly, and softly, he answered at first ; unwilling to speak words few men like to utter to women : but when he found she misinterpreted his gentleness and hesitation, he frankly and firmly told her how impossible it was for him ever to return the passion she avowed. She retorted, by upbraiding him with being warm to another while he was so cold to her ; with being capable of love for one who never would—who never could—love him with such a love as she herself bore him : she sprang into his boat, flung herself at his feet, embraced his knees, and in an agony of entreaty besought him not to kill her by spurning her affection ; then stung by his silence, she started up, and drawing a knife from the folds of her dress, attempted to plunge it into his bosom ; but he, though taken by surprise, succeeded in mastering the weapon, wrenching it from her, and casting it into the water.

“ Weak woman’s hand ! ” she exclaimed, as she clenched it in the scorn and wrath of defeat ; “ weaker still the woman’s heart, that quailed and seconded its impotence, instead of aiding it to strike ! But a time will come, when heart and hand shall avenge more surely,—nerved by your own to-day’s cruelty, Paolo. Merciless to me, you have taught me to show no mercy ; and be sure I will have none ! ”

She cast herself into the other boat, and floated speedily away ; whilst Paolo, agitated and unmanned by this personal struggle with an enraged woman, let his vessel glide on towards the Lido, feeling the solitary spot to be in peculiar unison with his mood. He was glad to be alone, that he might recover from his emotion before the time came for his repairing to meet Barbara. He reached the dreary stretch of sand ; hastily moored his boat ; and threw himself at full length upon the ground.

He was a good-natured, well-disposed youth, and it had given him sincere pain to behold a girl's face distorted with such violence of feeling; to see her frame writhe and fling itself prostrate before him; to witness such transports of mingled anguish and fury—of which he himself was the involuntary cause; and he could not readily throw off the painful impression the scene had left. He thought much less of the attempt she had made upon his life, than he did of her misery, the aspect of which haunted and distressed him. The sun rose high in the heavens, and poured its meridian blaze full upon his unsheltered head, as he still lay there, unconscious of the lapse of time. At length, when he arose, he found himself faint and giddy. Oppressed with his own sensations, and with the noontide heat, he staggered towards his boat, and returned to Venice; thinking that an hour's talk with his Barbara in the shady corridor at the back of the palace, would do more to restore him to his former self, than a whole day of troubled cogitation.

"I'll think no more of the girl;" said he to himself; "after all, is it my fault if she's wilful, and chooses to make herself unhappy? Let me think of sweet Barbara, and her pleasant looks, and pretty ways; such whimsies and caprices, and playful wilfulnesses as hers, are indeed just what should belong to a woman."

Meantime, Nina had returned to Venice, with rage and disappointment fiercer than ever within her. She hurried home; but unable to breathe beneath a roof, had soon restlessly wandered forth again. She had gone at one time for a few minutes into a place of public resort, where some of her companions and neighbours were busied about their ordinary occupations; she stood idly by, watching them abstractedly; but one of them chancing to speak to her, she turned away, and stood apart, leaning against the balustrade of a bridge that crossed the canal near there. Here she remained, watching the current as it swept sluggishly through the arches, beneath the parapet over which she hung, looking wistfully but dreamingly into the water.

After a time, she suddenly roused herself; pushed back the hair from her temples; glared round with a flushed cheek and haggard eye; and then she retraced her steps at a swift pace to her home. She went

straight in, walked towards a particular spot; seized up something which she securely hid; and then hurried out again, as abruptly as she had entered.

"Why delay it?" she muttered; "it must and shall be done; why then delay? Can I ever have better force than now, while the recollection of his scorn burns fresh within me? This is the very hour, I know, when he visits his minion. There, I shall make sure of him."

She glided swiftly along; making her way by some of the narrow alleys and passages that thread an obscure footway through Venice, until she reached the landing leading up into the corridor, at the back of Brabantio's palace. She made sure that the long gallery was empty; she sped along it, and concealed herself among the folds of a tapestry curtain, which was occasionally drawn across a doorway leading into the vaulted hall, but which now hung in dark heavy drapery on one side. Here she paused; her heart beating high; her breath held, but coming short and quick; her pulse throbbing; her feet contracted; her hands clenched.

Presently there was a light step; it came through the hall, and tripped along the corridor,—the person whose step it was, passing so close to Nina as to brush the folds of tapestry that enveloped her. There were voices; a hurried meeting; a light word or two, exchanged for an anxious enquiry; and then Nina plainly heard the words:—

"No time for mocking jest, indeed! How pale you are, Paolo! And how hot and feverish your hands! Your lips are parched—you are ill!"

"I have been lounging too long in the heat, I believe, with my head uncovered; but never fear, Barbara; not quite a sun stroke! I'm only a little giddy—it will pass. Put your cool hand to my forehead—that will cure me in a trice."

"Stay, I will fetch you a draught of iced water; that will refresh you. I won't be gone many minutes."

The light quick footsteps came back; the figure repassed through the curtained doorway; and again, all but touched the hidden Nina.

"Now is the very moment! Now, Nina, nerve thy heart and hand for one sure blow!"

For one instant, she looked forth. He was standing alone, partly turned from her, beside one of the long range of windows which gave light to the gallery on one side, overlooking the canal. He leaned against the embrasure, and had one hand raised to his head; his hair was put back from his face, and showed it wan and suffering.

Not allowing herself to note his look, she only perceived he was alone, and off his guard. Darting from her concealment, she made towards him; but whether some unconscious check to her speed had reached her in the glimpse she caught of his white face, or whether the space she had to traverse, afforded him some instant warning of her approach, he had just time to turn, ere she attacked him. He caught at her upraised arm, and attempted to seize the knife from her: but she was desperate, and clutched it tight, and struck madly at his face with it. There was a stern wrestle—as if between man and man—for a second or so. He, disabled by his illness, and yet more by his disinclination to cope with a woman: she, resolved, and deadly in her purpose, there was more of equality in the encounter than might have been supposed. Twice he had tried to grasp her wrist, and both times she had twisted it from him, and thrust again at his throat—his face; until goaded by such pertinacious assault, he put forth his strength, and forced her to give back.

She stumbled against the open window—lost her balance—fell out, dropping the knife at his feet.

Horror-stricken he gazed out after her. He saw the head strike against the side of the gondola; and then, her body plunge into the water. Once again he beheld the face, as she rose to the surface. It was turned towards him with a look—one look—such a look!—it turned him to stone.

He remained there, hanging out of the window, unable to stir; his eyes staring from their sockets, and fixed upon the waters where they had closed upon the upturned face—his mouth agape and rigid—his arms nerveless—his body incapable of moving—powerless—helpless.

He was found thus by Barbara, when she returned with a draught of water.



On her approaching him, he did not turn towards her; he neither spoke, nor moved. In great alarm she addressed him, and besought him to answer—to look at her. At the sound of her voice, he stared round vacantly, and then fixed his eyes with a mournful gaze upon hers. In piteous accents she implored him to speak—to tell her how it was with him; and then she pressed him to drink of the cool draught she had brought, to revive him.

He waved the glass from him; and with his eyes still mournfully fixed upon hers, he said:—"And so you would have me swallow that, would you, Nina? You cannot stab me—you would offer me poison, would you?"

He laughed a low unnatural laugh, that thrilled Barbara to hear.

"Dear Paolo!" she said soothingly; and would have laid her hand upon his arm; but the instant he felt her touch, he pushed her back roughly, and said, with sparkling eyes, "I would fain not hurt you—you're a woman; but do not tempt me—do not urge me too far."

"Dear, dear Paolo," again she said, weeping; "do you not know me? Will you cast off your own Barbara?"

"I know you, Nina; I know you! You cannot beguile me. I cannot love you—I tell you plainly—I can love none but Barbara!"

"I am Barbara—your own poor little Barbara. O Paolo! Do you not indeed know that it is I?"

She wrung her hands; and once more would have approached him to throw her arms about him, that she might strive to soothe him with those caresses, one of which he had so often vainly entreated, in some of their happy courting times, when she would play the sportive tyrant.

But again, the moment she attempted to touch him, he flung her from him; and this time with such violence, that she reeled, and could not help screaming aloud, with the fright and pain of receiving so heavy a blow from that hand.

"I warn you—keep back, Nina! Or I cannot answer for myself!" he exclaimed.

Just then, her brother Lancetto entered the corridor. He had of course heard nothing of Barbara's cry, but a glance at her disturbed

countenance, and that of Paolo, told him that something fearful was the matter between them.

His sister hastily communicated to him, by means of the signs which were in use between them, that Paolo had been seized with a sudden illness, which seemed to bereave him of his senses; that he did not know her; that he took her for some one else.

Lancetto went towards the unhappy young man, and spoke some gentle words to him: Paolo seemed somewhat calmer at the lad's voice; but when Lancetto attempted to lead him towards Barbara, he drew back, shuddered, and pointing at her, said in a hissing whisper:—"You don't know what she has done—she would have used her knife upon me; but it lies yonder; best pick it up, lest she recover it, and strike at me again."

Lancetto heard not the words, but he saw his sister's eye, directed by the stealthy movement of Paolo's finger, glance towards a corner of the window, in which lay the weapon that had dropped from Nina's clutch, when she fell.

"She sees it! She will use it again! You know not how she persists, to compass her deadly will!" And Paolo darted to the spot, that he might be first to seize the knife.

Barbara, dreading that in his wild excitement he might turn the weapon upon himself, was about to spring forward to arrest his hand; but perceiving that her least movement only seemed to excite him still farther, she checked herself, and stood with clasped hands, and streaming eyes, watching him, and striving to keep herself as motionless as might be. Lancetto, seeing Paolo thus eyeing his sister with distrustful and threatening looks, again approached him, entreating him to be calm, and to say what had angered him against her.

Paolo quietly gave the knife into Lancetto's hand, still, however, maintaining an eye upon Barbara, saying:—"Keep it securely; let her not know where you hide it—and then we shall be safe from her. Come away; let's leave her; if she follow us—as she may—for she's not easily repulsed,—we'll use her own knife upon her. She shall not come between Barbara and me—I've told her so, plainly; let her not tempt me again."

Scowling upon the miserable girl, he drew her brother away ; who, yielding to his movement, contrived to whisper to Barbara that he would but lead Paolo home, and then return to comfort her.

But comfort there was never more to be for Barbara.

Nothing could divest the unfortunate Paolo of the impression he had first conceived after the shock his brain had undergone from that fatal accident, occurring as it did so immediately upon long exposure to the noonday sun. Nothing could do away with his conviction that Barbara was Nina ; and he shunned her with no less abhorrence now, than he had formerly sought her with fondness.

The very love he felt, showed itself in hate ; for he fled Barbara, thinking her to be Nina, for the sake of herself.

This delusion lasted. In all else he was sufficiently sane. He went about his ordinary occupations, little changed ; except that he was subject to restless, excited moods, and a propensity to wander away alone, muttering to himself, and scowling gloomily. These moods always occurred after any attempts on the part of Barbara to see him, or to revive a recollection of their former happy attachment. He always shuddered at her sight ; the sound of her voice—that voice which had always possessed such charm for him—would irritate and bewilder him ; the slightest approach of her hand or person, would be sure to madden him outright ; he would then push her from him, and break away wildly, threatening, frowning, and wrathful.

This distempered fancy and strange aversion of her lover broke poor Barbara's heart. She bore it patiently, bravely, at first, trusting that he might yet recover. She would not yield all hope—until all hope was snatched from her. Her brother Lancetto, from the very first day of Paolo's distraction, had devoted himself to his friend ; he took up his abode with him ; kept near him through the day ; watched him through the night ; and was indeed a brother to his sister's unhappy lover. But Barbara, unable to relinquish all belief that her presence, which had once been the source of such joy, might still be the happy means of restoring him, upon one occasion stole to see them, as was her frequent wont. She found Paolo in a somewhat softened mood ; her

brother whispered that he had been more rational for some days past: she crept into a distant seat, and watched him through her tears, as Lancetto spoke to him in his quiet voice, and told him that Barbara was come to see him.

He started, looked round, and smiled; then uttered that unnatural laugh which was so sorrowful to hear—so unlike his once joyous, open, hearty hilarity.

She ventured to sing, in a soft undertone, some little simple air he had formerly loved.

The familiar strain seemed to lull and assuage his agitation; for he remained quite still, gazing vacantly into the corner of the room where she sat,—and listened. The evening was advanced, and he could distinguish little save the outline of her figure in the dark. She then, tremblingly,—but trying to master her emotion,—commanded her voice sufficiently to sing his favorite song; one which he himself had taught her, and which expressed the love he would have had her feel and avow. Often, in the times of her playful despotism, she had coyly refused to sing him this trifle, pretending it confessed too much; now she volunteered it in the depth of a timidity, earnest, anxious, far other than the once pretended bashfulness; she then affected fear in the height of happy confidence; she now assumed courage in the midst of her heart's dread.

The sound of this air—the well-known words—the association of both melody and verse with his love—with that season of happiness and joy—with her whom he had loved, and still loved, so fondly—affected him profoundly.

He gasped—fastened his eyes upon the spot, as long as the song continued. At its close he held forth his outstretched arms towards the voice, and exclaimed brokenly:—"My Barbara!"

She could not resist that call—that offered embrace; sick and famishing with so long fast from his kindness—athirst for his estranged affection—blinded by beholding them once more tendered thus unrestrainedly, she rushed forward, and threw herself upon his bosom.

But he no sooner felt her clinging to him, than he started up, thrust

her head back, to look at her face, exclaiming :—" Who is this ? Nina !" Then forcing himself out of her arms, and hurling her from him, with a wild cry, he dashed through the doorway, leaped into his boat, and disappeared over the dark waters.

After that night he was seen no more—he never returned ; and after that night, Barbara never lifted up her head. She went about, a forlorn, dejected, listless creature. She, once so gay and chirping,—no cricket was ever a more cheerful household thing—now slunk to and fro, joyless, hopeless. It was plain, her spring of life was snapped—her heart had broken—her spirit had died within her.

Her early merry tunes and happy airs were all forsaken ; she never sang at all, save one plaintive old ditty that seemed to haunt her fancy ; for she hummed it well-nigh incessantly, though apparently without consciousness. She crooned it in her sleep—when, restless and uneasy, she would turn, and toss, and mutter, wetting the pillow with her tears ; she would wake herself with mingled sobs, and broken snatches of this same old song ; she would let her spindle lie idle on her knee, while she gazed vacantly into the cloudless heavens, peopling them with visions, and murmuring its simple burden of " willow, willow, willow." She lapsed into its soft wail, as she watched the evening planet, or crescent moon ; and when the myriad brightness of stars shone forth in the blue depth of a Venetian night, Barbara's sad " willow, willow ; sing all a green willow," would steal from her lips in faint despondent cadence.

She lacked neither attention nor sympathy. Her kind-hearted mistress, the lady Erminia, left nothing untried, to comfort, to restore her ; the young Desdemona, by her tender ingenuity in devising means to cheer and console the dying girl, repaid back the debt which her own babyhood owed to Barbara's ceaseless efforts to amuse and delight her. If in Desdemona's infancy, Barbara's mirth and sprightliness had been exerted untiringly for her pleasure, in Barbara's season of affliction, in her last hours of despair, and heart-broken misery, Desdemona's affectionate care was to the full as cordially, as lavishly, as constantly bestowed in return.

But no kindness could console—no care restore ; nothing could

avail to revive the drooping girl. She literally pined to death before their eyes. She never uttered a complaint; never alluded to her loss; never spoke Paolo's name; but she lost all interest in life, and took notice of nothing, and no one.

She was quiet, utterly passive to all that was said or done, and neither accepted nor refused attentions. She would curtsey mechanically in reply to her lady's enquiries, but she rarely answered them by words. She would try to smile when her young mistress sought to win her notice by some kind piece of thoughtfulness, or gentle endearment.

When her brother Lancetto hovered near, endeavouring to express his quiet sympathy, she would feebly essay to form some of the signs by which they were accustomed to hold communication; but her hands would soon drop by her side; her eyes would fix wistfully; she would sigh, and hang her head; and then she would murmur, "sing all a green willow."

It did not last long. One evening, she was so weak, that her young lady had placed her upon a couch, near the open window, that she might enjoy the fresh air, without exertion; for she could not even bear the motion of a gondola—or rather the fatigue of being conveyed into one.

It was the lady Erminia's private room, where she could have whom she liked, without chance of Brabantio's coming to object that her associates were unworthy her presence. Accordingly, she sat there at her embroidery, while her daughter went to and fro between the frame, and Barbara's couch; now plying her needle with her mother, now setting and rearranging the pillows beneath the sick girl's head, who had sunk into a soft doze. Lancetto stood quietly by, also; for he had come to see his sister, and the lady, bidding him not disturb her, asked him to wait until she should awake.

The chamber was hushed. No sound but the low breathing of the sleeper broke the stillness. Presently, clear and pure arose that sweet voice, so sad, so touching in its tone of forlornness: it seemed an involuntary revelation of her sense of abandonment;—an unconscious utterance of her sorrow; her despair. "Sing all a green willow must be my garland."

A pause, during which the listeners dared not look at each other, lest they might see the moistened eyes, each knew the other wore ; then, again the sweet voice breathed forth soft and low :—" Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve."—The words were checked by a deep sigh, as the sleeper turned uneasily. A moment after, she opened her eyes, and attempted to sit up.

Desdemona was at her side instantly. She assisted her to rise ; re-adjusted the pillows, and whispered a few tender words,—cheering, encouraging. Lancelto crept near to his sister, and took her hand within his.

" He forsook me, because he loved me—I would have you know that : " she said. " Mark it well ; he forsook me, because he loved me. He left me to seek me. He thought I would have kept him from myself—so he threw me off, that he might go and find me. He thrust me away, but to be true to me. He pushed me from him, for my own sake. Be sure of that ; he forsook me, because he loved me. Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve—mark that well ! "

She turned to Lancelto, and pressed the hand that held hers ; she turned to Desdemona and faintly smiled, looking into her eyes. Then she closed her own ; and with an inward breath chanted " willow, willow, will-w ; "—and so, died.

This young girl's sorrow and untimely death made a profound impression on Desdemona. It saddened and depressed her to a degree, of which no less gentle a nature than hers would have been capable. It is rarely that childhood feels grief thus deeply ; but Desdemona was a rare child. Her feelings were moulded of such exquisite tenderness and sensibility, her imagination was so lively, so susceptible, her heart was so benign, so humane, so full of sympathy, charity, and all kindness, that she not merely pitied the unhappiness of others—she shared it ; she not only deplored, and commiserated suffering, she made it her own ; she so warmly, so entirely, interested herself in that which affected those she loved, that she became affected in nearly a similar manner.

Barbara's fate impressed her so strongly, that she fell into a dejected

spiritless mood, which alarmed her mother. She moped, grew absent, abstracted, regardless of the objects which usually interested her. She acquired a habit of standing idly, inanimately, her hands clasped loosely before her, her arms hanging at length, her head drooping, her gaze bent vacantly forth, without having any apparent aim; and once, her mother saw her lips move, and heard her unconsciously murmur the words of poor Barbara's dying song.

The lady Erminia's motherly heart took fright. She thought she saw her daughter sinking into the same apathy which had preceded the young girl's death. She imparted her uneasiness to her lord, and besought his permission to take their child for a short time from a spot which was evidently fraught with too painful association for her young heart.

Brabantio caught his wife's alarm. He gave immediate orders for their removal to a villa he possessed on the Brenta, that change of scene might work its beneficial effects in giving a turn to the thoughts and daily habits of his child. He appointed a proper retinue to attend the lady Erminia and her daughter thither; prescribed the establishment of a numerous household, in his usual style of pomp and magnificence; and promised to join his wife and daughter there, as soon as the affairs of state should permit his absence from Venice.

The prospect of change is seldom without its attraction for childish fancy; and already the thought of going to spend some time in a country-house with her mother, gave evident pleasure to the young Desdemona, and awakened a look of interest and expectation in her face, which it had not worn since poor Barbara's death. Both mother and child enjoyed the anticipation of this excursion and sojourn together; and, but for one incident, their pleasure would have been unalloyed.

On the day fixed for their departure, during the bustle and hurry of removal, Brabantio came hastily into his wife's apartment, where she sat at her embroidery-frame with Desdemona; Lancetto,—who since his sister's death had been appointed page to the lady Erminia,—being there also in waiting.

The magnifico was full of some arrangement he had been making for



his lady's comfort and convenience on the journey ; and he brought with him a casket, which held a rich carcanet, gemmed with rubies and pearls, for Erminia's wear. He told her that he did not expect her to dress like a rustic now that she was to be in villeggiatura ; but that he had brought her a new ornament for her throat as a sample of the style in which he hoped to see her appear when he should come to them at Belvista.

The lady thanked her lord, as so gallant a token deserved ; and added, she should make the casket even more precious by keeping in it the letters she hoped to receive from him, until such time as he could come himself.

He smiled ; and was about to show her the secret of the spring-lock which fastened it ; when perceiving that he had not the key with him, he bade the page go to his room, and fetch it from the table where he supposed he had left it.

Lancetto, of course, did not hear the command. Brabantio, perceiving that the lad stood motionless, instead of starting to obey him with the alacrity which usually followed his slightest behest, exclaimed :—“ Did'st thou mark me, sirrah ? Why art not gone ? ” The angry look caught the lad's attention, but he in vain sought its meaning.

The lady Erminia hastily made a sign to her page, by which she told him what her lord desired ; but Brabantio said : “ What mummer's this ? Must thou await a signal from another, ere thou obey'st my orders ? Methinks, I am lord here, and a word from me may suffice.”

“ The poor lad's deaf, my father ; ” whispered the gentle voice of Desdemona : for her mother was trembling, and could not speak. And then she repeated the order in such method, as that the page should understand what he was to do ; desiring him to hasten, in fetching the key.

The magnifico muttered a frowning “ pshaw,” as he examined the fretwork of the gold casket, and drummed his fingers impatiently on the lid, while Lancetto was gone.

He speedily returned, with a key, which he tendered to Brabantio ; who had no sooner snatched it from him, than he exclaimed :—“ Why, this is not the key of the casket, dolt ! This is the key of my cabinet !

Thou'rt dull as well as deaf, not to be able to bring the key I sent thee for. This is not the right one!"

The page, who heard not a syllable, but saw by the irate expression of his master's face that there was something wrong, stood meekly waiting.

This only incensed Brabantio the more, who exclaimed—"Out of my sight, sirrah! Be gone! I'll have none here, who cannot obey me at a word."

"He is obedient; but, alas, he cannot hear. Bear with him, my lord:" murmured Erminia.

"And why should I? I'll have no dullards about me, that cannot hear a plain command. Let him be dismissed, I say."

"He is Barbara's brother;" said the lady softly; for the reluctance she felt to part with one thus associated, gave her courage to contend for a moment with her husband's will.

"What then? Were he mine own brother, he should away, an' he knew not how to obey a command of mine. See how the contumelious varlet stands there, and stirs not. Begone, fellow; when I bid thee!"

Brabantio actually stamped his foot, exasperated to fury by the deaf lad's unmoved look; so unaccustomed was he to behold any thing but the most implicit and instantaneous submission to the slightest intimation of his will.

The lady Erminia and her daughter both hastily signed to the page that he should retire; but it was too late to appease the anger of the magnifico, who reiterated his command distinctly and emphatically. That Lancelto should be at once and for ever discarded from the household.

His dismissal cost the lady Erminia a pang; not only for the lad's own sake, whom she had grown to like for his quiet ways, and faithful attachment towards herself and child; but for the sake of his poor mother and sister. However, there was no motive which could long weigh importantly with her, against the consideration of her husband's will and pleasure, and accordingly Lancelto was given up.

In the beautiful villa Belvista, on the Brenta, Erminia spent some very happy time. She had the joy of seeing the bloom return to her

daughter's cheek; the look of health revisited the face; the vigour of health reanimated the frame; the gleeful expression native to youth, once more sparkled in the eyes; and the lady felt that her child was spared to her.

It was a charming retreat; and possessed that delight of all delights to a child—especially a Venetian child—a garden. There were bowers, and alcoves, and terraces, and fountains; sloping turfs, statues, and vases; avenues, and tufts of trees; with flower-beds in profusion. Here, the mother and daughter passed their days in blissful retirement. There was ample opportunity for pursuing their studies, their elegant needlework, their music, and the thousand and one feminine avocations, that a mother devises for the employment, the instruction, the pastime of a beloved daughter. Here, Desdemona recovered health, while she acquired that complete knowledge of housewifely duties, and that variety of graceful attainment, which caused her to be afterwards noted as one of the most accomplished women of her time. Here she cultivated and developed those endowments, which subsequently shone forth in such maturity of excellence.

But while her daughter grew in beauty, health, and accomplishment, the lady Erminia gradually declined in strength. Her diminished energy, for some time, was perceptible only to herself; for she shrank from paining her husband by its discovery; and she still more carefully preserved the secret from her daughter, whose youth and happiness she would not have had clouded by anxiety and alarm.

But Brabantio was too sincerely attached to her not to make the discovery for himself. His affection for Erminia had ever been the most powerful of the few tender emotions he had experienced; and it now enabled him to perceive the first apparent tokens of her declining health. He proposed change of air and scene; he planned a delightful journey for her round the coast of Italy in one of his superb galleys.

They took their young daughter with them; they lingered about the beautiful shores of the Adriatic and Mediterranean, and purposely protracted the time of their pilgrimage, that its changes and wanderings might renovate the vigour of her who was so dear.

The plan succeeded ; for a long space of time, the evil was warded off. [www.libtool.com.cn](http://www.libtool.com.cn)

Both mother and daughter were so well pleased with Belvista, that on the conclusion of their tour, they prayed to return thither instead of to Venice ; and Brabantio indulged their wish ; repairing thither himself as frequently as his senatorial duties permitted.

Some years elapsed, unmarked by any particular event ; excepting that each year Desdemona seemed to her fond mother to increase in worth and loveliness.

It was not until her daughter was on the verge of womanhood, that the malady returned, and the lady Erminia died. When her hour came, it found her calm, peaceful, resigned. Her death was serene, gentle, as her own nature. She sank into rest. She slept, never more to awake.

Her mother's death was severely felt by Desdemona. But it produced no such effects, as the shock of Barbara's early fate. Her character had since acquired the sobriety and calm of added years, as well as of holy teaching. Her mother had carefully implanted faith, reliance, and trust, in comforts not of earth ; such as might prove her child's consolation in the hour she herself had long foreseen. Instead therefore of yielding to despondency, and the languor of sorrow, Desdemona strove to derive consolation from a more correct fulfilment of her duties ; she offered her vows to Heaven with a fervour and zeal of piety no less trustful of comfort than unfeigned in humility ; she devoted herself to her father's will and pleasure, and studied how she might best conduce to his happiness ; she resumed those errands of charity and benevolence, which she had first learned to perform from the example, and in the company of her beloved mother. This association alone, would have rendered them dear to her heart, and a source of consolation, even had they not possessed a consoling virtue of their own, in their nature and exercise. But partly from habit, partly from individual feeling, innate and acquired, her own soul alone was cognizant of the source whence she sought to derive solace. She confided to no one her aspirations, her

duteous endeavours; she found what comfort she could from them, but she savoured them silently, secretly, with no other guide than her own spirit of love and gentleness.

To her father she appeared in her quiet assiduity, ever at hand to minister to his pleasure, during his domestic hours; she was affectionately duteous, meekly watchful, beautiful, soft-paced, sweet-voiced, with a hand dexterous and light, eyes serene in their fond observance, and a carriage so still and easy, that she seemed rather to glide to and fro, than to walk or step from place to place. She had a buoyant grace of motion, as if borne on wings, or floated upon air. She looked an embodiment of household peace and joy; the tranquillity, and dove-like nested comfort of home personified in woman—home's presiding genius.

Her father had brought his daughter back with him from Belvista to Venice on the death of her so dear to them both. Now it was that he for the first time learned the full value of the treasure he had lost, and of the treasure his Erminia had bequeathed to him. In his child, Desdemona, he found renewed all those gentle virtues that distinguished her mother; and he grew to love her with a double love.—for her own sake, and for hers of whom she reminded him. Reflected in the daughter, he perceived the true lustre of those qualities inherited from the mother, and learned to prize them at their real worth. He had never so entirely known his wife's excellence as now, that he beheld it shining in his daughter's beauty and virtue.

But though he thus recognized and worshipped gentleness in the characters of his wife and daughter, his own nature gained nothing of corresponding suavity. He was still the same imperious Brabantio; proud, harsh, despotic. Though a fond and indulgent father, he was fond and indulgent only after his own peculiar fashion. He was fond of his daughter for her attention and submission to him; he took pleasure in her beauty, her accomplishments; he was intensely conscious of her grace and loveliness; he indulged her in every desire she could form of taste or luxury. But he was as far as ever from any power of winning her confidence, or responding to the sympathies and hidden instincts of affection and imagination which lurked within her heart.

He knew nothing of them; he suspected nought of their existence beneath that serene exterior, that still demeanour of hers. She was hardly aware of them herself; but had she known them ever so palpably, she would all too surely have felt they could meet no response from him. What aspirations she was imperfectly conscious of, therefore, she locked close within her own thoughts, and let the only satisfaction they sought, be found in secret and in silence.

Thus it came, that her fervour, her yearning desire to hold communion with the spirit of her mother, her hope to gain fortitude for the endurance of her loss, led her forth at quiet morning hours; to matins, or early mass, in one of the churches that neighboured her father's palace. Here, in the gray dawn, before the sun poured his golden rays through the dim aisles, to touch with light and warmth the marble pillars and pavement, would Desdemona kneel, pouring forth her soul in prayer and adoration, in humble supplication, in hope, in trust, in faith.

To this quiet old church, would the magnifico's child steal all unsuspected and unattended, irresistibly drawn thither by her pious ardour, her desire for unwatched devotion.

And thus it came also, that her inward craving for kindness and sympathy, and the necessity for doing good natural to her, led her to watch for those periods of the day when her father's attendance at the senate ensured his not requiring her presence at home, that she might take her way to such haunts of poverty and distress as she knew furnished ample scope for her charitable purposes.

It might be, that beside this feeling which made her shrink from letting her pursuits be known, she was swayed by a spice of that romance which had, in his youth, led her own father to take a sort of delight in the mystery attending his secret marriage and intercourse with Erminia: certain it is, that, inherited or not, there was a strong tendency to the imaginative and the romantic, in Desdemona's disposition. Her fancy had always been strangely excited about that absent sailor-uncle of hers; his abrupt departure, his unexplained absence, his probable adventures, had always possessed a singular charm of wonder and speculation for

her mind, and had occupied many an hour of solitary musing. The fascination which all that presented food for her imagination had for her, might thus have been one source of the unobserved way in which she chose to pay her visits—both of piety and charity. But the main-spring of her reserved conduct, was undoubtedly, awe of her father.

One morning, soon after her return to Venice, Desdemona had gone forth to the old church close by. It was situated on the banks of a narrow by-canal, and was not many paces from the Brabantio palace; so that, plainly dressed and veiled, the lady could readily reach it unobserved.

She had been so engrossed with her devotions, that she did not remark a lad who was kneeling not far from the spot where she had taken her place; but when she arose, upon the conclusion of the service, and passed near to the spot where he still crouched upon the pavement, she was surprised to hear a stifled cry, and find that her veil was abruptly, and as if by an involuntary movement, seized, and its hem pressed to the lips of the kneeling person.

She looked upon the face more attentively; and then she saw that, however altered by illness and suffering, however wan and attenuated, it was no other than Lancetto's.

She uttered his name in a tone of pity and surprise. The lad could not hear the sound; but he saw that he was recognized.

"Forgive me, lady! I could not forbear"—he faltered.

Desdemona, in her benign way, raised him; and then, by signs, asked what had befallen, since he had left the Brabantio palace; expressing regret for the want and misery betokened in his looks; for, haggard eyes, pale cheeks, ragged clothing, spoke a plain tale.

He told her all his little history. How, upon his dismissal, he had gone back to the old place where Paolo had lodged, and where he had watched and tended him in his distraction. How he had lingered there in his own disgrace and abandonment, reckless of what became of him, after being turned away from the only roof where he had known happiness. How he had been driven forth by the pangs of hunger to seek food; how his scanty resources were soon exhausted; how he had hung

about the public places, the Piazzetta, and St. Mark's Square, in hope of meeting with some charitable person who would be content to take a poor lad as page, without a character, on the strength of his need; how he had failed in all such hope; how, when well-nigh starving, he had wandered away from the great thoroughfares, lest he might no longer be able to resist the temptation to beg (which had often beset him, he said, when he beheld the throng of well-clothed, well-fed people passing close to him); and how that, on creeping along by a low deserted mud-bank, skirting one extremity of the city, looking out towards the gulf, he had perceived an empty boat drifting along near in shore. That he had been struck by a look about the craft, which he thought he knew; that he had succeeded in drawing it to land; when, upon examination, he had recognized it surely for Paolo's boat, which he had first suspected it to be.

He went on to say, that, though the finding of the boat had occasioned him much grief,—as affording but too clear evidence of the fate of his friend,—yet that eventually it had furnished him with the means of livelihood; bare and scanty it is true, for there was great difficulty in getting any one to hire a gondolier who had the inconvenient misfortune of being deaf; but still, by plying constantly, and endeavouring to recommend himself by patience and assiduity, he had contrived to ward off absolute famine.

One of Desdemona's first works of charity, was to establish this poor lad in comfort in the old lodging that had been his friend's; he was thus made independent of chance hirers, while she crowned his content, by herself using his gondola whenever she required transport to and fro on her benevolent visitations to the sick, the poor, and the afflicted. By this means, too, the privacy she so much desired, was ensured; for Lancesetto could bring his gondola to the small water-entrance at the back of the palace; and Desdemona, muffled in the quiet black dress, veil, and mask, which formed the ordinary out door dress of a Venetian lady, could step into the boat at any hour she chose, without attracting other observation than that of her own women, who were too much attached to their gentle mistress, and too well acquainted with her virtues, to



doubt the propriety of any thing she chose to do, even had not the dread in which they held the magnifico, her father, prevented their mention of any circumstance that took place in his household unknown to him.

But thus it happened, through the disposition of Brabantio, and the soft timidity of his daughter, that a clandestine air was given to actions not only perfectly innocent, but even virtuous and praiseworthy ; and that one of the most pure of women, insensibly allowed herself a kind of tacit deception, and equivocal procedure in conduct. Yet how should she, conscious of unsullied rectitude in thought, word, and deed, dream that she was swerving from duty in pursuing those duties which religion and charity enjoined, merely because she pursued them in secret? To perform them without parade, without ostentation, seemed their best fulfilment. She did not detect the one motive beside, for concealing them—*anxiety to avoid her father's possible disapproval.* The gentle Desdemona meant honestly ; she did honestly—to the utmost power of her gentle nature.

Very little short of an angel upon earth seemed this gracious lady to her faithful attendant, Lancetto, as he conveyed her about the city on her missions of beneficence, carrying help and comfort whithersoever she went. He looked at her with the reverence with which he would have gazed upon a saint, as she sat there beneath the black awning of the gondola, muffled in her black dress and veil, yet through all which seemed to pierce the radiance of her grace, her goodness, her benign beauty.

Sometimes, when they reached the less frequented canals, or got out upon the broad waters of the lagunes, Desdemona would take off her mask and throw back her veil, that she might woo the welcome freshness of the air.

One twilight evening, as she sat thus, letting the breeze play upon her face, Lancetto perceived its expression change, from its accustomed serenity and sweetness, to a look of regretful reflection.

The fair head drooped towards the shoulder, the cheek paled, the soft eyes filled, the hands fell listlessly, the arms hung by her side, and the quivering lips gave utterance to some sound. The attitude, the whole

appearance, told her thoughts vividly. The deaf lad, Lancetto, felt and saw she was thinking of his sister—poor Barbara; and he almost seemed to hear the sad low-breathed strain that he knew had been hers, and to distinguish those murmured words of “Willow, willow; sing all a green willow!”

The sob Lancetto could not restrain, told his mistress that the poor lad had penetrated the subject of her reverie, notwithstanding his defective hearing, and she hastened to relieve the pain she had unwittingly caused, by some kindly communication addressed to him by such signs as he could comprehend.

To have recovered the services of this poor lad, quiet, mild, and faithfully attached, was a great source of self-gratulation to Desdemona. She was pleased to have him once again, for his own sake, for the sake of those with whose memory he was associated, and for her own.

It is broad noon—the full meridian blaze of an Italian sun—when a squadron of noble war-galleys sail up the blue Adriatic, and cast anchor at the port of Venice. The fleet brings news to the state, of recent conquest against the Turkish force; and soon all is welcome and triumph. The citizens flock to the quays; loud voices rend the skies; the courtyard and avenues to the ducal palace, are filled with messengers hurrying to and fro; its balconies are thronged with senators and dignitaries; everywhere is eager inquiry, and congratulation. Among the crowds who are hurrying ashore from the vessels, there is one solitary man whom no one welcomes, no one hastens to meet, no one receives, no one observes. He is dressed like a Venetian naval officer; and as he prepares to quit the ship in which he has just arrived, he turns to wring the hand of the captain, with warm thanks for his aid since he redeemed him from captivity; telling him he can never forget that to him he owes it, that he ever exchanged the rags of slavery for the uniform which had been his before his capture. The friends part; the captain remaining on board his galley to see all his orders fulfilled to the last; the other hastening on shore. But he no sooner touches land than he quits it again for a gondola, into which he flings himself, desiring

the boatman to convey him as speedily as may be to the Brabantio palace.

“But I will not risk any such fatal effects, as followed my last hasty and unannounced return;” he muttered to himself. “I will send her timely word ere I present myself, that her gentle heart may be prepared to welcome once again her brother. Time wears the edge off all things. Sharpest stones, it wears smooth; actual pangs of grief, it softens; keenest animosities and resentments, it blunts into toleration and forbearance. Years of absence have enabled me to think of meeting him now with equanimity; and if I find that he has been a fond husband to her, I shall learn even to regard him, for her sake. I think I will see him first, that he may aid me to break the intelligence to her. Dost thou think thou can’st bear a message discreetly to the Signior Brabantio for me, fellow?” added the officer aloud to the boatman. “I would have conference with him; and I think of announcing my arrival, ere I present myself.”

“You do well, signior capitano, to use some little ceremonial in addressing yourself to the Signior Brabantio, if you are not intimately known to him;” returned the gondolier. “The magnifico is high and mighty, and does not readily admit strangers to his presence without credentials of their deserving the honor. I don’t think he’s much altered, to judge by what I hear from those who ought to know what he is—being, as they are, of his own household, both Luigi and Antonio. However, there are not wanting, people, who’ll tell you he hasn’t quite so much of the devil’s graces—pride and haughtiness,—as he used to have, before his wife’s death. Santa Madre di Dio! What makes you turn so pale, signior capitano?” added the man, as he witnessed the effect of his last words upon the stranger’s countenance.

Gratiano.—for it was no other than Erminia’s long-absent brother,—made a sign that the boatman should delay his approach to the Brabantio palace; and when they had withdrawn to a more retired spot, he questioned the man farther, upon the terrible words he had dropped.

He now too surely learned the fact of his sister’s recent death; and found that his return had been too late, by a few months only. So bit

terly did he feel this severing of the only tie that bound him to Venice, that it seemed as if his redemption from captivity were valueless, now that she no longer lived, who would the most delightedly have hailed his return. The happiness of freedom was poisoned now that he could not share that happiness with Erminia. Melancholy, and despondent, he hung back from the society of his brother officers; he forsook his quarters at the Sagittary, only repairing thither when naval and military discipline demanded his attendance; and resumed his old lodgings, once occupied by his father and sister. He fed his grief by repeated visits to the church where Erminia's remains were deposited; and for some time her image solely occupied his thoughts.

On a certain evening, returning from one of these mournful visits, his gondola was gliding through one of the quiet canals that led to the quarter where his humble lodging was situated, when in passing near to a fine old church that stood there, the sound of the organ pealed forth into the open air, and made him give a sign to the boatman to pause.

It was the vesper service. Through the draperies that screened the church-door, came the volume of sound,—full, sonorous, solemn. He remained still for a few seconds, to listen, as the tones came floating upon the water, and mingling with the rich warm breath of an Italian sunset; but when they ceased, he could not resist the impulse that bade him motion the boatman to row to the shore, upon which he stepped, ascending the few marble stairs leading to the church, and entered.

As he gently raised the heavy curtain, a flood of glowing evening light poured into the quiet sanctuary; but as the folds fell, after admitting him, the cool shadowy stillness of the place was restored. A few dim lights burned from the tall wax candles on the altar; a faint smell arose from the flowers that filled the vases which decked it; the organ was hushed; the choristers had ceased; a few devotees knelt here and there in the body of the church; while the officiating high priest, with his attendant deacons and acolytes, moved to and fro upon the altar steps with noiseless feet, performing an occasional silent genuflexion, with bended head.

Presently the organ rolled forth in its swelling majesty; and the

choral voices chanted, "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum : Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.*"

Gratiano sank upon his knee with inclined head and lowly heart, as he reverently crossed himself; and as his soul as well as his lips echoed the words, his spirit owned itself elevated and strengthened,—if not rejoicing and exultant, by reason of its brotherly sorrow. Never, since its first having overtaken him, had that sorrow been so assuaged,—so profoundly relieved. He could now for the first time think of his dead sister, as one of the blest in heaven, instead of fruitlessly regretting her loss upon earth.

He remained thus until vespers were concluded; he was then turning to leave the quiet church, when he perceived one figure still kneeling there. It was a lady, attired in black, and closely veiled; who seemed so completely abstracted, and absorbed in her private devotions, as to be unaware that every one else was retiring. He could not help lingering a moment, in the half-formed hope of seeing her more nearly; but finding that she stirred not, he felt the indelicacy of staying to watch her, and withdrew.

He was surprised to find that the remembrance of this kneeling figure haunted him afterwards. Though so completely screened by her dress and veil, there was something that promised grace and dignity, which made him wish to see her arise and move; there was an indescribable air which betokened nobleness and beauty, even beneath that plain black garb; and he could not help feeling an interest about this half-seen lady,—for lady, he was convinced she was,—a restless, inquisitive, irresistible desire to know more of her. Who has not felt this inexpressible, yet invincible attraction towards some other object of the kind at some time or other?

He went for several successive days to the same church, at the vesper hour; but he never saw her there again. He could not forbear watching the spot where she had knelt, until it looked so empty, and so mocking to his wishes, that he could have believed at last, he must have seen her there only in imagination.

But once, as he was threading the busy crowd on the Rialto; hap-

pening to cast his eyes upon the boats that were gliding on the grand canal beneath the bridge, one gondola among them attracted his attention, for, as it shot along, he caught a glimpse of a female figure wrapped in black, which, from some instantaneous and unaccountable conviction, struck him as being the same he had seen kneeling in the church. He ran to the landing-place, took boat, and hurried in the direction which the gondola seemed to be pursuing. But he could recover no traces of it: phantom-like, it seemed to have vanished.

A day or two afterwards, as he lay back in his gondola, musing on the figure which now chiefly occupied his thoughts, he saw it, for an instant, in one of the narrow alleys leading up from the canal, along which he was then floating. It seemed to be attended by another, also darkly clad and veiled. He saw them distinctly, as they passed on through the alley, which was in a poor quarter of the city, but in which, at that hour, there were not many people about. He stopped his boatman in haste, bidding him land there; but not before the gondola had passed beyond the opening of the alley. By the time the boat was brought to, the figures were out of sight. Gratiano leaped ashore, and sped up the passage at a quick pace; but nothing of the veiled lady or her companion could he see. Whether they had entered a house, or whether they turned down some of the winding alleys that diverged from the one in which he had seen them, he could not determine; but certain it was, they were gone.

On the following morning, he fancied he was nearer to his hope of tracking the black-robed mystery. He saw the figure he now knew so well, step from a gondola, on to a landing in front of some shabby-looking houses, one of which it entered. Ordering his boatman to draw to the landing, where lay the lady's gondola awaiting her return, Gratiano determined to await it also; and in the meantime addressed a few words to the attendant who had charge of the boat. He was a young fellow, and sat in a quiet abstracted way, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the door through which his mistress had disappeared, ready to receive her the moment she came back.

Gratiano was surprised at having no reply, when he addressed the

lady's gondolier ; he repeated his appeal in a louder tone, but still there was neither answer, nor token that he had been heard. Provoked at the unmoved way in which the young man sat there, the officer touched him on the shoulder with his sheathed sword, exclaiming:—"How now, fellow, is this sauciness or sulkiness, that I speak twice to thee civilly, without a civil answer?"

The young boatman turned at the touch, and looked in the face of the stranger ; but only shook his head, and resumed his former attitude.

"Per Bacco! The fellow's airs of insolence make one smile;" muttered Gratiano, half laughing. "He deigns not the slightest notice. He affects no less mystery than his lady. He chooses to shroud himself in this silence of his, as she does in her black muffles, so closely drawn around her. She seems some disguised princess of Arabian story ; and this, forsooth, is her mute,—her dumb slave, doubtless."

While Gratiano was debating with himself, whether or no he should make any farther attempt to force the young gondolier into some explanation, a vessel containing a party of brother officers came by ; who, seeing their comrade, hailed him, and asked him to go with them to a grand parade, to be held that morning in the Piazza St. Mark, whither they were all repairing. He declined ; but they persisted.

"What dost thou do here, Gratiano? loitering away the gayest hours of the day? Come with us, man. All the world will be at St. Mark's—all the Venice world—her proudest nobles—her brightest ladies. Nay, an' the promise of beholding fairest women do not lure thee, it must be something of weight indeed detains thee," said one, a handsome young Florentine.

"What if it be some one woman still fairer than any of those thou promisest him sight of, that keeps him here?" said another of the officers with a sly and somewhat sarcastic laugh ; "methinks he has the right lover's look ; shily skulking here by himself, as if in pursuit of some hopeful assignation."

"Is it so, i'faith? And have we caught the sober-seeming Gratiano? Do we find him to be no better than one of ourselves ; a ruffling gallant?"

Marry, it may be so indeed; for now I bethink me, this place bears none of the best character," said the young Florentine officer, glancing at the houses, with a smile, and a light look.

"It seems, you know their repute; and haply, by experience, know too, that it is well-founded;" retorted he who had laughed sarcastically before, and now did so again. "If they are haunts of yours, it is odds, but we are right in our suspicion of its being some gallant adventure which detains our friend from us."

"Have with you, gentlemen!" exclaimed Gratiano, eager to see them gone from the spot; and finding there were no other means of ridding himself of their importunity, than by accompanying them.

When, however, he contrived to escape from their society, and returned in all haste to the spot, he found, as he had expected, the lady, the gondola, the dumb attendant, all flown. Nevertheless, he consoled himself with the circumstance that she had not made her reappearance while the party of officers were there; as he felt, that the chance of her being compromised, would have been far worse to him than the present disappointment.

For some days, he saw nothing of the incognita. He tried to take more interest in the pursuits of his brother officers, and to make himself more companionable among them, than he had felt able to do, in the first sorrow of learning his sister's death. The party of young men who had urged him to join them that morning, were not precisely brother officers of his, they being in the military service, and he in the naval service of Venice; but he had frequently met them, and their frank soldierly gaiety and ease led to some comradeship. They were now full of the expected advent of their general, the warlike Othello, a noble Moor, high in the confidence and employ of the Venetian state.

He had been engaged on their behalf in the long-protracted warfare against the Turks; but this had lately terminated in a glorious action wherein the arms of Venice had been triumphantly successful, and which it was expected would put a stop to hostilities for some time to come.

Great preparations were making to receive the Moorish general with



the honors due to one who had achieved such accumulated renown to the state; and his officers,—who had preceded him to Venice, by a short period, during which he staid behind with one or two others to settle some private affairs that required his personal inspection,—were among those who expected his arrival with the greatest eagerness. In all this, Gratiano took the natural interest belonging to his profession; besides that which he did his best to muster for the sake of being sociable with his comrades, whose thoughts ran upon nothing else. But his own, do what he would, often reverted to the veiled lady, whom he had met so singularly and so frequently, and of whom he had learned so little.

About this time, he bethought him of a charge he had undertaken for a veteran sailor who had been killed in an engagement fought on board that ship which had brought himself home. The old man had been cut down, while fighting at the side of Gratiano; and lay weltering in his blood, until victory proclaimed, gave the officer an opportunity of raising him in his arms, and seeing to his wounds. The old mariner, who knew he was dying, besought Gratiano to waste no more time in looking to hurts that were mortal; but if he wished to do him good, he said, he could do it far more effectually by taking charge of some money—his hoarded pay—which he wished to send to his only son, in Venice. The dying man, pointing to the neckerchief around his throat, as a sign that money was secreted there, gasped a few words—the name of a Venetian alley—the name of his boy, who he said was sickly, and full of sickly fancies, and whose heart was set upon being a painter; and then he rambled off into an unintelligible murmur about the foolish lad, who let his head run upon Titian, and Giorgione, and other daubers upon land—when there was far finer colouring to be seen abroad on the green sea, and along her shores, than upon any canvas that was ever daubed; but the lad was sickly—too sickly for sea, he supposed, and there an end; with which, his words broke off into a gurgle, and he fell dead on the deck.

Gratiano, reproaching himself for having so long neglected the fulfilment of this charge, now set out determined to seek the young artist, and to deliver his father's dying bequest.

He had no difficulty in finding the alley the old man had named; and after a few inquiries, he found that in one of its houses the sailor's son still lodged. He was preparing to enter, when his attention was attracted towards a gondola, which lay near, and which he knew to be the mysterious lady's, by perceiving that within it sat her silent attendant, in precisely the same attitude as before—his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the door, whence he expected his mistress to appear.

Gratiano had scarcely made this observation, ere the lady herself came forth from the house he had been seeking. She advanced hastily towards the landing, as shunning observation; but just as she approached it,—ere she was within reach of her attendant's arm extended to her aid,—her foot slipped, and she might have fallen, had it not been that Gratiano, who stood close by, proffered timely support. It was so respectfully as well as so firmly and earnestly given, and withal so opportunely, that the lady could do no less than accept and acknowledge the attention, which she did with a curtsy full of modest dignity. Two eyes like stars, turned towards him for a moment from beneath the black velvet of her mask; the slight motion of a pair of lips through its mouth-piece was perceptible, while a murmured, "Thanks, signior;" just reached his ear, and the next instant, she had stepped into her gondola, and was gone.

He stood watching the vessel as it swept away, leaving a watery track in its wake, but he saw nothing save the white hand that suddenly appeared from beneath the black folds, as she strove to save herself from falling, the star-like eyes, the lips that formed those gracious words, the bending yet dignified form, the whole figure of lady-like grace and gentleness as it stood lately beside him. Then came self-contemptuous thoughts of his folly to indulge in such reveries. The contrast that his own weather-beaten, sun-burned face,—lined and marked with the traces which captivity, wandering, and all the hardships of a seafaring existence had left,—presented with the evidences of youth and freshness which distinguished this lady-vision; the shy retirement of his manners, unfitted by a sailor life for those graces which should win womanly favor; all pressed upon him as so many reasons against allowing his imagina-

tion to dwell upon youthful beauty, such as he felt hers to be. "Why, these very hairs of mine, dulled and mingled as they are, should warn me, from such wild, such miserable delusion, as feeding my fancy with her image!"

With a smile of self-mockery, he turned away, and was about to enter the house he sought; when his thoughts again reverted to the theme, in shape of the question which had so often presented itself:—"Who can she be? What is her object in these mysterious perambulations? I see her first, in church, kneeling, lost in prayer; but I afterwards behold her entering a house of questionable fame, I see her walking in an obscure alley, attended only by another woman, I find her coming from the abode of squalor and neglect—yet wherever I meet her, there is an air of purity and nobleness invests herself, that proclaims her a being of another sphere than those she haunts. Who, and what, is she?"

A second time checking his thoughts upon the subject which so perplexed and interested him, he went into the dwelling (which was a lodging of the meanest description, where the extreme of indigence alone would choose to harbour), and found his way to the upper story, occupied by the young artist. The door stood ajar, and Gratiano had the opportunity of looking into the room, ere he entered. The whole appearance was that of poverty, and utmost need; but the look on the face of its sole occupant showed its wants were scarce perceived, its bareness hardly felt, in the absorbed contemplation and pursuit of that Art which to him supplied the place of aught else upon Earth, and raised him to a Heaven of happiness in its all-sufficing self. The sick lad had risen from his truckle bed, and was standing before his easel, brush and palette in hand, intently sketching in a figure upon the canvas; while on his wan face there sat an expression of entranced interest—of almost radiant delight. His body was emaciated, his cheek was hollow, his eye sunken, his hands were thin and trembling; but they trembled with eagerness as well as with weakness, and his eyes gleamed with the fire of artistic excitement, as well as with fever and famine.

Gratiano softly approached; but what was his surprise, on coming within view of the picture upon the easel, to perceive that it

was no other than a sketch of the lady in black, who so occupied his thoughts. [www.libtool.com.cn](http://www.libtool.com.cn)

A slight and involuntary exclamation attracted the attention of the young painter; and then Gratiano hastened to account for his appearance, by fulfilling the object which had brought him thither. After he had duly delivered the request of the veteran sailor, and satisfied all the filial interrogation which his story brought forth, he alluded to the sketch upon which the young artist was at work.

"It is an attempt I have made to represent an angel;" said the young man, with enthusiasm. "You smile," continued he, "to see black robes, veil, and mask, instead of the white flowing raiment, the wings, the unshadowed countenance that embody our usual conception of angelic beings. But the angel I have here sought to depict, is one of those permitted to visit Earth—a gracious, a benign, a gentle-hearted woman. A spirit of beneficence, kindness, consolation, who brings help and healing in her hand, charity in her heart, tenderness in her eyes,—whose feet are guided by pity, and whose wings are those of holiness and goodness. She came but now, hither; and I have tried to fasten my impression of her presence upon the canvas."

"Some charitable mortal lady, you would say, who visits the sick and the afflicted?" rejoined Gratiano eagerly. "Do you not know who she is? Have you never seen her otherwise than thus veiled and masked?"

"I never saw her at all until to-day;" replied the artist. "I heard of a kind gentlewoman who brought assistance to an unhappy fellow-lodger of mine, a widow, with two sick children. This poor widow has taken a sort of motherly interest in me, because she fancies I look weakly and hectic, as she tells me; and lately, in her neighbourliness, she came to my room, to put it a little in order, and do a few housewifely matters for me that she thought I needed, kind soul, and then she told me how a strange lady had suddenly come to see her; how she had brought medicines and clothing for the little ones, how she had given relief and assistance to herself, and how she came always alone, always closely veiled, and always in plain black. And then the widow

went on to say, that for all her plain dress, and her being without attendants, and her keeping so closely masked and muffled, she was very sure she was a high lady and a virtuous lady—for that she spoke in a low soft voice, and had a manner all gentleness and kindness, and one of the whitest as well as the lightest hands that ever raised a poor sick child's head, or touched its aching limbs."

"To-day," continued the young painter, "I had myself an opportunity of judging how correctly my widow-woman had described the soft voice and the white hand; for in her neighbourly zeal, my poor friend brought her benefactor to see me, with some of the usual hints about hectic, and fever, and over-work; but the veiled lady, with a delicacy that seems native to her, as well as indicative of high-bred nobleness, spoke of my beloved Art, professed herself pleased with the attempts I have made in it, and ordered a picture, leaving the choice of subject to myself. I have already conceived one, which I shall submit to her, on her next visit; but meantime, I could not resist the temptation I felt to make this sketch of herself from memory, for my own delight."

Gratiano felt just as strong a temptation, to offer the painter his own price for the sketch; but, considering that it would be unfair to deprive him of what possessed so paramount a value in his eyes, as well as his own, asked him if he would paint him a duplicate, as he had taken a fancy to the subject; and after a little farther conversation, and a promise to come and see him again in a few days, the officer took his leave.

When, however, at the end of those few days, he returned to the young artist's lodging, Gratiano found that the widow-neighbour had only too truly discerned the fatal hectic and fever of overstrained thought, and overwrought exertion, together with that of inanition; he learned, that the young painter had been seized with a rapid and mortal illness which ended his existence in the course of a few hours; and that, dying, he had desired to have the sketch of the angel in black, and one other favorite picture, buried with him.

And now took place the event to which all Venice had been eagerly

looking forward. The Moorish captain, Othello, general in the army of the Venetian state, made his entry into the city. He was received from on board his galley, by the duke himself, and all the members of the senate. There was a public entertainment given in the open air, in St. Mark's place, at which the magnificos, the chief families, the most distinguished members of illustrious houses, and all the highest nobility of Venice were present, to welcome with due honor, the return of the victorious warrior.

In virtue of his naval rank, Gratiano was one of the guests. In all that fair assemblage, as may be supposed, the individual who most attracted his attention, was the valiant Moor, Othello. He was curious to behold a man of whom he had heard so much, but whom, as yet, it happened, he had never seen. He had heard of him at Rhodes, Aleppo, Cyprus, and other places, where his vicissitudes in the service of his country had taken him; and everywhere he had heard the general spoken of with one accord, as truly noble, an accomplished soldier, a skilful commander, an honorable man, high in virtue as in renown. All that he now saw of the man's bearing went to confirm the character which fame had given him. He seemed noble among nobles; distinguished among the distinguished; honorable among the honored; full of dignity among the dignified; and worthy of the high regard paid to him by the highest personages there. By the side of even ducal magnificence, and senatorial greatness, he looked princely and majestic,—heroic in soul, as in achievement.

Next to the Moor, there was another person who chiefly interested Gratiano. This was the senator, Brabantio; his brother-in-law. With what a contrariety of emotion did he once more look upon the man, who had played so conspicuous a part in his family history. With what mingled sadness and pity did he look upon the face once so handsome, so fiery, so animated, which had won the heart of his sister Erminia, now worn, and thoughtful, with a furrowed brow, and a contracted lip; the hair, once bright and thick, now thinned, and greyish; the frame, before so erect, alert,—so full of energy of will and action, now somewhat bent, and enfeebled. Years had left their traces upon the haughty

nobleman. At the thought, that it might be regret for Erminia, which had helped to effect this change in the person of her husband, her brother felt that he could forgive him all the pain he had caused, and that he could now clasp his hand in friendship and fellowship. He resolved in his heart, that he would ere long do this ; that he would seek Brabantio in his own house, and for his own sake, as he had formerly shunned the house on his account. He would be friends with that man who had loved Erminia faithfully ; and would mourn her with him in kindness and sincere affection. Henceforth, they should be brothers.

There was another motive too, that drew Gratiano's heart towards him. Beside the magnifico sat a young lady of exquisite beauty, who, he felt could be no other than Erminia's child,—that same babe whose birth he had witnessed, whose first breath had been drawn amid so much of anxiety and agitation.

How strange it seemed, that the little infant he remembered, and that beauteous maid before him, were one and the same being ; and yet how ineffably precious was the sight of her, thus grown into such consummate grace and loveliness. What joy it would be to know her and to love her, for her mother's sake, and for her own.

"And that supremely beautiful creature is my niece—my own niece!" was the thought that continued to fill him with pride and joy as he looked upon her.

"You are fascinated, signior, by the beauty of the lady Desdemona, signior Brabantio's daughter ;" said an elderly gentleman, who happened to be close beside Gratiano, and observed the direction in which his gaze was fixed. "She certainly looks transcendently lovely to-day in that satin robe of virginal white, and with those orient pearls hanging upon throat and arms not less pure in hue than themselves. I don't wonder at your admiration ; it is shared by us all ; young or old, it is just the same ; we can none of us resist the charm of her beauty. The young fellows, of course, are all mad for her—it is the privilege of their age to be as insane as they please on the chapter of woman's beauty. And as for us old fellows—but I beg pardon, signior ; I ought not, perhaps, to rank you among the grey-beards."

"And yet, the grizzled hue of mine, bespeaks me far on my way towards a claim to the honor," remarked Gratiano with a smile; and touching his chin, as he spoke.

"Well then, signior, since you allow yourself to be a candidate for those dubious delights, the respects and dignities of age—ah, one hour of disregarded youth, is, I fear, in truth, worth the whole of their glory!—but, since you allow yourself to be no longer young, we may cry cousinship in regret, and condole with each other on being beyond the hope of swelling the train of the lady Desdemona's admirers."

"Nay, admirers, even adorers, we may be, though at humble and age-stricken distance;" answered Gratiano, humouring the old gentleman's playfulness; "but as to wooers or suitors, many reasons would prevent our aspiring to swell her train of those, I fancy. Her father's pride of birth, for instance, would be one serious obstacle, doubtless, to a poor sailor like myself, who has nothing but his officer's pay, and his good sword, to entitle him even to approach the magnifico and his daughter."

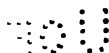
"Her father's pride?" O, ay, signior Brabantio has pride, assuredly; he has already refused many worthy gentlemen his daughter's hand, on the score of lacking blood worthy to mingle with his. There is poor signior Roderigo; that lackadaisical-looking gentleman, yonder, in the pale blue doublet, with the huge roses in his shoes; him, I mean, with the small eyes close together, and the sandy eye-lashes and beard; well, he, poor gentleman, is past cure in love with the lady Desdemona; and no longer ago than last week, it is said, her father forbade him the house, because he had the audacity to make proposals of marriage to the magnifico's daughter, in despite of the sinister bend in his escutcheon; but, in my opinion, he has one far graver objection than his mean birth—he has a mean soul—a poor, silly, worthless, characterless character; and that alone ought to preclude his wooing and winning such a creature as the beauteous Desdemona, who is as good and high-minded as she is fair.

"And does she herself appear to favor any among this large train of which you speak? Is it said that she has yet shown a preference for any suitor above the rest?" asked Gratiano.



“ On the contrary, she seems averse from marriage, and has encouraged no one of the numerous gentlemen who have hitherto paid their addresses. Her father does not urge her to select a husband ; and no wonder he is not in a hurry to part with his only child,—and such a child. But I have my own private reasons for believing,” continued the old gentleman, with that confidential lowering of the voice, peculiar to persons of his gossiping predilection, “ that signior Brabantio secretly cherishes a wish of eventually bringing about a match, between his daughter and her cousin, signior Ludovico ; that handsome cavalier, there, speaking to the lady in the green mantle, with the diamonds and emeralds among her hair, and the snowy plume. It is whispered, that that very lady would give the worth of every jewel she possesses, twenty times told, could she hope to win his love to herself ; but I rather think, neither the wealth and passion of the lady Ginevra, nor the beauty and excellence of the lady Desdemona, will ever tempt signior Ludovico to fall in love with the one or the other. He is too intensely conscious of his own merits, ever to affection any body half so well as his own sweet person ; too cold-blooded and cautious, ever to commit the indiscretion of seeking his happiness at the hands of any one, save from his all-sufficing self.”

“ But see, there is a stir among the group yonder ;” said the old gentleman, interrupting himself, to note what was passing. “ The duke is presenting the general to some of his particular friends among the magnates of the state. Now he approaches signior Brabantio, and introduces the valiant Moor to him, and to his fair daughter. With what a modest sweetness she curtsies. No wonder the general looks upon her with such eyes of admiration. I told you so ; we all do ;—young or old—soldier or civilian—native or foreigner—fair or dark—it’s all one ; and the Moor, for all his swarthy cheek, and his warlike visage,—that has seen many a stormy year of siege and bloodshed, I take it—hath yet a fire in his gaze that shows neither years nor wars have blinded him to the beauties of a fair Venetian lady, when she stands before him in her full perfection, as she now does in the person of the divine Desdemona. See sir, I beseech you,” went on the old



gentleman, "with what a winning grace she stands by her father's side, the unconscious mark of every eye-shot, the theme of every tongue, the observed and admired of all beholders; yet how serene, how self-possessed, in her gentle innocence and unconsciousness she remains; the general seems addressing some words of courtesy to her; and mark how lady-like her ease, how maidenly her attitude, as she listens. She is the magnifico's child in her gracious air of beauty and dignity, while she might be a cottier's daughter for the meek propriety, the adorable gentleness, which, above all else, distinguishes her. You will smile at my raptures, signior; but in truth, the lady Desdemona is worthy of all enthusiasm."

"I doubt it not, believe me, signior;" replied Gratiano; "it needs but look upon her to read the simple justice of your words, however high their extolment. The lady is indeed a rare creature."

And once more he repeated within himself—"and she is my niece—Erminia's child—my own niece!"

His eagerness to claim affinity with her, however, yielded to his disinclination to do it on so public an occasion as the present. He resolved to content himself with gazing upon her from a distance, as a stranger, for to-day; but on the morrow he promised himself, he would indemnify his patience under the delay, by seeking her and her father so early and so quietly, as should ensure to their meeting all the affectionate unreserve of privacy.

But that same night, some hours after the entertainment was over, Gratiano, unable to sleep, in the interest of the anticipation, and wakeful with many conflicting emotions of remembrance and present fancy, went out alone upon the lagunes, that the calm of the waters, the cool breeze of night, the placid light of the moon, might help to tranquilize his mood of thought. On returning to the city, at a late hour, as he passed through one of the smaller canals, a boat approached his own; four men, armed and masked, leaped out upon him, and before he was aware of their purpose, mastered him, bound, gagged, and blindfolded him, and then forced him into their boat, which they proceeded to push in silence from the spot. Not many minutes elapsed before the motion

of the vessel ceased, and then Gratiano found that they were leading him forwards. But when he was guided to the edge of the boat, and forced to get out, instead of having to mount the steps of a landing-place, he felt that he was conducted down some stairs ; and, from this circumstance, as well as from the peculiar damp, oppressive, earthy smell of the air he breathed, he gathered that he was entering some subterranean passage. Then he heard the application of a key—the withdrawing of bolts—the grating of a heavy door, through which he seemed to pass ; then came a silent unbinding of his arms ; and then, the withdrawal of the bandage from his eyes : but he could see none the better for this ; all was pitch dark ; there was the breathing of the men near him—there were their hands busy about him, unfastening the ligatures from his arms, and the folds from his eyes ; but he could distinguish nothing else through the gloom and silence. The moment the gag was removed from his mouth, he burst into a torrent of questions ; but amid the unbroken stillness which was the sole answer he received, his own voice sounded strangely ; the echos of its abrupt vehemence rang out, then died away, as he felt the men withdraw from around him, and then heard the re-closing of the heavy grating door, succeeded by the turning of the key, and drawing of the bolts once again, which told him he was now alone.

Thus suddenly and inexplicably deprived of his liberty, plunged into a dark and solitary dungeon, the whole seemed one of those perplexing dreams that oppress us with a sense of bewilderment and unreality even while enacting them in sleep ; but from such dreams morning awakening relieves us, while in this one, there was throughout a palpability, a force of circumstance, that pressed upon Gratiano but too strongly all along that it was fact and no vision, strange as it seemed.

The stories he had heard, of men mysteriously made away with, for a whim of state policy ; the secret system of the Venetian tribunal the dark deeds which it was whispered the irresponsibility of the senate's despotism suffered itself to use—with the weal of Venice as its avowed object ; all now came into Gratiano's mind, and he could scarcely doubt but he was one of these same victims to the authorized tyranny, which

made sinister accusation and arrest, summary condemnation and execution, a right of rule.

"And am I indeed destined to behold never again the light of the sun, the face of my fellow-man, the glories of earth and sky and sea? Never more to draw the breath of freedom? Am I indeed to be cut off thus in the midst of life? To be snatched from existence; thrust apart to linger in daily death; or perchance, to be led forthwith across that fatal bridge, where the breath of doomed wretches has exhaled in anguish so profound, as to have eternized a name of sighs and misery; and then, the dark cell, the midnight strangling, the sack dragged forth through the low portal, the plunge into the funereal waters. And this fate—is it indeed to be mine?"

Such were involuntarily some of the suggestions that presented themselves to Gratiano's mind, as he revolved the sudden change that had come upon him. A few hours since, a guest at the feast where all the most illustrious and renowned among his countrymen were convened; a free wanderer on the broad waters of his birth-place, unimpeded, unchallenged, at liberty to go whithersoever he might think fit; and now, what a contrast! Immured in a dungeon, left in unexplained silence and darkness, exposed to an indefinite period of captivity, or to possible death.

While these bitter thoughts succeeded, in wearing, ceaseless, circle, and with all that harassing activity of recurrence which it is impossible to resist under like emergencies of sudden and inexplicable event, Gratiano heard a bolt drawn back, as if by a stealthy hand; then another; then the key tried, and unlocked; then the door pushed slowly open; and then in the space it left, stood a figure he well knew.

He recognized it instantly, though it was revealed only by the light of a small lamp, carried in the hand.

It was the lady in black. She was closely masked, and the folds of her veil fell thick and shroudingly round her figure, as usual. She spoke no word, but beckoned; signing Gratiano to follow her forth. He lost no time in obeying; and was about to utter some eager question, when she enjoined silence by placing her finger on her lip. They were no

sooner on the outside of the door, than the lady turned to replace the fastenings ; but Gratiano hastened to relieve her from the office, by closing the massive door, turning the key, and drawing the bolts upon his own empty dungeon. This done, his guide led the way along a gallery, in which Gratiano could perceive several other doors like the one which formed the entrance to the cell he had so lately quitted ; by which he supposed they were passing through the access to a range of dungeons. But he had not opportunity for much observation, for his conductress glided along with a swift though noiseless foot, and he soon found himself at the end of the subterranean passage, where a small door led them through into a labyrinth of arches, which seemed to form the foundation of some large hall, or chamber, above. Soon, they came to a winding stone-staircase, up which the lady led the way. On reaching the summit, they emerged into another long passage, which had also several doors leading from it.

Here, there was sufficient glimmer of breaking light from the approaching dawn, or rather from closing night, to make its way through some high-grated windows ; which the lady perceiving, she extinguished the lamp she carried, and proceeded by such twilight help, as seemed radiant, compared with the subterranean gloom they had left,—more especially to the vision of a man who had well-nigh lost hope of ever again beholding the light of day.

Presently, there was the sound of a footstep ; it seemed approaching, and the lady suddenly turned, threw open one of the side doors, drawing Gratiano silently with her into the room to which it opened. She listened : the step came clanking along the passage, as if it were that of an armed man ; passed the door, went on, and was soon lost in the distance. During these few minutes of suspense, Gratiano had time to cast his eyes round the room in which they had taken refuge ; but he perceived that it was an ordinary looking chamber, small, little furnished, and apparently but little used.

Then the lady opened the door of the apartment, and said in a whispered tone :—“ You can proceed with safety alone, now, signior ; the end of this passage will take you to a large vaulted hall ; cross it ; go through

the opposite entrance leading into a corridor, at the termination of which there is a low door leading out upon a landing-place. At the landing-place, you will find a boat ready to convey you to a place of safety. Farewell!"

Gratiano would have poured forth some of the expressions of gratitude for her protection and aid, some of the eager enquiries he longed to make; but, with her finger again and yet more impressively laid upon her lip, she murmured:—"Stay not to speak, I beseech you, signior; every moment increases your peril—my own. Once more, farewell."

With an earnestness not to be withstood, the lady continued to motion him forth. He could do no other than obey her; but the instant he stepped out into the passage, the door closing upon him, he repented that he had not entreated two words more. He hesitated for a few seconds; then, yielding to an impulse he could not restrain, he determined to risk all for the satisfaction of speaking farther to her, and hastily re-opened the door.

But the apartment was empty. No trace of the lady was to be seen, nor any indication of how she had effected her egress. No door or opening could he perceive of any kind, save a single window, high up, and grated. She had vanished.

After standing a moment, amazed and disconcerted, there came to his recollection two words of hers, which, more than anything else, made him hasten away. She had said, "every moment increases your peril—my own." The thought that he might injure her by remaining, induced him, therefore, to hazard no longer stay, but at once to follow her instructions. He reached the landing-place, as she had directed, and found the boat awaiting him. He saw, as he had half anticipated, that the boatman was no other than the lady's usual attendant, the lad whom he had named her dumb slave.

There he sat, with folded arms, and fixed regard, mutely waiting; but on seeing Gratiano appear at the low portal, he started up, as if expecting him; and upon his stepping into the gondola, pushed off silently, as if in pursuit of previously-received orders. There seemed no need of communication; the boat proceeded steadily, with an evidently

pre-appointed course, quite independent of anything Gratiano might have to propose ; and the adventure concluded with no less mystery than had marked it from the beginning. The young boatman conveyed him through the quiet canals,—hazy, chill, and entirely deserted at that early hour, when night had scarcely given place to the first faint streaks of dawn ; drew to a landing-place at one of the most retired quarters of the city ; and then stopped, as if to let step him ashore. Gratiano could not resist the temptation of addressing a question to his singular gondolier, before they parted ; but as he anticipated, he received no other reply than a slight shake of the head, a shrug of the shoulders, and the continued look of patient expectation that he would land. He did so ; and the gondola, with its silent gondolier, retreated, gliding swiftly away ; both soon lost to sight in the grey mist of morning.

The sun arose gloriously. As its beams put to flight the darkness of the past night, so did the thought of that interview which Gratiano had promised himself should take place on the coming morning, displace the recollection of the last few hours, and the events they had witnessed.

His reception by Brabantio was as full of cordiality and welcome as he could have desired ; and he soon perceived that time had done nearly as much in softening the magnifico's manners, as it had wrought change in his appearance. He showed an affectionate pleasure at beholding one so dear to Erminia ; evinced regret that Gratiano had quitted them, by the warmth with which he greeted his return ; and best proved repentance for his own former conduct, by the eagerness with which he called him brother, and pressed him henceforth to share his home.

“ I have one strong inducement to offer you, in urging this last proposal ;” concluded Brabantio, as he despatched an attendant to the lady Desdemona's apartment, to summon her, that he might present her to her uncle ; “ my daughter has grown to womanhood, in goodness and grace, worthy even of her whom we have lost ; and in finding that a father's fond partiality does not extol her beyond her desert, shall be your best hope of consolation for her mother's loss. Stay with us ;

make your happiness in her love; let her be a child to you, no less than to me; let her find a second father in my brother Gratiano."

"I have already beheld your treasure, my brother;" was Gratiano's reply; "I saw her with you at the duke's entertainment, yesterday, in St. Mark's place; and all that my eyes could inform me of her merit, went to prove the generosity of your goodness, in permitting me a share in the filial love of such a creature. The warmth with which I accept the proffer of your regard and hers, may best evince my sense of its worth."

"Come hither, jewel;" said Brabantio to his daughter Desdemona, as she entered. "What wilt thou say to me, an' I give thee another father, who will love thee scarce less fondly than my foolish old self? What reward do I deserve for finding thy sailor-uncle for thee, and bringing him back with a heart prepared to be well-nigh as soft and indulgent towards thee as mine own? We will make him so welcome, will we not, my girl, that he shall ne'er think of running away from us again. We will try and persuade him to give up a sea-faring life, and sit down contented with us in our sea-girt city, our own swan-nest home. Look upon this gentleman,—my brother Gratiano; and bid thy uncle, thy second father, welcome, Desdemona!"

His daughter advanced; the blood mantling in her cheek, as she murmured a few words of gentle yet earnest welcome. But low as the murmur was, gentle as were the words,—there was no mistaking that voice. Gratiano felt that the lady in black stood before him; that the radiant beauty of the day before, in her virginal white and pearls,—the lovely girl whom he now looked upon, in silken vesture of faint lilac hue, pure and delicate, as some fresh spring flower, or a feather from dove's wing,—and the mysterious figure, black-robed, veiled, and masked, were one and the same person.

"Your uncle has the advantage of us, my girl; he has seen us before; he tells me he saw us yesterday at the duke's feast. I wonder we did not note him among the guests. The signior capitano's is no figure to pass unobserved."

Desdemona uttered a few words of assent to her father's compliment;



but she said nothing of having herself seen Gratiano before ; and her uncle forbore making any allusion to what she evidently did not intend mentioning. He could, however, see that she was no less aware than himself of their having previously met ; for the color of her cheek varied, and there was consciousness in her eye. To her father, her manner was accounted for, by the agitation of beholding, for the first time, that sailor-uncle, whom she knew and loved only through her mother's words of affectionate remembrance.

" But, I believe, we none of us, yesterday, had eyes and ears save for him, our victorious general ;" continued Brabantio. " Beside him, others scarce less worthy of regard, stood unobserved. He is a brave soldier, and hath a noble manhood in his look, as well as a frank and honorable speech that have taken me mightily. I have entreated him hither, as often as he will pleasure me with his visits. He has promised me to come to-morrow. Let thy ordering of the banquet for the occasion do credit to thy housewifery and to my wish to do him honor, good my daughter. The valiant Moor has done brave service to the Venetian state ; and it is fitting her senators should show him all countenance and approval."

" My best care shall be given, to further your wish, my father," she answered.

" And while we are on the subject of household discussion, gentle mistress," continued Brabantio, " see that the green and gold suite of apartments be appointed for the occupation of thine uncle Gratiano. He has consented to grant us his society, and take up his abode here altogether. You see, brother, I treat you with the slight ceremony befitting a relation. I speak of housewifery concerns with my daughter, as though you were not present. You will prove you forgive our scant ceremonial, by treating us with as little ; and by showing that you feel yourself as much at home with us, as we show ourselves to be with you."

Gratiano had not long been domesticated with Brabantio and his daughter, ere he discovered that the softening in the magnifico's manner, was a softening in manner only ; as long as nothing thwarted him, as long as he had his own will uncontradicted, he was all courtesy, affa

bility, and bland condescension : but once cross his humour, or oppose his wishes, and he was as haughty, as irascible as ever. Gratiano perceived that this was the reason of his daughter's conduct. It was the origin of her silent acquiescence in whatever her father advanced ; whether true or not, that mattered less, than that he should remain uncontradicted. It was the source of her omitting to mention their having seen each other before, when they met in Brabantio's presence, lest it should occasion the discovery of her private expeditions ; in which, masked and veiled, she secretly went forth to prosecute her charitable purposes, without her father's knowledge, relying solely on their innocence, their virtuous intention.

Gratiano's questions led to her candid statement, that it was because she felt alms-giving, charitable visitation of the sick and the miserable, and affording such help and healing as lay in her power to bestow. were the sole sources whence she could hope to derive comfort under the affliction of losing her mother, which had first induced her to try this course ; and that it was only that she might not importune or displease her father, that she had failed to ask his sanction to a procedure in which she could see no harm.

Upon her uncle's pointing out how she might risk compromise of reputation in the pursuit of even good deeds, by disguise and privacy, which gave them a clandestine air ; she, in her own meekness, and sweet docility, voluntarily promised to pursue them thus no more. She said that she would entreat her good uncle to be her almoner ; that he should advise with her in future ; should aid her to dispense her gifts judiciously and appropriately ; and that then, through the faithful Lancetto, they should be conveyed into the hands of the selected objects.

Gratiano told her how he had so frequently met and watched her ; how he had become interested in her, little thinking the tie which really existed between them ; how he had styled her, in thought, an Eastern princess, bound on some strange errand, such as took the lady of old through the streets of Bagdad ; how he had settled Lancetto to be her dumb slave, her faithful mute.

And then, Desdemona, amused with her uncle's story, would inter-

rupt him laughingly to explain, that her attendant was not dumb, but deaf, though no less faithful than any mute of Arabian story.

And then, Gratiano drew from her an explanation of that mysterious night-adventure, when she had been his protectress, and rescuer from captivity.

He learned that she did not even know who the prisoner was. But that one of her women had informed her of what she had overheard from some of the retainers, about a man that was to be seized by order of signior Brabantio, and conveyed into one of the subterranean range of strong rooms belonging to the palace, until such time as he could be removed to the state-prisons. That the girl had afterwards heard the man telling of a mistake that had been made in the person seized ; that they feared signior Brabantio's displeasure when he should discover their error ; that they determined to make farther search for the right man ; and as for the poor devil who had been caught by mistake, he might remain where he was, quietly, as he could tell no tales through stone walls, that would reach signior Brabantio's ears. That on hearing this from her scared damsel, Desdemona had determined to take upon herself the quiet evasion of the prisoner ; and that since, she had been much diverted by the girl's report, of how the men had found the captive escaped, the untouched locks and bolts on the outside of the dungeon door plainly indicating that he owed his rescue to the intervention of the Madonna, or to his own wicked dealings with the infernal powers.

"And by what sorcery did Desdemon herself contrive to make her escape, that night ?" said her uncle, adopting the caressing abbreviation of her name, used by her father ; "my curiosity to learn more of my swart preserver, out-weighed my discretion ; and I returned to the room, to find her flown. But how ? For on a nearer knowledge, I find she is unprovided with wings, notwithstanding any other seraphic attributes she may possess."

Desdemona explained to her uncle, that a sliding-panel gave egress from the room in question.

"In future, depute me to carry out your benevolent chivalries for you, Desdemona mia ;" said her uncle. "You are not exactly the figure

for an amazon; all the brazen armour in the Arsenal would not suffice to make a knight-errant of you; all the black veils and plain gowns in Venice cannot disguise that noble air of thine; do not flatter thyself that a mask will hide, what it has pleased Heaven to set with two such lustrous jewels; no, no, there's a lady-look about thee, Desdemona, that would betray thee through russet, home-spun, and dowlas. Take my word for it; best keep thou thy state, and send me of thine errands; thou shalt have no occasion to reproach me with lack of zeal, I warrant thee."

Desdemona playfully consented to dub him her knight-almoner, on condition, she said, that he would resign his commission in the navy, and keep house with her father and herself.

"With you for our housekeeper, I know not what would tempt me abroad. It is agreed then, between us. I give up the sea; you give up"——

"Hush! my father comes. It is a covenant;" said Desdemona, hastily interrupting her uncle, as signior Brabantio entered the apartment, bringing with him the Moorish general Othello; who was now a frequent visitor at the senator's palace.

The conversation fell, as was usually the case, upon the general's adventures; Brabantio loving to hear him relate them, as often as he could draw Othello upon the theme

Gratiano listened, too, with interest, to a history delivered by its own hero, with as much modesty as eloquence; and he thought he could perceive that his niece was a no less attentive hearer than either her father or himself. He knew that she was full of high romantic feeling, of enthusiam, for all her outward serenity; he knew of what devotion, of what magnanimity she was capable; he knew how her soul aspired to nobility of deed, and how it claimed affinity with virtue and heroism, notwithstanding the feminine gentleness and maidenly reserve of her demeanour,—her quiet look, her still motion, her soft voice, and low-toned speech; and, knowing all this, it did not surprise him to see her greatly interested by the narrative of the warlike Othello.

She would sit at her embroidery-frame in the window, while he con-

versed with her father and uncle ; but the latter observed, that as the story proceeded, her needle would forget its office, and the stitch remain unset, until some perilous circumstance, or hair-breadth escape were passed ; and that then, a sigh of relief, as of long-held breath, accompanied the suspended drawing through of the silk. He noticed too, that if anything occurred to interrupt the discourse, she would ingeniously contrive to bring it back to the same subject ; or if, by chance, called forth herself, by some domestic duty, she would return in so short a space of time, as plainly bespoke her eagerness to lose no word.

Yet notwithstanding that he discovered these tokens of the interest which Desdemona took in the conversation of her father's guest, her uncle did not see that she showed any particular favor or attention to that guest himself. She paid the respect and courtesy due to her father's friend ; but still she behaved with more of coldness and distance, than seemed compatible with her preference for his discourse. Gratiano would have been more at a loss to account for this inconsistency of manner, had not his previous knowledge of his niece, and of the reserve which her father's peculiarity of temper had superinduced, helped him to form some idea of the true cause of what he saw. He noticed that she showed more of this retiring coldness when her father was present, than at any other time. He noticed that she was more shy, more distant, when Brabantio was by ; that she insensibly became less frank and artless, before him ; a cloud of restraint seemed to sit more or less upon her, then ; giving a bashful hesitation and irresoluteness to her manner, — a want of candour and straightforwardness to her words. To have seen her bid good morning to the Moor, when her father presented him to her on his arrival, or say farewell on his departure, the lady might have been thought almost to feel repugnance towards him, so shrinkingly and tremblingly she curtsied, so reluctantly her hand seemed to meet his ; and yet, when seated behind her father's chair, at her embroidery-frame, there was a color in her face, an eagerness in her quivering fingers, a warmth and glow of interest in her very silence, that told the avidity with which she devoured every word that was falling from the speaker's lips.

These evidences of imperfect sincerity, of a want of consistent candour and openness in the character of the otherwise perfect Desdemona, gave her uncle inexpressible pain. He could but too well account for them. He knew the irrational wilfulness of her father too well, to be at a loss for their source. He saw, that the overbearing temper of Brabantio had induced this undue timidity in his daughter; had taught her a shrinking terror of giving offence, which insensibly, and almost inevitably, degenerated into dissimulation. By generous usage, by tenderness, by confidence, by sensible and candid treatment, the gentle Desdemona might have been won to extreme of openness and sincerity,—she might have been made as perfect in ingenuousness, as, by nature, she possessed every other qualification to form a model of womanhood. As it was, that one fatal defect but too certainly existed.

Once, at taking leave, her timid withdrawal had been so obvious, on the general's respectfully saluting her hand, that the moment his guest was gone, her father rallied her upon her coyness.

"Why, I fear me, Desdemon, thou hast inherited more than a fair share of that pride which has always been imputed as an attribute of our house. And so, thy noble Venetian blood recoiled from granting a favor to a barbarian, did it? But let me tell thee, gentle mistress, for all thy lily hand disdained to linger within that dusky palm, it is a brave hand, a prevailing hand, one that has wielded its good sword right valiantly in the service of thine own Venice, and therefore is deserving of favor from all her fairest ladies. Nevertheless, I had rather see thee over-proud than over-free to any one, my girl; it sorts best with our family feeling or failing, whichever they will have it to be. Brabantio's daughter cannot hold herself too high to please her old father,—well thou know'st that."

And thus was Desdemona's course of conduct confirmed.

Months flew by; and still Gratiano thought he could see growing proof of the difference he perceived in his niece's conduct to the Moor, and her feeling towards him. There was the same outward appearance of dread and dislike. There was marked indifference,—not to say aversion,—in her manner of behaving to the general himself, and a pointed

expression of slight and disparagement when his name was in question. One of his favorite officers frequently brought messages to her father and herself; and on these occasions she would make playful mockery of the enthusiasm with which the young Florentine spoke of his noble commander. She would appear incredulous of Othello's claims to the respect and affection which his officer professed, as well as of the young man's professions themselves; she would dispute the merits, and affect to disbelieve the regard and attachment they inspired. Yet in all this, her uncle thought he could discern,—not only that subtilty of feminine device, which will sometimes disparage the object of partiality, for the pleasure of hearing it defended by another,—but an ostentation of dislike, assumed to veil an increasing secret preference.

Knowing her father's haughty irascibility, he dared not speak to him on the subject, lest he should injure her with him; and on one so delicate, he felt hesitation in talking to Desdemona herself. He felt that he had been too short a time known to her as an uncle, to warrant his interference, or to entitle him to her confidence on such a point.

One morning, when these ideas pressed upon him with unusual force, from noting the looks of Desdemona, as she sat listening, with scarce a pretence of work, by her frame, in its old place, at the back of her father's chair, flushed, breathless, and absorbed in the adventure then narrating, Gratiano quietly withdrew, and sallied forth into the open air, that he might take counsel with himself, what should be his own course, and whether anything he could say or do, might discreetly avail.

But his self-debate, though of considerable length and earnestness, ended, as all previous ones had done, in his resolving still to preserve silence in a matter, wherein his intervention could do no good, and might do harm. He was accordingly returning, when, on crossing the great square, he met the old gentleman who had made gossiping acquaintance with him on the occasion of the ducal entertainment.

They saluted each other, and fell into talk.

Gratiano sought to draw it towards the subject nearest his thoughts,—the character of the man whom he believed to have inspired so strong an interest and regard in Desdemona; and the gentleman easily followed his lead.

"Truly, there is but one report of our valiant general; he has the popular voice entirely in his favor; and Othello is no less looked up to by the commonalty, than he is in high esteem with their rulers. The Moor, during his sojourn here with us in Venice, has won all hearts; by his soldierly conduct, his warlike knowledge, his prudence, his maintenance of discipline, and the modest dignity with which he bears the honors awarded to him."

"You speak him highly, signior;" said Gratiano.

"Not more highly than he deserves;" returned the old gentleman. "To give you a convincing proof that I am sincere, I will tell you, that notwithstanding he refused a suit, which I, and two of my friends preferred to him, in behalf of a certain officer of his, whom we thought peculiarly deserving of promotion, I felt more constrained to yield him praise, than even before his refusal. It was given with so firm, so manly an air; he gave us reasons for his denial, so wise, so just, so convincing, at the same time showing us he was sorry to be compelled to deny us, and also admitting all that we said in favor of our client, while yet he adhered to his own grounded preference for the officer he had himself selected for promotion to the post of lieutenant, that, as I tell you, I admire the general more heartily than ever. Othello is a noble warrior; and a just, an honorable gentleman."

"Then why, after all, should I fear to find that she has bestowed her regard upon such a man?" mused Gratiano, after taking leave of the old gentleman. "I believe, it is chiefly, in dread of the rage, the grief, which would be her father's, on the discovery that his fair child had given her heart to this Moor. And am I sure that it is so? May not my surmise be false—utterly baseless?"

On reaching the Brabantio palace, he learned that soon after his own departure thence, the senator had been summoned to a council of state.

"They are alone, then; have been alone some time;" thought Gratiano, as he approached the saloon, their usual sitting-room, where he had left Brabantio, his daughter, and their guest.

When he entered the apartment, however, he at first thought it empty; but presently he perceived Desdemona there, alone, leaning



amongst the folds of a curtain that draped the window which led out into a balcony over-hanging the grand canal. She was not looking forth ; her eyes were fixed upon a curiously wrought handkerchief that she held in her hand, and more than once pressed to her lips in a fond, passionate manner. Her eyes gave evidence that she had been weeping ; but there was that in their expression, which told of deep-seated happiness, far more eloquently than the brightest lustre that had ever sparkled in them.

Her uncle could not bear to watch her thus unobserved ; he felt there was a kind of treason,—involuntary though it might be,—in thus witnessing her self-communion. He was preparing to leave the room ; when the slight noise he made, attracted her attention, and he saw her hastily conceal the handkerchief among the folds of her robe. Shortly after, on some slight pretext, she herself withdrew.

And yet once again he saw her caress this same handkerchief. She was sitting bending over her embroidery-frame, with her back towards him, as he entered ; and he had advanced some feet into the room, before she heard the approaching step. Then she thrust the kerchief into the case which held her colored silks ; but not before the curious arabesques of the flowered border, and the strawberries spotted over the centre, had shown her uncle, that it was the one he had before beheld.

Had he not seen this,—had he not witnessed these endearments, lavished in secret upon a token which he could not but associate with the Moor, as his gift, from its oriental look, and yet more from the fondness with which Desdemona regarded it,—Gratiano would have been more surprised than he actually was, upon being, one night, hastily aroused from his bed, and hearing that his brother was distracted with the news that his child was gone ; that Desdemona had fled from her father's house ; that it was whispered, that she had left the palace secretly, with the Moorish general ; that it was reported she was married to Othello.

All this news, disjointedly and incoherently poured into his ear, as he hurried on his dress, seemed to reproach him with having taken part in her clandestine act, by preserving silence so long. He hastened to

his brother, but found that Brabantio had already left the palace; that the senators were assembled in council; that there was a talk of sudden and warlike preparation against the Turks.

Amidst all these flying rumours, there was one that caught Gratiano's ear, and caused him to hasten to his old quarters at the Sagittary. It was here that Othello, and the other military then in Venice, likewise were stationed; and here it was said, that he had conveyed his new-made wife.

Gratiano reached the Arsenal, just as Desdemona was being conducted from the Sagittary, by order of the senate, to the ducal palace. Her uncle hastened to give her the support of his presence. She looked pale, but collected; and as if resolved to assume her utmost firmness.

On her entering the assembly of senators, the duke spoke; then her father; and then her uncle heard her soft voice,—gentle and low but wonderfully calm, as if she willed it not to tremble.—utter these words:

*“ My noble father*

*I do perceive here a divided duty :*

*To you, I am bound, for life, and education ;*

*My life, and education, both do learn me*

*How to respect you ; you are the lord of duty,*

*I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband ;*

*And so much duty as my mother show'd*

*To you, preferring you before her father,*

*So much I challenge that I may profess*

*Due to the Moor, my lord.”*



What follows further of the “downright violence and storm of fortunes” that befell Desdemona, is “trumpeted to the world” by the Poet “I pray you, hear ‘him’ speak.”

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**MEG AND ALICE; THE MERRY MAIDS OF  
WINDSOR.**

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TALE V.

MEG AND ALICE; THE MERRY MAIDS OF WINDSOR.

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“Merry, and yet honest too.”

*The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

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“HAVE ye heard the news, mother?” said a girl about twelve years old, bouncing through the open door of a cottage where sat her parents, gaffer and gammer Quickly; “have ye heard that mistress May and mistress Gay have both been brought to bed this morning—and that they have a goodly girl apiece?”

“Girls; pshaw!” ejaculated John Quickly.

“And why shouldn’t they be girls, if they like it, John? And why shouldn’t girls be as good as boys?” asked Gilian, his wife; “I know you were like one wood, when ye learned that your own children were both wenches; but for my part I’d never ha’ changed our Neil and Poll for any knave-bearn of them all.”

“In the first place, boys can work; and girls are of no use;” quoth John.

“Of no use! Can’t they be good housewives, John?” asked his wife.

“Can be? Ay. But are they? eh? Seldom, I wot;” grumbled John. “There’s our Nell. What did she do, trow?—but as soon as she grew to be a likely wench in her teens, wasn’t she teen enough to me? Wasn’t she always gadding about, running after the fellows, and

never content, till she got her cousin Bob Quickly to marry her? And now haven't they set off to London to get their living there? And much good I've got out of my eldest girl, haven't I?"

"Why, I think she's done very well, John; she might ha' done worse;" said the philosophic Gilian. "She's married the lad of her choice; she's gone up to London, to live among ladies, if she is not a lady herself. Didn't Jem Wainrope, the waggoner, bring us word that they've taken a tavern in Eastcheap, and that they've called it the Boar's Head; and that they're like to drive a thriving trade there?"

"Ay, that's all very well for them; but what's the good of it to me?" growled gaffer Quickly. "If Nell be making her fortune as a hostess in London, that don't do me any service here, in Windsor, do it, wife?"

"Well, there's our Poll left to us, John," said gammer Quickly; like many another philosopher, shifting her ground, when she found herself worsted in one part of the argument; "there's our Poll; I'll warrant her, she'll never leave her old father and mother; but stay and take service in Windsor, if we get her a good place, won't ye, Polly?"

"I'll tell ye what, wife," said John Quickly, interrupting whatever reply his daughter might have been about to make; "it's my notion that our Poll is going on, much the same road that her sister Nell took. Good housewife, quotha? I see little of the good housewife about her, as yet; nothing that'll get her a good place, or fit her for useful service. I see nought but fitting hither and thither; gossiping with neighbours; idling away her mornings; chattering away her afternoons; busybodying, prating, meddling and making in everybody's concerns. There isn't a bride-ale, or a burial; a harvest-home, or a sheep-shearing; a Christmas revel, or Hock-holiday, that our Poll doesn't take good care to be among the foremost in them; Plough-Monday, Shrove-Tuesday; May-morning, Midsummer-eve; Whitsuntide, Martlemas, Candlemas, — It's one to Poll: she'll take right good heed not to lose a single chance for gossipry, and idling of any sort; and how's she to learn good housewifery in all that play-making, I should like to know?"

"Our Poll's but young, John;" said his wife; "she'll be steadier by and bye; won'tee, Polly?"

"To be sure, mother;" replied the daughter. "But you haven't heard the best part of my news yet. Farmer Gay and Farmer May are about to give their christenings together, that there may be a right goodly feast, to do honor to their two little girls; and every body's to be bidden to't; and there's to be such holiday doings as never were known in Windsor before, at a farmer's table, they say."

"I know'd it was a holiday o' some sort that had set our Poll agog in this way;" said gaffer Quickly.

"And so there's to be a grand feast, is there?" added he presently.

"Ay truly, is there, father;" said Polly; "and you know, well as I love a morris-dance, a mumming, a May-pole measure, or a game of barley-break, where I may lighten my heels and my spirits, footing it or sporting it away by the hour together, you are to the full as content with a holiday that promises plenty of good fare and humming ale. I can tell ye there's to be everything of the best and the cheerest at this christening; for both farmer Gay and farmer May, have so long been hoping in vain that their dames would bring them a child, that now the babies are born, they think they can't do enow to show their joy, and to make all the folks in Windsor rejoice with 'em. Lord be joyful! say I; and sing, 'Blessed is he that has his quiver-full!'"

"The bearns have been so long a coming, their fathers have had time to get rich meanwhile;" grunted John. "Well for 'em! But now, they must needs hasten to spend what they've gained, on a parcel of feasting and foolery, to show they're better off than their neighbours. However, I don't mind going. I ben't churlish; I shan't refuse to go to the christening."

"If we're asked, John;" said his wife. "You know we ben't such well-to-do folks as the Gays, or the Mays either."

"I know that, fast enough, wife, without your 'minding me on't; but that's the way with you women; a man's never inclined to be jolly, and sociable like, and willing to take you out for a bit of pleasure, but you're sure to damp him with some of your confounded meeknesses, or prudences, or nonsenses of some kind or another, that none of us wants to hear."



"But mayhap they will ask us;" said Gilian; "for Poll says all Windsor's to be there. And more nor that, Poll's main clever at getting asked to every merry-making she has a mind to go to, and ——"

"And that's to every one of 'em;" growled John.

"And so," continued his wife, regardless of the interruption, and anxious to make up for the ill-timed remark which had roused her husband's ungracious mood; "and so, our Poll shall manage to get us asked to the christening, as well as herself. Step up to farmer Gay's and see if they want any one to hold the baby; or to farmer May's, and see if they need help for Joan cook. They'll be busy enow, I'll warrant me, at both houses, just now, to make a handy girl like you, quite a treasure to 'em. Run, Poll."

And Poll Quickly went; and Poll Quickly contrived so well, she was so zealous, and so busy, and so at every body's beck and call, during the time of preparation, when all hands were in request at the farm-houses, that it was soon an understood thing, that her father and mother as well as herself were to be among the guests at the christening.

For the company included almost all grades, from the substantial yeomen,—among which class were the two hosts themselves,—down to the labourers and hinds that were employed on their farms. Indeed there were not wanting, to grace the feast, personages of a still higher rank, who vouchsafed the honor of their presence on this festive occasion. There was a neighbouring franklin or two,—wealthy country gentlemen, who, with their wives, thought it not beneath their dignity to appear among the train of guests assembled by such respectable townsmen as farmer Gay and farmer May. There was the London merchant, whose dealings for wools and fleeces brought him into communication with farmer Gay. There was the great metropolitan corn-factor, whose accounts for wheat and barley, and oats, and beans, were considerable with farmer May. There were a few smart foplings and fine city gentlemen, now in attendance on the court staying at Windsor, who thought it worth while to give the distinction of their presence, in return for the entertainment of a rustic feast on a scale of rather unusual magni-

tude. There was the good curate, Sir Paul Pureton; the worthy school-master, Peter Scriven; the burly brewer, Ralph Barleybroth; the merry maltster, Nat Kilnby; the roaring butcher, Dick Cleaveholm; the hearty miller, Guy Netherstone; the little barber, Will Patterly; beside many other townfolk, and numerous country acquaintances for some miles round about Windsor, together with labourers, hinds, farm and household servants, and their respective friends and gossips, forming a goodly company in all.

In order that fitting respect should be paid to those guests of superior rank who had honored the feast by their presence, a temporary dais was fitted up at one end of the large hall where the tables were laid, and a cross board was spread for their especial accommodation, while the boundary salt-cellar was placed on each of the lateral ones; but for the most part, ease, good-humour, frank and friendly bearing towards each other, was the order of the day; mutual kindness, warmth, and heartiness of manner prevailed. Where so much mirth and good abounded, there seemed no room for stiffness, haughtiness, or pride; they seemed by general consent to be banished, and genial fellowship to be convoked in their stead, that nothing might be wanting to the perfect enjoyment of the whole company. The stout oak tables were far too stout, and too English of heart, to groan beneath the burden of good things with which they were laden; but they well-nigh split with laughing, and cracked their sides, at the heaps of substantial dainties which were piled, and close-jammed, and wedged together, with not a hair's-breadth space between, in pitiless profusion upon their broad plane. Dish after dish smoked upon the board; and still dish after dish came smoking along the hall, borne by grinning trencher-men, handed by red-cheeked damsels, and placed in endless succession upon the tables.

First came the lordly boar's head with the lemon in its mouth, racy and piquant; then the noble sirloin of beef garnished with boughs and rosemary; haunches of red and fallow deer; sucking-pigs fed daintily on dates and muscadine, and stuffed with rich puddings; capons, barndoor fowls, turkeys, geese, and boiled mallards; a shield of brawn with mustard; roasted neat's tongue, and chine of beef; a goodly and chris-

tian gammon of bacon, that no suspicion of Jewish taint might be there. Nor was the cook's skill wanting in the various dishes of quaint device, as the red herring o' horseback, wherein her craft had shown the likeness of a rider galloping away through a green field, which was cunningly represented by a corn sallad ; pies of divers kinds, as warden-pie, olive-pie, pippin-pie, mince-pie, and baked chewets ; hog-liver puddings, veal-toasts, carbonadoes, pamperdy, links, fritters, tansies, and quelques-choeses ; jumbals, leach-lombard, custards, or dowsets ; suckets, wet and dry ; March-pane, sugar-bread ; jellies of all colours, marmalades, and florentines ; as well as juncates and dainty confections, spiced and richly sweetened, of quinces, pomegranates, oranges, and other fruits, with cream or sugar.

That all space might be given to the dishes, the various drinks were placed on a sideboard, whence the guests were supplied with whatsoever they might choose to call for. There were generous wines of many vintages ; those quaffed plain in their native excellence.—from the foreign luxuries of princeliest sack of Xeres, strong sacks of Canary and Malaga, and rich muscadine, to the home-made delicacies of Ypocras, Clary, and Bracket ; those concocted, to suit other palates ; some sweetened with sugar ; some seasoned with lemon and spices ; some brewed into possets, with eggs ; the two kinds of raisin-wine, brown and white bastard ; with good store of distilled liquors, such as rosa-solis, and aquavite. Ale and beer were in profusion ; from the stately March ale, to simple small beer ; there was double beer, double-double beer, mum, and dagger-ale ; there was the popular huffcap ale, dear to the common lip by such familiar titles as " mad-dog," " angel's food," and " dragon's-milk." These different malt drinks were also to be found choicely compounded, as well as the wines ; spiced, and sugared, with a toast floating.—warm, and mellow, and cordial. There was not absent the favorite bowl of spicy nut-brown ale, called Lamb's wool, with its bobbing, hissing, roasted crabs, or apples, and the sprig of rosemary to stir and impart a flavour. The fruity beverages of cider and perry were there for those who chose them ; and though the honey-made metheglin had fallen into disrepute, some calling it " little better than swish-swash," yet as a Welsh

family of the name of Evans had lately come to settle at Windsor, and were expected to be present, it was thought well to have metheglin provided, out of due regard to the well-known national predilection.

The feast was at its height; the dishes were all set on table; the door that had so frequently opened and given to view the busy cook and her helpers, the roaring fire, the laden spits, the steaming pans, the whole paraphernalia of the glowing kitchen, was now closed; the trencher-men and damsels ceased going and coming across the hall with dishes, and confined their attention to the tables, round which they perpetually hovered, leaning over the backs of the guests, reaching platters, handing trenchers, serving drinks; carving, helping, pouring wine, frothing ale; now jesting, and laughing, with the guests, when they good-humouredly addressed some facetious remark to them; now shouting and bawling directions to each other. At its height was the jingling of glass and china, and the clinking of silver flagons and goblets, and tankards, at the dais-table; at its height was the clatter of pewter platters, and dishes, and measures, of wooden trenchers, of beechen cups, of treen ladles, of horn spoons, at the long tables,—especially below the salt, for noise is inseparable from enjoyment among the less well-bred; at its height was the mirth and uproar of the feasters, when Poll Quickly said to her father and mother,—or rather screamed to them, for it was as difficult to make a person hear amid all that riot and confusion, as the remark was safe from chance of reaching the ears of any one but him or her immediately addressed:—"Said I not sooth, father, when I told ye 'twould be a brave feast?"

"Ay, ay, brave enough! It's well for a farmer to get on thus in the world. Lord warrant us! See the china dishes, and the silver goblets, and the pewter service, that have taken the place of the treen platters and plain gear that would ha' served an honest man's turn in my young days, e'en at the upper end of the table; now, they must needs be used but by us below the salt;" grunted John; though he was compelled to growl a little above his usual key that he might be heard in reply.

"O, but most part o' they fine things, the plate, and the china, and the glass, are borrowed from their great friends;" said Poll Quickly;

adding, with all the precision of a gossip proud of the accuracy of her information, "the parcel-gilt flagon came from Sir Mark Pursey's ; the six tankards from Arden Hall ; that great china charger was lent by lady Fragilhurst ; and the cut glass goblets, and biggest salt-cellar by—"

"I care not whence they came, nor who lent 'em, lass ;" said her father ; "I can see well enow that the Gays and the Mays are rich and well to do, setting aside the finery of the tables."

"The pewter's all theirs, I know for surely ;" persisted Poll ; "dishes, platters, bowls, spoons, all the whole service, for I helped to scour and brighten it myself ; they use it every day ; the treen set, and the horn spoons are only for the servants. But just look at mistress Barleybroth, mother ! There's a coif and pinners ! Flanders lace ; no less, I'll assure you ! And see what a flaunting ship-tire Lady Pursey wears ! Ribbons enow to stock a mercer's booth ! And only see that gaunt lad, the Welshman's son, Hugh. They say he's a parlous scholar, and knows all sorts of Latin and Greek ; it is thought that if he goes on as he's begun, he'll be fit to do both Sir Paul Pureton's work, and Peter Scriven's, together,—priest and schoolmaster in one. If he's as sprag at learning, as he is at eating, marry, I'll ensure him the place, when time comes for the two old men to die, and leave him to stand in their shoes. Do but look at the lumps he puts in his mouth ! It's like loading a hayloft. There's trusses of beef and salad for you ! Mighty different to Will Patterly ! He can't eat for watching every body else. He keeps as fidgety a look-out as a bird pecking grain ! But he's a good soul ; he has only one fault ; he prates too much."

At this moment, a loud voice rang thro' the hall, enjoining silence ; and then the principal guest, who was one of the sponsors, arose, and proposed a toast to the health of the two mothers, Mistress Gay and Mistress May ; and then the other godfather arose, and proposed that health, happiness, and long life to the two new-made christians should next be drunk ; and then amidst the waving and doffing of hats (for it was at that time esteemed no ill-breeding to sit covered during meal-time) the toasts were pledged and drunk with hearty good wishes and much enthusiasm.

And then, the two babes themselves were brought in, wrapped in their white chrisom-cloths, looking very red-faced, and staring, as if wondering at their baptismal honors; and then, the twelve apostle-spoons, given to little Margaret Gay by her godfather, and the four evangelist-spoons with a silver-gilt cup, given to little Alice May by hers, were handed round for the inspection and admiration of the company. And then, once again, all became uproar and clamour of tongues and utensils; laughing and jesting, and eating and drinking, proceeded as before.

Next succeeded singing, and merry tale-telling, flirting, gossiping; and then the tables were cleared, that dancing and sportive games, and all the more active species of merry-making might conclude the day. At a late hour, well pleased, the company broke up; and, for long after, the christening of Margaret Gay and Alice May, was cited as one of the most notable amongst remembered Windsor festivals.

In course of time, the red-faced, staring babies grew to be two of the prettiest, chubbiest, rosiest children to be seen in all the country round, for many a broad Berkshire mile. Curly-haired, bright-eyed, red-lipped darlings they were; and two of the merriest little grigs that ever laughed the careless, happy, hearty laugh of childhood. In the sweet blue eyes of Alice May, the cloudless sky of midsummer seemed reflected; and the transience of an April shower was all that ever sparkled on their lashes, making them, if possible, brighter still. In Margaret Gay's clear hazel eye, danced ever glancing light, that knew no rest or shadow, save in sleep.

Nurtured in kindness and indulgence, free and joyous, their childhood years were a series of holidays, unchecked by a single thwarting or disturbance; so that their native cheer of disposition grew ever in liveliness, good-humour, and pleasantry. Their looks were beaming; their accents were mirthful; their gestures were all vivacity. They seemed human fairies; mortal elves of health, spirits, and frolic youth; fay-like, airy and buoyant in their behaviour,—of child-like substance and proportion in their well-moulded, active, flesh-and-blood limbs. Sprites might boast such bewitching playfulness of look and mien; but nothing short of beauteous childhood itself could furnish those blue veins, that

threaded the white temples ; those fresh firm cheeks, so round, so pulpy ; that breath of a dairy, or a new-mown hay-mead ; those mottled arms, those dimpled hands, so plump, soft, and smooth, yet so springy and elastic beneath the pressure of touch or kiss. In sooth, they were a couple of as bonny little creatures as could be matched in all merry England.

Neighbours' children as they were, both of an age, both of a sex, both of like rank in life, and both of the same merry temper. it befel, as a matter of course, that they were constant companions, and shared the same plays, the same pursuits, the same thoughts, the same likings and dislikings ; they shared each other's pleasures, as they would have shared each other's troubles, had there been any to share ; but hitherto, joy had been their only portion ; the very crosses and vexations common to childhood, seemed spared to them, and what might come near, their own happy temper rendered pointless to sting their quiet.

" Alice dear, I've come to fetch ye ;" said Margaret Gay, at the gate of farmer May's garden, one fine spring morning ; " Mother's lent me two of the new dozen-bunch of horn spoons that father brought her from the fair lately ; so let's away to the moat side, and have a good game at making dirt-pies. I know such a brave place, where we shall be quite snug, and find plenty of marl, with water at hand from the castle-ditch."

It was, as Margaret had described it, an excellent spot for their purpose ; lying a little out of the public path, and screened by a copse of hazels, alders, and maple-trees. Here, they played for some time, happily enough, making between them, good store of pies ; with raised crusts of kneaded clay, and filled with flints, and pebbles, and moss, and grass, and twigs, to represent fish, flesh, fowl, and fruit, with condiments and seasoning of salt, spices, peppers, and herbs, figured by strewed dust and sand.

But by-and-by, they were disturbed by the advent of Hodge Bull-cub, the butcher's boy, who came loitering there, to wile away his time, or rather his master's, in throwing stones into the moat, watching the wide-spread circles they made, listening to their plunge, and trying how far he could jerk them.

"I wish he'd go away, Meg;" whispered Alice May; "he splashed us all over; see how wet my frock is."

"Suppose we tell him;" replied Meg.

"I daren't;" said Alice; "he's such a great fierce lad; perhaps he wouldn't like to be told to go."

Just then a great stone came plump down, only a yard or two from the bank where the two children knelt; and, falling in shallow water, threw up quite a fountain of splashes, which plentifully showered Meg and Alice.

"Take care what you're about, if you please;" said little Margaret Gay; "if you don't mind, some of those stones 'll hit us; that one came very near; and see how it has sprinkled Alice all over."

"What do I care?" said the lout. "It'll make her grow; and spare her standing out in the next rain-shower. She's little enow to want something that'll make her taller."

The next stone fell just in the midst of the dirt-pies, and demolished a grand centre-dish of raised crust, ornamented with clay-paste devices, that had cost much care and time.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed the two young cooks, both at once.

"I wish you'd move farther away, if you must throw stones;" added Margaret.

"I shall throw 'em just where I please; I'm not going to be ordered off by two chits like you, don't think it;" said Bull-cub; "I've as good a right to play here, I suppose, as you have. I might just as well find fault with that rubbish you're doing there. Here, what's all this? dirt-pies? clay-puddings? hey?" added he, coming towards the spot where they were, and kicking contemptuously with his hob-nailed shoes, among the pastry-marvels they had achieved with so much pains.

"O don't, don't; you're breaking my goose-pie; and that's Meg's herring-pie; and—oh dear, don't spoil that—that's our warden-pie." Alice started up, and threw herself against Bull-cub, in her eagerness to stay him from destroying their morning's work; but the great strong lad held her at arm's length, contriving to kick down the pies one after the other, pushing their ruins into the moat with his foot, and laughing at the au-



ger and entreaties of the two children, though little Meg dealt him as lusty cuffs as she could with her baby arm.

In the struggle to effect his wanton exercise of power, the brutal hobbdehoy leaned so heavily over towards little Alice, that she lost her balance, slipped down the shelving ground, and fell into the water, which, however, was luckily but shallow just there. Margaret screamed aloud, ceased thumping Bull-cub, who ran off,—and was about to dart to Alice's assistance, when she saw two boys she knew well, neighbours' sons, coming towards the spot. She just shouted to them, "Hodge Bull-cub has pushed Alice May into the castle-ditch," and then flew down the bank to help her friend.

"I see him, the rascal, making off among the trees;" said one of the boys; "but I'll soon be up with him, and give him as sound a thrashing as ever he had in his life."

"Do, Frank, and I'll help the girls;" said the other boy; "the water isn't deep here; I'll soon have her out."

But long before this speech was finished, Frank had sprung after the butcher's boy to execute his well-deserved sentence.

The other boy found the two little girls hand-in-hand; one close by the edge, trying to tug her out of the water, in which the latter stood, up to her waist; having fortunately fallen in such a position, that she could readily scramble to her feet, though she could not draw them from the muddy bottom in which they stuck.

"Give me your other hand, Alice May," said the boy, seeing how matters stood; "now then, pull away, heartily, Margaret, and we'll soon have her out."

But not so soon, could they succeed in extricating her; first one foot, then the other, stuck fast, then she slipped down on her knee, and souse went she into the water again.

"Can't you contrive to slip your feet out of your shoes? never mind your shoes! leave them stuck fast, so that we get you out!" said the boy.

"O, I've long ago lost my shoes;" said she laughing; "Stay; now I think I've got my right foot clear. Now, pull!"

"Well, make a good stride, and plant your foot on the firmest place

you can find; here, here's a gravelly spot! Now then, hold tight! Grasp our hands well! Haul away, Margaret! Here she is! Safe ashore!"

Alice once landed, they all three made the best of their way to farmer May's, that Alice might be put into a warm bed without delay; and then mistress May made little Meg hasten home, that she might change her clothes, which were very wet, too; and then the boy, thanked and lauded by both families, for the help he had given their darlings in their need, went to look after his companion, whom he had left in pursuit of Bull-cub.

He found him just emerging from the copse, looking hot and flushed, but victorious; though the butcher-boy was half again as big as himself.

"I've given the hawbuck such a drubbing as I think he won't forget in a hurry," said Frank; "he can bluster enough to little girls, but he can only blubber and yelp, like a cur as he is, when he has to deal with boys. I left him howling, as our hound does at the moon; and with great big tears rolling down his nose. But how did you get on, George, with the girls—the two children?"

"I found them laughing as heartily, as your lout was crying," said George; "they're two merry-hearted little souls—nothing puts them out—not even a souse in the castle-ditch."

"Did they both tumble in?" said Frank.

"No, only one;" said George; "but there they both were, roaring a-laughing—the one pulling, the other being pulled—both dripping wet, and bespattered with mud—but laughing fit to kill themselves at the pickle they were in. Little Alice, with her bright flaxen hair all blown off her face, and showing her pearly rows of teeth between those coral lips of hers, looked like a young mermaid, as she stood giggling, and struggling, and slipping about, waist-deep in water. You should have seen her—and how heartily Meg was helping her, with all her little might, laughing as much as pulling. You should have seen them!"

"I wish I had!" said Frank. "I wish I had'n't run after that chap, but had stayed with you to help Meg and Alice; I half envy you your share of the adventure."

"You needn't; yours was by far the most glorious;" returned

George; "you pursued the brute of a giant, and overcame him; I hadn't even the merit of succouring the distressed damsels,—for they weren't at all distressed. You had the peril of the fight—I hadn't that of the flood—it was only mud. It's evident, that they also thought you had chosen the worst job, for little Alice popped her head out of the bed-clothes, as her mother was tucking her up, to bid me mind and thank Frank Ford for going after Bull-cub to teach him better manners, as she was sure he would now be afraid to meddle with or worry them any more."

"She's a good little soul—as gentle as she's gay;" said Frank; "that's certain."

Some time after that, an opportunity occurred for Frank's being as completely the hero of an adventure where one of these little girls was concerned, as he himself could have desired. It happened, that Alice May was going to gather king-cups in Datchet mead, and she as usual went to fetch her little neighbour and playmate to go with her; but it so fell out, that Margaret Gay was wanted at the farm, that morning, by her mother, who was busy making cowslip wine, and had set her little girl to pluck the yellow blossoms out of their pale green cups. Alice would have stayed with Meg, to help her in her pretty fragrant task, but her friend whispered her to go and gather the king-cups all the same. and that she'd get leave to come in the afternoon and help to make them up in posies and garlands, as first intended. Alice accordingly took her basket again, and trudged off to the field, where she was soon up to her chin in butter-cups, daisies, meadow-sweet, eye-bright, ragged-robins, and tall waving grasses, flowery and feathery in all their lush vernal blossoming. She was so busily engaged cropping armfuls of the gay wild-flowers, and heaping them into her basket, hoping to get it quickly filled, and return to help Meg, that she was not aware of a wizened little old woman who stood close by, watching her. But presently the shadow cast upon the shining grass, caught the child's attention, and she suddenly looked up, and saw two grey watery eyes fixed upon her; a pair of wrinkled cheeks, which sank and distended; shrivelled lips, that mumped, and parted, and quivered; and a withered hand stretched forth looking like a bird's claw—so skinny, so ash-coloured, and so dry.

The child's head involuntarily shrank from the talons with which this claw was appropriately garnished ; and the old woman said :—

“ What pretty golden hair you've got ! It's as bright as your king-cups ! Will ye give me a lock, my pretty dear ? ”

The claw fumbled in a pouch, from which it presently drew forth some glittering instrument

“ I would, and welcome,” said Alice ; “ but father don't like to have my hair cut—he says he likes to look at it, and can't spare a bit off. Meg told me she heard him say he was very proud of his little Alice's long locks. So, please, don't touch it.”

The claw was just about to dart out, and make another clutch ; but at that moment,—shrilly whistling as he came along the path that lay not far from the spot where Alice and the old woman stood.—Hodgo Bull-cub appeared in sight. The butcher's boy paused an instant, gaping and staring across the tall grass, to make out who formed the group he saw ; but apparently soon satisfied, he gave a short laugh, resumed his piercing whistle, and sauntered on.

“ It's too nigh the public way, here ; ” muttered the crone ; then, aloud, she said :—“ I've got something brave to show ye, my dear, at my house, if you'll come there—it's not far off—only down by the forest-edge, close to the blasted thorn-tree ; come, I'll lead ye there in three minutes.”

“ I can't come now, for I promised to take Meg these flowers, and we're going to make posies together ; but perhaps this evening,—what's the brave thing you've got to show me ? ” said the child.

“ A string of amber beads, as bright and pretty as your hair, my dear ; you shall have 'em for a necklace, if you'll come with me.” And the shrunk lips puckered and mumped, and the grey eye twinkled.

“ I should like to see them, but ”—and little Alice looked round in perplexity ; then joyfully added ;—“ O, there's Frank Ford coming, he'll carry home my basket for me, I know, and then I can go with you Frank ! Frank ! ”

The little girl ran towards him, as she saw him leap over the little stile into the field where she was ; and hastily telling him what she wished him to do, and where she was going, she put the basket in his

hands, and begged him to give it safely into Margaret Gay's keeping, with the assurance that she herself would soon be with her. Then she hurried back to the old woman, who had followed her brisk movements with some anxiety lest she should not return ; but who now, beckoning Alice to follow, took her way through the grass into the lane which led to the forest.

For some time they walked thus, the old woman leading the way through the least-frequented paths and bye-ways ; all the time talking in a shrill gasping voice, that whistled through her few teeth, like wind through a key-hole, telling the child of the beautiful things and the nice sweeties she had got in her house for her.

As they reached the skirts of the forest, they came to a wooden hut, all grown about with lichens, and mosses, and brambles. It had but one window and a door. This latter, the old woman opened with a key she took from her pouch ; and when she had unlocked it, she drew forth the key, and took it inside with them ; entering with little Alice, fastening the door again, and putting the key into her pocket.

The child noticed nothing of all this, so eager was she to see the fine things she had heard of ; and said :—" Well, where are the amber beads, goody ? And the sugar-sticks, and the——"

" Oh, they're all in that cupboard, my dear ;" said the crone ; " but first, I'm going to tell you how kind I mean to be. How should you like to live here always with me, hey, my dear ?"

" Not at all ;" said Alice ; " I like to live with father and mother, and near to Meg."

" Well then, I'm going to be so kind as to let you go home to them, when you've given me your hair, little flaxen-poll ;" said the old woman with a grin.

" But I told you, I couldn't give you my hair," said Alice ; " father likes it."

" How should you like to take off that pretty kirtle, and let me have it to make a hood with ; hey, my dear ?"

" Not at all ;" said Alice ; " I can't spare it."

" Well then ; I'm going to be so kind as to let you keep it still,

instead of having it to cover my grey hairs with, after you've let me cut off your golden ones, little fair-locks;" said the crone, hideously jocular as before.

"But I'm not going to let you," said Alice stoutly; "I told you so before."

"A'n't ye, though? We'll soon see that;" said the old woman, clutching Alice's shoulder in her claw, which closed upon it, like an eagle's, and drawing her between her knees as she sat, held her fast prisoner.

Alice shrieked aloud.

"If you give such another yell as that, you young imp, I'll jab these scissors into your eye, or thrust 'em down your throat, or stick 'em in your heart, instead of clipping your hair with 'em, as I'm so kind as only to be going to do;" said the crone; "so you'd best be quiet, I advise ye; and it's very kind of me to advise you, when I might kill ye, if I chose it. So d'ye mind, let's have no more screeching, but stand quiet while I cut——"

Here, just as the old woman brandished her weapon, and was about to sever the first lock of the spoil she so gloatingly coveted, her raised hand was suddenly suspended by a loud knock, as of a cudgel on the door of the hut. The old woman gasped a deep curse; her knees relaxed an instant, in her surprise, and Alice sprang from between them, uttering shriek upon shriek.

At that moment, the casement of the single low window was flung back, and Frank Ford, cudgel in hand, leaped into the room.

"What are ye doing to hurt little Alice May?" said the boy, confronting the old woman, and placing the child behind him.

"I was doing nothing to hurt her, young master;" said the crone, rumping and grinning in her former coaxing fashion; "I was going to be very kind to her."

"Kind!" exclaimed Alice.

"Kind!" echoed Frank, with flashing eyes. "What made her scream, then? Odd sort of kindness, to make her scream!"

"How can I help a child's whims, that screeches if you're trying to

be kind? That won't let you be kind, try as hard as you will? That's odd if you please!" said the old crone. "And if you come to that, how dare you break into my house, you young whipper-snapper, laying about you with your cudgel, rapping and rending, tearing and driving, hammering my doors down, dashing my windows in, and frightening a poor old woman out of her wits? Pack! Tramp! Begone with ye! Out of my house, this instant, both of you!"

So saying, she hobbled to the door, unlocked it, flung it wide open, and before Frank and Alice had recovered their amazement at her wild manner, now whining and cringing, now violent and angry, they found themselves out in the forest, thrust forth, by those withered hands that shook with age and passion.

Frank looked at Alice; Alice looked at him, and then burst out a-laughing.

"I'm glad to see you laugh," he said; "I thought you were frightened."

"So I was;" said she.

"You screamed like a caught hare; and you were all of a tremble, when I got into the room;" said Frank; "yet you're laughing now."

"I was frightened enough then, while she'd got me in one hand, and the scissors in the other, telling me she'd poke 'em in my eye, if I didn't stand still;" said Alice; "but now I can't help laughing to think of her pushing us out of the house, as if it was any punishment to be turned out! Why, all I wanted, was to get away."

"Or I either;" said Frank; "though,—talking of punishment—I should like to have her punished; and I hope I shall, too. I'll speak to father about it, directly I get home. But how came you to go with her at all, Alice?"

Little Alice told him exactly how all had happened; and then asked him how it was that he came to be at the hut, also.

"When you left me with the basket," replied he, "I turned back to take it, as you asked me, to Margaret Gay; and had got some way across the fields to Windsor, when I thought to ask myself the question *what* was the old woman I had left you with. I remembered that I had never

seen her before—that she seemed a perfect stranger hereabouts—that the place you told me you were going to, with her, didn't bear a very good name—for the hut has been said to harbour gypsies, deer-stealers, and other such vagabonds, upon occasion. Then it suddenly came into my head that the old woman herself, had not the most pleasant of looks; and then I thought of what you had said about her promising you some beads, or something; and thereupon I bethought me of what I had heard tell of wicked creatures luring fair-haired children into bye-places, that they might rob them of what would prove golden booty in supplying the court-rage for yellow locks. In short, I couldn't help working myself into a belief that you had fallen into just such hands; so, cutting myself a good ash stick out of the hedge, in which I had carefully stowed away your basket of flowers, that we might find it all safe, on our way back, I set off as fast as I could in pursuit of you and the old woman, and arrived just in time, to save your little flaxen head from her clutches. It would have been a pity, a lambkin like you, should have been shorn by such a scraggy old vulture as that!"

"Father will thank you for saving his lamb's golden fleece, as I thank you for saving my eye, or my throat, perhaps both, from her scissors;" said little Alice; "it was very kind, and very bold of you, Frank, to venture for me."

When Frank's father, and farmer May, and some of their men, went to the hut on the skirts of the forest, in search of the old hag, they found the place deserted; not a trace of the old woman, or of any one else, was there; nor was she ever afterwards seen in that part of the country.

Master Ford, Frank's father, was a thriving lawyer at Windsor. He made round sums and put them by carefully; so that he grew to be very rich; and men said he deserved his gains, for they were made not only cleverly, but honestly. He would settle his neighbours' disputes as equitably and as speedily as might be, and he as often did this by persuading them not to go to law, as by conducting their cause in court. He made up nearly as many quarrels as any single man of his craft usually busies himself in fomenting; and he made pretty nigh as much



money by amicable adjustment and private umpirage, as other attorneys by bickering and equivocating, brow-beating witnesses, ferreting out flaws, and bringing about unjust verdicts.

He had four sons, all of whom he hoped to provide for, by settling them worthily and prosperously in life. Three of them he meant should learn a trade each ; but his eldest boy, Frank, in whom he thought he perceived a promise of good parts, and a capability of superior breeding, he resolved should have the advantage of a university education, that he might be fitted for following his own profession, or any other he might prefer.

Master Page, George's father, was a substantial yeoman ; he was farmer or bailiff, to Sir Marmaduke Ducandrake, who owned the finest estate thereabouts. He was a large burly man, with a ruddy complexion, that bespoke a hearty appetite, a warm purse, and constant living in the open air. It was whispered that he was worth a mint of money, and that he could have bought his employer over and over again ; for Sir Marmaduke was an extravagant courtier, a spendthrift and a gambler ; one who thought nothing of investing all the fleeces of a sheep-shearing in a court-suit, of wasting a quarter's rents on a court-masque, or of staking a whole copse of oaks upon a card at primero. When the fleeces, the rents, or the oaks had to be suddenly converted into ready money, Master Page was the alchemist to transmute them ; it was his gold which supplied the courtier's need ; and it may be believed that the crucible, his pocket, did not yield its treasure without contriving to retain a due—or more than a due residuum of the material employed.

As Sir Marmaduke's property waned, Master Page's store waxed fat and increased. The knight's patrimony dwindled ; while the yeoman's farm swelled into a goodly bulk of acres. The two men's persons were like their land. The one was a pale, lean, stick of a man—with hollow eyes, wan cheeks, and enervated limbs, telling a plain tale of squandered energies, sleepless nights, drowsy days,—life wasted in folly and debauchery. The other was a hale, robust, portly man, with a trunk like an oak, an arm like a staff ; a step firm and steady, the eye of a hawk, the grip of a vice, and a chest as ample as his barns and granaries, while the purse at his girdle was as well filled as they.

Master Page was no less able than his neighbour Master Ford to have sent his son to the university; but the worthy agriculturist, like many of his class, had slight respect for book-husbandry, and resolved that George should be nothing more nor less than a farmer, like his father before him.

“My boy shall know how to stock land, plant trees, cart a crop, till a field, and reap a corn-harvest, with the veriest ploughman that ever trod a furrow,” said he, once, to his neighbour Ford; “and that’s the way, I take it, to raise as fine a fortune as ever’s to be digged out of the pages of Virgil—for all he wrote a fine book upon farming, as I’ve heard tell.”

Frank Ford was not a little proud of the distinction conferred by his father’s determination to send him to college. He felt that he was at once raised to a higher grade in society by this circumstance, for it was a mode of education chiefly confined to the sons of noblemen, and gentlemen, or those of very wealthy parents.

His young Windsor friends thought he gave himself airs upon it, and that he treated them a little cavalierly, when he returned home for the vacations; but George Page, who was of a frank, open disposition, and rarely suspected anything amiss in his associates,—giving them credit for being as guileless and well-meaning as himself,—maintained that Frank was the same good fellow as ever.

Not so, Margaret Gay and Alice May,—who now growing to be tall girls, yet lost no jot of their merry-hearted sprightly humour,—thought their former playmate had no right to assume the tone of superiority, which they chose to discover in him. They persisted in calling his increased height and growth, stateliness; his more thoughtful look, contempt for their ignorance, and his gravity, sheer insult. He, in turn, complained that they were altered; that they no longer received him so cordially as they formerly did; that they excluded him from their games; and treated him stiffly, and as a comparative stranger, when they met.

“You are no longer the same girls; you are quite changed;” said he to them one evening, when they all chanced to meet in the wood, a-nutting; “you don’t seem glad to see me back; you don’t shake hands

with me as you used. You wouldn't treat George Page so, if he went to college, and came home to spend the vacation."

"Nang-nang-yah!" said Meg, mocking his tones of injured innocence, and making a face at him. "He thinks himself very grand, forsooth, because he's been at college; and that he's at liberty now, to school us as much as he thinks fit, since he's taken a degree in university birch. Many's the time he's had that honor, I'll be bound, though not oftener than such a scholar deserved. But we don't care for his fine tutoring, do we, Alice?" said she, bursting out a-laughing.

"No, to be sure!" said Alice, laughing too; but her echo of her friend's laugh was rather a faint one; for she half pitied Frank, as he stood there, disconcerted, biting his lips, and eyeing his two laughing enemies, as if he longed to cuff them, but couldn't, for manliness sake. Besides, she was a little touched by remembering how he had more than once stood her friend in those former times to which he referred.

"And he must needs twit poor George, too;" continued Meg; "because, forsooth, he doesn't go to the university as well as the young squire."

"I never twitted George;" said Frank Ford.

"Didn't you?" said Meg. "What did you mean, then, by bringing him in, when you said we wouldn't have treated him so, if he had been to college, and come back? Unless it is that you're such a jealous-pate that you grudge him our liking, which he has never done anything to lose."

"And pray what have I done to lose it, pretty Mistress Meg?" said Frank.

"What have you done? Why a great deal,—everything! A'n't you now acting the young man, and the collegian, truly, with us? Calling us 'pretty,' and 'mistress,' as if you were a grown man, and we, poor little chits. Marry, I shouldn't wonder, if you had impudence enough to teach us Greek and Latin, only to show off what you've learnt. As if nothing was to be learnt anywhere else but at college! However, whatever they may teach there, they don't teach modesty and pleasant manners, that's a sure thing. And another sure thing is,

that, whatever folks learn there, they don't learn to make themselves agreeable." [www.ibtool.com.cn](http://www.ibtool.com.cn)

Tossing her head, she turned away; while Frank muttered, "And stay-at-home wenches learn to be pert, if they remain as ignorant as sheep, in all besides."

"There! there's one of your fine college words!" she exclaimed, over-hearing him, and looking back. "There! you call us 'wenches'—your old friends and neighbours, Alice and Meg! We changed—we altered! 'Tis you that are grown out of knowledge, master Frank. But we'll try and remember you, won't we, Alice? We'll not forget you! We'll match you, some day or other, for your grand airs, depend on't. The 'wenches' won't break their hearts about it, I dare say, for all you are so changed."

With another laugh,—tho' there was a spice of vexation in it, that marred its heartiness,—Meg went away, linking her arm in Alice's, and drawing her with her, notwithstanding all George Page could say to induce them to stay, and to make peace with Frank Ford.

"I've no patience with him, I declare!" muttered Margaret Gay, as she walked on hurriedly; "A puffed-up jackanapes! A conceited puppy! To give himself such airs! 'Wenches,' forsooth!"

"I'm afraid we provoked him to that, Meg!" observed Alice, as she tried to keep pace with her angry friend.

"And I suppose George Page provoked my lord squire, too?" pouted Meg. "He must be sneered at, also, by this fine college princex, this musty-brained, book-worming sprig of scholarship, must he? But I'll be even with him, see if I don't! I'll fit him for books, I warrant you! I'll sauce him with doggrel, that shall be tougher to puzzle out, than all his trumpery Homer and stuff; which, I'll be bound to say, he prates of more than he knows."

"How you rave; Meg!" said Alice, smiling

"I'll not rave more than I'll brave;" said Meg. "I'm determined I'll plague him for his boy-pedantry,—ridiculous in a young fellow like him, with scarce more down on his lip, than you or I have. Let me see; let me see; I'll get Hugh Evans, the young Welshman, to write out my

script for me—and I'll get Poll Quickly to bear it. Yet stay, that won't do either—he knows her, and will suspect something—maybe, question her ; and her magpie tongue will blab all out. No, no, I'll trust no one but myself. Let me see ; let me see."

Next evening, as Frank Ford was sauntering down a close lane, that was thick embowered with hedge-rows of hawthorn, dog-rose, briony, and brambles, with many a peeping fox-glove, harebell, and cowslip beneath, and many a fair young towering oak above ; suddenly there dropped at his feet a green ball, of moss, grass, and twigs, curiously enmeshed and intertwined, that looked like two birds' nests joined together.

Frank picked it up. "A fairy-favor !" he exclaimed half-aloud ; but looking, as he spoke, among the branches overhead, and through the hedge that skirted the lane, to see what mortal hand had thrown it there. But no mortal was to be seen ; no living thing seemed there, but the birds that were carolling their even-song upon branch and bough ; some kine that were softly lowing in a neighbouring meadow, waiting to be milked, and some sheep and lambs basing fold-ward.

Frank Ford began mechanically to untwist some of the fibres of grass and withy, that compacted the ball ; and, to his surprise, perceived that it contained a scrap of parchment, upon which were inscribed odd crooked characters, which after some careful decyphering, he found to run thus :—

If you'd find a marv'lous treasure,  
 Book of lore and wondrous pleasure ;  
 By to-morrow's earliest sight,  
 In Windsor Park by cock-crow light,  
 Beneath the moss-grown beech's root,  
 (Mark'd with crosses three its bark,)  
 Firm of heart, of hand, of foot,  
 Dig from sunrise until dark.

"Pshaw !" said Frank ; "how should this be ? A book ; buried beneath a tree ! Are there indeed such fairy-gifts ? Knowledge is

gained by toil—its treasures lie hidden—and are only to be brought to light by research. May such things be? Our Windsor Park is said to be the haunt of beings more than mortal. If such a book is there in truth, 'twere well worth the digging for."

At night, when he laid his head upon the pillow, his last thought was:—"What if I were to go there, and see the place? No harm in that. I'll sleep upon it."

He woke before the dawn. "I'll go look for the tree, at all events, and see whether it bear the three crosses." He arose; but before he left home, he took a spade from an out-house. He shouldered it, and thought:—"Nobody will know of my folly, even if I should have the folly to put so much faith in this scroll, as to use my spade." Passing master Page's farm in his way to the forest, he encountered George, who was up, with his father, looking after the men, and setting them to work.

"Is that you, Frank?" said George, coming through the gate of the farm-yard to meet his friend; "whither away so early? I thought you'd been more of a student—and loved better to pore o' nights over black and white, than to get up o' mornings to see the sun rise."

"Hush! never mind; now you have seen me, come with me, if you will;" said Frank; "I've got something in hand, that I care not should be talked of by thy father's hinds, and so, get over half Windsor. If I play the fool, let my chum only, know my folly."

He walked on, saying no word more. When he reached the forest, he plunged into the thick of the trees, and still walked on.

"What seek you? A coney, a hare, or a squirrel?" said George Page laughing, and striding after Frank. "Or is it a buck-royal that you have come hither to knock o'the head with that spade, and so bring me with ye to bear part of the blame of deer-stealing?"

"Prythee, peace;" said Frank, peering about among the boles of the trees.

They had reached a tangled thicket, or dell; far and wide reputed as a fairy-haunt. In the midst stood a venerable moss-grown beech-tree, hollow with age, and but few leaves left fluttering on its rugged arms.

The rising sun sent its penetrating beams through the neighbouring oaks, and elms, and beeches; and, as the stream of light fell on this centre grand old tree, three crosses were distinctly visible, carved upon its smooth trunk.

"By the mass, there they are!" exclaimed Frank.

"What, are where?" said George, amazed at his friend's excited manner.

For all answer, Frank pointed to the three marks; thrust the bit of parchment into George's hand; hastily threw off his doublet; and began digging vigorously.

George examined the queer characters of the script; spelt them over and over; and then said:—"I'm no great scholar, but I can make enough out, to find that you're digging in hope of a promised book."

"Just that;" said Frank, lustily continuing his labour, though it made the beads stand upon his brow.

"You're less accustomed to handle a spade than a pen, Ford," said George; "give it to me, and let's see how many spits I can heave to your one."

Frank Ford was about to yield the spade; when he suddenly resumed plying it, as eagerly as before.

"Laugh at me if you will;" said he; "but I'm determined to carry out this adventure myself; who knows but the charm consists in being worked out by him alone, who's destined to find the book?"

A very soft titter,—scarce more than the twitter of a young bird, might have been heard at this moment; but it was unheeded by either Frank or George.

"You have faith in the charm, then?" said George; "I thought you book-men held fairies and fairy-gifts to be little better than old wives' tales."

"I hardly know what I believe—or what I doubt;" said Frank; "the more we scholars learn, the less we rely upon our own wits. We get awed by the store of knowledge there is to acquire, which makes each step we advance seem but a plunge into fresh difficulties; the light before us serves but to show us the darkness through which we have

passed, and casts into shadow even our actual path. However that may be, I'm resolved in this search I'm about, to win through with it, e'en if I dig here till set of sun."

The soft titter trilled forth once more; while Frank continued to throw out spadeful after spadeful of earth from the hole,—which was by this time pretty deep,—as if he had been tossing linen out of a basket; for, sooth to say, he was more impetuous than skilful, as a husbandman.

George Page stood watching him; turning over the bit of parchment betwixt his own fingers, and considering. Suddenly he said:—"Frank, what's the day of the month?"

"I know not,—neither do I care, I was going to add;" said Frank Ford hastily, digging away as strenuously as ever.

"But it may make some difference in your charm, you know;" said George, silyly. "I do believe, it's the first day of April!"

The spade dropped from Frank Ford's hand; he stood aghast, up to his knees in the hole he had dug; while there was an uncontrollable burst of tittering, as if a whole brood of young birds were clamouring in their nest for food.

George Page put his finger on his lip, as he looked at his friend, and then stepped close to the hollow trunk of the beech-tree.

"I've found the fairies," cried he, peeping in, and discovering,—as he expected,—the crouching forms, and laughing faces of the two merry maidens, Meg and Alice; "but since they've been pleased to play their elvish tricks upon us, we'll not let them vanish without paying the penalty. They shan't creep forth from their hiding-place without giving us a kiss a-piece; shall they, Frank?"

"A kiss is the least I deserve for my hard digging," said Frank Ford, leaping out of the pit, and placing himself beside George to prevent the escape of their rogues of prisoners.

"Let's promise the kiss a-piece, and trust to our fingers for ridding us, by the exchange of a box o' the ear each;" whispered Alice to Meg. "Come, come; let us out!" she added aloud.

"Well then, you promise?" said the two youths.



"Yes, yes ; we promise, of course ;" said the girls ; but the instant they had both got clear of the hollow tree, they took to their heels, and would have scampered off scot-free ; had not Frank and George,—half prepared for such an attempted cheat,—caught them before they had run many paces. Then a soufle ensued, such as the prize in question generally brings about between rustic lads and lasses. There was much struggling, and cuffing, and bending of waists, and bobbing of heads, on the part of the girls, to avoid the clasping arms, and adventurous lips that sought a victory.

George Page succeeded in snatching a transient touch of Meg's soft mouth, amid a storm of writhings and pushings, and thumpings ; while Frank Ford obtained a passing sweep athwart Alice's rosy lips, that was scarce more than smoothing the silk of an electric machine, amidst a perfect hurricane of poutings, and slappings, and twistings, and twinings, of her pretty little body to and fro within his arms.

"He's so strong, I've no patience with him ;" she exclaimed, as she burst away from his embrace ; but it was only to fall into the equally potent one of George Page, who stood on the watch for her, as he let Meg go.

Frank Ford was not quite so alert as his friend, so that Margaret Gay had time to dart off, before he could seize her in his turn. This annoyed him ; and he said testily,—as the girls disappeared ; "So I've punished only one, after all !" I wonder which it was of them that sent me the fairy-favour, to make an April-fool of me ! I wish I knew."

"Forget and forgive !" said George. "Besides, I shouldn't like to have my kisses taken for punishment, if I were you."

"Why, what would you have 'em taken for ? I suppose you've the modesty to think the girls take yours for blessings, master George ?" said Frank.

"Well, I've a notion that Margaret Gay didn't loathe it, for all she cuffed me so heartily : it's proper to struggle, you know, Frank ; they all think so, bless 'em ;" said George, laughing.

"And pray how did Alice May take your worship's salute? Did she seem to think it an infliction, or a privilege?—but the latter no doubt;" said Frank, with a tinge of bitterness in his voice.

"I didn't so much notice what she seemed to think;" said George.

"Now, is that careless tone of his, put on, I wonder?" thought Frank Ford. "The touch of Alice's lip is not to be thought of with such indifference as that! Impossible! Not natural! He but affects not to care for it!" For another moment his thoughts ran on upon the merits of the lip in question; then he said aloud:—"I don't know what business you had to kiss Alice May at all, for my part!"

George Page laughed; "Only as much business as you had; we both kissed her for pleasure, not for business, I believe. At least, I did."

"You had a kiss of both the girls; I had one only of Alice. I shan't rest contented till I get one of Meg, also;" said Frank.

"Tell her so;" said George; "and if she's the girl I take her for, she'll give you one of her own accord, to show that she bears no malice. In that case, you'll come best off, after all; for, to my thinking, one willing kiss is worth a dozen forced ones, any day!"

The next time the young people all met, Margaret Gay proved that George Page's estimate of her character was a true one. She had already forgiven, and nearly forgotten, Frank's pedantic airs; besides, her fooling him in the forest,—although the tables were partly turned upon herself there,—had sufficiently avenged the playmates' cause upon the young collegian; and they were all once more upon their old friendly footing together.

Therefore, when George Page said:—"Here's Frank Ford cannot rest contented till he's even with you for your April-morn jest, Meg; so give him a kiss for peace' sake; and then you may give me one for—for—liking' sake, if you will;" Meg gave a blushing laugh, but held out her plump fresh cheek to Frank, giving him her hand heartily at the same time.

"Well!" said George.

"Well?" echoed she.

"I'm waiting for mine ;" he said.

"You don't think I'm going to offer it, do you, Mr. Impudence ?"

"Then I may take it ?"

"Take care, I don't take something else, then. I may take you a box of the ear, saying, 'take that for thy pains,' if you do."

"I'll run the risk ;" he said, catching her in his arms.

"Stay ! If you snatch it, how will it be given ? I thought you asked for a given one,—one to be given 'for liking' sake ;' pray, how have you deserved such a one ?"

"By liking thee, Meg ;" he replied. "In good sadness,—or rather, in sober verity,—or rather, by this good light,—which is the gay light in thine eyes, Meg,—I like thee right well ; which, I take it, is a fair title to a kiss upon liking, in return."

"He's meddling with your father's vocation, Frank ; talking me out of my senses, like a lawyer ;" said Meg, turning towards him, after yielding to George's wish with a maidenly colour in her cheek, yet with the unaffected cordiality and frankness belonging to her disposition.

But Frank had been for some moments talking earnestly to Alice, which prevented his observing what Meg said.

"And now, come, all of you, to father's ;" said George Page ; "he bade me bring as many of the lads and lasses of Windsor, as I could muster, this evening, to our old barn ; where we're to have an Easter-tide dance and supper. So you, Frank, take Meg and Alice there, while I go beat up for more guests, who have heels as light as their hearts. We'll have a merry night on't !"

During that evening's revels, the young scholar, Frank Ford, attached himself almost wholly to the side of Alice May. When the coloured eggs, proper to this holiday season, were handed round, he presented her with some as a keepsake ; he secured her as his partner in well-nigh every measure they danced ; he ministered to her plate at supper, he pledged her in the foaming nut-brown ale ; he drank out of the glass from which she had sipped ; and while showing her all these attentions, he found himself thinking of the sweet fairy-favour he had won from that

rosy lip of hers, in the early April morning among the old park trees. He thought how bright and sparkling, yet how tender, was her blue eye. He thought how gay and merry-hearted she was, yet how gentle and modest. He thought how gracefully agile her steps were in the dance, yet how seemly her behaviour; how lively her manners, yet how musically soft her laugh and her voice. "She has the blithe humour of the simple country-girl, with the refined look and air of a high-bred maiden;" thought he; "she might have been born a lady, and would do honor to the choice of a gentleman. What a wife she will make for a man of taste and breeding, in a few years' time!"

Each succeeding vacation, thoughts such as these floated through the mind of the young collegian, when he returned home to Windsor, and encountered his old playmates, Alice May and Margaret Gay; and each time, these thoughts recurred with added strength, and assumed a more definite purpose.

"I will tell her my thoughts, the next time I return home, which will be for good and all;" he resolved, when he went back to college for the last time. "I will tell her what I think of her, and learn whether she judges me as favourably."

Meanwhile, George Page had been indulging somewhat similar ruminations with regard to Margaret Gay. "What a frank, free-hearted creature she is!" thought he. "What a good-humoured, comely face, she has! What an even temper, what a pleasant look, what a joyous laugh! The sound of it's enough to set a man's heart dancing for an hour after; the glance of her eye, to make him sing or whistle as he walks; the sight of her face, to fill him with glad thoughts for a whole day. Her voice is like the carol of a thrush on a may-bough, or the oussel after rain; her speech is like the bubbling of a water-brook in summer-time, sweet, liquid, and welcome; her smile is like an opening rose, and her looks are like the morning. What a happy husband she would make of him she might love! What a cheerful hopeful companion, what a true friend would he have in such a wife!"

His fancy was amusing itself with just such thoughts as these. one

summer evening, when he met Poll Quickly, who, like all people of her busy-boddy nature, made friends with every one, and forced every one to be friends with her.

"Give you good even, master Page;" she said, dropping the young man a curtsey as she passed. Then, lingering on her way, to suit her pace to the sauntering one he was taking, she added:—"And how's the worthy gentleman, your father? Stout and hearty, I hope; may Heaven in its mercy, be long before it calls him to a better place than this wicked world, I pray."

"My father was never better;" said George Page; "I thank you, good mistress Polly."

"Long may he continue so; and may he never be worse than better, till it please Heaven to bid him to its best;" said she. "But how is it, that so comely a young man as his son, is walking abroad by himself? When there's not a maid in all Windsor but would bear him company, as welcome as the flowers in May, did she but know he was so lonely."

"Lonely, but not sadly, mistress Poll;" answered he. "Though a pretty maiden's talk is pleasant company, to be sure, yet a man can walk alone, and yet contrive to entertain himself, I trow."

"And that he may;" replied Poll Quickly; "speciously when he can make his thoughts of the pretty maid keep him company, if he can't have herself by his side. I know what I know; but all's one for that."

"Why, what dost thou know, good Mistress Poll?"

"Nay, nay, I warrant me, you think, master Page, that a mill-sixpence will cover all I know about your worship's fancy for a certain well-looking farmer's daughter that shall be named no names;" said she, nodding her head waggishly; "but as sure as a hare's foot is good for the cramp. I can tell who was she that sat in master Page's thought, when I came up with him, just now."

"How know you that I was thinking at all?" said Page, laughing.

"Troth, master Page, I know well enough, that when young men walk alone in the fields, their arms folded, their eye on the ground, their step slow, and their breathing quick, they're not thinking of nothing; I

know they're thinking of something, and a pretty something—an eye, or a lip, it may be; or of somebody, and a pretty somebody. Well, Heaven made us all! But some are fashioned comely, and some are fashioned ugly; some are fashioned goodly, and some badly."

"True enough;" said George Page.

"Ay, in truth, it is true enough;" said she; "and I'll hold your worship a silver-white shilling, that I know who your worship deems the goodliest-fashioned, the comeliest-featured, and all-to-nothing prettiest girl in broad Windsor, though it's a broad town and a wide town, and a fair town: but be it as broad as a bean, or a Windsor bean, too, yet I wot well who master Page thinks the fairest maid there."

"Go to, thou prat'st;" said he.

"Prate or not prate," retorted she, "I'll hold my own, that young mistress Gay is worth any man's liking; she's a wife for a king if he fancied her, for she's notable and saving,—a right thrifty housewife; she's a wife for the proudest lord at court, for she's frank-spoken and open; she's a wife for a farmer, for she's pretty and merry; nay, for the matter o' that, she's a wife for a poor man, if she chose to have him, for she has good looks and gay spirits enough to console him for a scanty table and a starving hearth."

"She has your liking at any rate, mistress Poll;" said George Page, smiling.

"She has my good liking, and she shall have my good word, too, whenever she asks it, master Page;" said she; "I can see, as you can see, that she has a hazel eye, a ripe lip, a slender waist, and a trim ankle; but I know moreover, that she's as good a housewife as ever a wife in Windsor; though so young a maid. She has all the gifts of a notable housewife; she's as neat as a bride, in her garments; she has a quick eye, a curious nose, a careful taste, and a ready ear; she's neither butter-finger'd, sweet-tooth'd, nor faint-hearted, so that she'll let nothing fall that should be held fast, she'll waste nothing that should be used or stored, nor will she lose time with over-niceness. I tell you, master Page, she'd make a wife for a prince, or for the prince of young farmers,

which, sooth to say, well I know who is." And Poll Quickly ended her speech with a meaning look towards him, to mark her concluding words.

"Is not mistress Alice May all this, to the full as worthily as young mistress Gay?" said Page, maliciously, that he might mislead her, and make her think she had lavished her match-making praise on the wrong person.

Poll Quickly was so taken aback by this idea, that she could not immediately rally; but presently she stammered:—"Surely she is! Never a maid in Windsor is a sweeter girl, or a more prudent housewife, than young mistress Alice."

"Saving mistress Margaret;" said Page, drily.

"Ay, saving her;" assented Poll Quickly; "yet mistress Alice is a rare pickler and preserver; and so indeed is mistress Margaret. Such cowslip wine as she makes! And yet mistress Alice hath the lighter hand at a crust for a venison-pasty; but few can equal mistress Margaret at tansy-cakes; and then what skill hath mistress Alice in veal-toasts and kickshaws. They'd make your mouth water only to see 'em in a dream. Sooth to say, I cannot tell which maiden is the better gifted in housewifery, or the worthier to have a comely young farmer for a husband; but they'll both make passing good wives—above all, young mistress"—here she glanced vainly into Page's face; which, affording no glimmering ray of intelligence to guide her, she stumbled on blindly, and ended with a vague sound of 'ay, to which he might prefix either *G* or *M*, as might best please himself.

"In short, she's as expert in cookery and household matters, as she's charming in person;" said George Page.

"Troth, master Page, you never said a truer word; and so you shall find, when you've made her your wife."

"Made whom my wife?" said he, slyly and suddenly.

"Young mistress 'ay;" answered Poll Quickly, with the same dubiousness of pronunciation in the commencing consonant; "Ah, you'll be a happy man, master Page; truly, you have an eye to choose a sweetheart, and wit to choose a wife; both of which I wish you joy of,

in young mistress 'ay. And though I wouldn't be bold to remind you of the wager between us, yet you'll own I've fairly won it; have I not, master Page? The silver-white shilling is honestly mine."

"You shall have the shilling, fairly won, or no;" said George Page laughing; "there it is for thee; thy praise of both the merry maids is honestly worth it,—at all events, to my ear, for I love them both, dearly."

"Marry; Heaven forbid! You can have but one of them to wife, remember, master Page;" said the startled Poll Quickly.

"Rest you content, mistress Poll;" said Page, smiling. "I love my pretty neighbours in all honesty of liking; they have both been my playmates from boyhood; I've a right to say I love them dearly, and I do love them dearly—'speciously' one of them," he added to himself, mimicking Poll's word.

"I'll commend your worship to them, and tell them so, the first time I see them again;" said Poll Quickly, dropping her parting curtsy.

"Do so, mistress Polly; and good evening to you;" said he.

"Good evening, and good night; and pleasant dreams of young mistress 'ay, I wish you from my heart, master Page. And may her pretty face, which I see at this moment"—here Poll Quickly's mental vision gave her a confused dual portrait of Meg and Alice's two sets of features blended in inextricable cross-lines and hues—"may it smile near your pillow while you sleep, as clear as I behold it before me now, I pray Heaven."

Whilst this conversation between George Page and Poll Quickly was taking place in the fields, Meg and Alice were chatting together over their spinning-wheels, which they had brought out into the porch of farmer Gay's house, that they might enjoy the sunny afternoon in the open air.

"Tell me, Meg, is this true, I hear that mistress Barley-broth asked your good mother whether she thought you could love her son Ambrose; and that honest Ralph Barley-broth told your father he hoped he'd not refuse his boy such a good wife as his daughter would make?"



"Yes, yes, it's true enough," said Margaret Gay, laughing; "true enough that young master Ambrose was too sheepish to court for himself, and so got his father and mother to get him a wife ready-wooded."

"Then you wouldn't have him?" said Alice.

"Have him? What should I do with him, when I had him? Set him to mind father's geese?—or to hold my distaff? But even these offices, I fear me, would prove beyond him. A young fellow that hasn't courage to look a girl in the face, or wit to tell her his liking, would let the geese stray, and the flax tangle."

"Poor Ambrose!" laughed Alice.

"Cast not thy pity away upon a sheep, any more than thy pearls,—had'st thou a string of 'em,—before swine;" said Meg; "take my word for it, master Ambrose Barley-broth is not so tender a lambkin that he'll break his heart upon the stony cruelty of mine. He'll get his good parents to carry his bleatings to some other damsel, who will be content to listen to them at second-hand; and then he'll think her fairer and comelier than ever he fancied me."

"Like enough;" said Alice; "a shame-faced suitor sees most beauty in her who smiles on his suit with least suing. But see who comes here! That tattling gossip, Poll Quickly."

"Her tattle is harmless, and her gossip is amusing;" said Meg; "let's hear what news she has."

"A fair evening, and a many of 'em, to the two merry maidens of Windsor;" said Poll, approaching the porch; "the wheel flies swift and the yarn lengthens, when spinning is done out of doors such evenings as these, and by such fingers as those."

"Hast thou been among the courtiers, up at the castle, good mistress Poll, that thou hast learnt such flattering words?" asked Alice.

"Nay, I flatter not; I but repeat what others say, when I avouch that the two merry maids have fingers both nimble and fair;" said Poll. "And as for gill-firting among the courtiers up yonder, I detest, as I'm an honest maid, I'm above such doings. No, all can be said of Poll

Quickly is, that she minds her modest calling of bar-maid, and does its duties soberly, I thank Heaven for it."

"Thou still keep'st thy place at the Star Inn, then?" said Margaret Gay.

"Ay, that I do, i'faith;" replied Poll; "though hard's the softest words I have there, and heavy's the lightest work I have, Lord knows! Up with the lark, and down with the lamb, is my latest lying-abed, I'll warrant ye. At work by cock-crow, and only half done by the time the chickens go to roost, is my daily labour. A bar-maid at the Star has her hands full, I can tell ye; and the place isn't a bed stuffed with pullet-down."

"Why do you stay in it, then, mistress Poll? Why not try and get another and a better place?" said Alice.

"So I would, and so I mean, if I can get some good soul to help me to a better;" returned Poll Quickly. "They do say, that there's a ranti-pole young man coming over here from Staines to set up a new hostelry; and if so, the old Star may go whistle for custom; in which case, I leave, depend on't."

"Rats quit falling houses they say;" whispered Alice to her friend; "and here's a mouse that won't stay, where there are no crumbs to be nibbled."

"And who do you think I've just parted with, in the fields, yonder?" said Poll Quickly, who had crossed her arms leisurely on the top of the wicket-gate, a few paces from the porch where Meg and Alice sat, and had evidently taken up her position for a lounging talk; "I'll give it ye in ten, I'll give it ye in twenty—though two you'll not guess, ere you hit upon's name, I warrant me. Well, Heaven be praised, young men will be comely, and young women will have eyes; and so for the matter of that, have young farmers; and a keen eye, and a handsome eye he has, and a roguish eye for a pretty girl, I'll be his surety."

"Of whom art thou talking?" said Margaret.

"Lord, lord! to see how crafty-modest young maidens can be!" exclaimed Poll; "As if, for sooth, you didn't know, both of ye, as pat as

a pancake to Shrove Tuesday, or a coloured egg to Easter, that the young farmer I'm telling you of, is none other than master George Page."

"And what of him?" asked Alice; for Margaret was at that instant busy, untwisting a knot that had somehow got into the yarn she was spinning.

"Why, nothing of him, but what you know, both of ye, better than I can tell you;" said Poll, glancing shrewdly into both their faces alternately, that she might try and find out which of the young girls showed most interest in what she was saying; "nothing of him; but much of what he said;" added she with a nod, as she emphasised the last words.

"And what said he?" Alice went on; for Margaret was still intent upon the knot.

"Ah, you're a daughter of grannam Eve, mistress Alice, like us all, Lord forgive us!" exclaimed Poll Quickly. "Now, I warrant me, you couldn't guess, not you, that master Page's talk was naught but of a certain young maiden, that sits nearer to me, than I am to London town; and if I was to say she's one of the two who are known for the merriest maids in all Windsor, you wouldn't think that, either, would you?"

"And prythee what was his talk of us? What found he new to say of his two old playmates and neighbours?" said Alice.

"Why, he said—he said—that he loved them both dearly;" stammered Poll Quickly; who, when thus called upon to repeat what master Page had actually said, could recollect nothing more definite, or to the purpose, in his laudation.

The two merry maidens burst into a gay laugh. "Is that all the mystery thou hast to tell? That's nothing new, to say or to hear! We know full well that we are favourites of his, as two friends of such long standing needs must be;" said Alice.

"Ay, but his favourite one of the two of ye—which is she, I wonder?" said Poll Quickly slyly, and rallying; for she was not long to be disconcerted.

"Ay,—which?—I wonder, which?" said Alice. "But in good sadness, I think it would be hard to tell which; for I believe he likes us both so well, there's not a pin to choose between us. George Page loves

Meg and me as dearly as sisters; and he's too good a brother to breed dissension, by giving one a preference to the other."

"Sisters, quoth'a?" retorted Poll; "Troth, mistress Alice, you're a sly bird; but there's a fowler lying in wait for you, or I'm much mistook, that'll lure you into his net some of these fine days, and make you his turtle-dove; he'll springe ye, he'll ring-fence ye, he'll cage ye, I'll warrant; which Heaven send, I pray." So saying, with many a nod, and wink, and chuckling laugh, Poll quickly left the wicket-gate, and potted away.

For some time after her departure, the two merry maids pursued their spinning in silence,—an unusual thing with them; but at length Alice said with a smiling look towards her companion:—"I'm minded, Meg, that should Poll Quickly be right in fancying that George Page likes one of us better than the other, and that one even more dearly than a sister, he needn't fear the fate of Ambrose Barley-broth."

"He wouldn't woo like Ambrose Barley-broth;" replied Margaret. "If George Page loved a girl well enough to wish her for a wife, he'd tell her so himself, and at once."

"May be so; and may be, that 'at once' is not so far off, eh, Meg?" said Alice; "I've a notion it'll be shortly; what say you?"

"Nay, perhaps you know best;" answered Margaret smiling; "Poll Quickly said one of the merry maids was his favourite; who knows but it may be you, after all?"

"I know better; and so do you, Meg. Come, now; own like the honest girl thou art, that thou see'st he loves thee, and that thou lov'st him."

"If he tell me the one, I'll tell thee the other, Alice," said her friend, blushing and laughing. "But, come now, in thy turn own to me, whether there is not one, beside the friend in question, who, were he to tell thee the same tale, would get as kind an answer for his pains."

"Where should such a one be?" said Alice.

"Marry, at college, now;" replied Margaret; "but vacation-time will soon be here, and then he returns to Windsor, and then——"

"And then," interrupted Alice, "if he tell me the tale thou think'st he has to tell, I'll tell thee the tale thou expect'st to hear from me."

"A bargain;" said Meg. And the two friends' spinning-wheels went merrily on; while the spinsters struck into a quaint ditty, in which they both joined voices tunefully together:—

FIRST VERSE.

1ST VOICE.

2ND VOICE.  
*Ad lib.*

ACCOMP.

O, the hum of the wheel is

O, the hum of the wheel is

plea-sant and chee-ry! Of the hum of the wheel, O,

plea-sant and chee-ry! Of the hum of the wheel, O,

who could grow wea-ry? It chimes with our song, It

who could grow wea-ry? It chimes with our song, It

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helps us a - long, It chimes with our song, It  
helps us a - long, It chimes with our song, It

helps us a - long, As we spin the good yarn,  
helps us a - long As we spin the good yarn,

Length - i - ly, Speed - i - ly, Fast as our fin - gers can fly.  
Length - i - ly, Speed - i - ly, Fast as our fin - gers can fly.

SECOND VERSE

U, the hum of the wheel is

U, the hum of the wheel is

glad - some and gay! The light work of the wheel's e'en

glad - some and gay! The light work of the wheel's e'en

bet - ter than play; To our song it keeps time, Murmurs

bet - ter than play; To our song it keeps time, Murmurs

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soft with our rhyme, To our song it keeps time, Murmurs  
 soft with our rhyme, To our song it keeps time, Murmurs

soft with our rhyme, As we spin the good yarn,  
 soft with our rhyme, As we spin the good yarn,

Web soundly, Thread roundly, Fast as our fingers can fly.  
 Web soundly, Thread roundly, Fast as our fin-gers can fly.



About this time, sir Marmaduke Ducandrake returned to his estate at Windsor, after a lengthened sojourn in London, where he had contrived to fool away larger sums of money than ever. One of these sums was lost at a tavern, where the Templars, and young law-students of the different inns of court, much resorted. The young fellow who had gained the knight's money, was not inclined to trust his debtor any the more for finding that his rank was above that of his associates; and when sir Marmaduke owned that he had not as much cash about him as would pay the sum lost, the young man blustered, and would have doubtless proceeded to even worse extremities than venting his ire in several opprobrious terms, the least of which was 'sneak-up,' 'coystril,' and 'bilking knave.' But in this emergency, one of the company, a country squire,—who happened to be in London on a visit of the same nature with the one which called sir Marmaduke thither, namely, a desire to get rid of a little of his superfluous revenue, and enjoy a roystering season in the metropolis,—stepped forward, and offered the use of his purse to sir Marmaduke Ducandrake, only soliciting the honor of his friendship in return for this passing service.

With much alacrity, sir Marmaduke seized this opportune tender, and protested that it was he who should feel honored by the acquaintance of a gentleman who could behave with so much spirit and generosity of feeling.

The country squire announced his name to be Robert Shallow, Esq., of Gloucestershire; upon which a friendly alliance was struck up between him and sir Marmaduke that lasted all the remainder of the London season. The knight introduced the country squire to such of the amusements at the court-end of the town, as he thought he might safely be seen in with so bumpkin a companion, letting it be well understood, that the squire was rich enough to gild his rusticity and make it pass current among the town gentry; while, in return, the country squire introduced the knight to several delectable tavern-haunts Eastward, which had till now been unknown ground to the courtier. But when the court removed to Windsor for the summer, the friends were compelled to part; for sir Marmaduke had to attend the royal suite, as well as to

visit his estate, that he might recruit his health and his finances, which had both suffered, in the late London campaign; while, on his side, the country squire was about to return to Gloucestershire, to resume his magisterial duties, being a justice of the peace in that county.

Sir Marmaduke had given his note of hand for the money he had borrowed of justice Shallow in his emergency; and now, on taking leave, he told his friend, he would forward him the sum in question,—three hundred and fifty pounds,—by a safe hand, so soon as he should return to his Windsor estate.

On the very morning after his arrival there, sir Marmaduke sent for his treasurer and bailiff, farmer Page, and told him the occasion he had for various sums; and among others, he mentioned this one, and desired Page would find a trustworthy messenger to convey the amount of his debt to Gloucestershire, and to place it in the hands of justice Shallow. The farmer undertook that his own son should execute the knight's commission; and accordingly George Page was desired to be ready by the following morning to set out upon his journey.

Now, a journey of some seventy miles, through Berkshire woods, and meadows, and among Gloucestershire uplands and hills, in lovely summer weather, on horseback, and at a pace suited to the rider's own liking, should seem no such irksome task; and yet, when it was first proposed by farmer Page to his son, true it is, that George did not feel the glee, in its prospect, which most young men of his age would have both felt and shown. But neither did he manifest any discontent; he took his father's directions with regard to the message and the packet he was to bear, and prepared to set forth with his usual frank good-humour and unclouded brow.

The cause of his first unwillingness, and his subsequent cheerful assent in the matter, might be gathered from the words he muttered to himself, as he saddled his horse at an early hour next day, and began his journey:—"I can tell her, just as well, when I return; it has been so long untold,—perhaps unthought, even by myself,—that it may well abide unspoken till I come back. And yet, meantime, I wish I could have seen her; had it been but to say goodbye; although, had I

said that, I had certainly said more. Well, I should have carried a lighter heart into Gloucestershire could I have told its secret to Meg before I went; I should be a coxcomb to fancy that hers will be heavy at my going away without a word; but yet, I would I had seen her ere I left Windsor."

The morning was one of those so common to a fine English summer, when the landscape is shrouded in silvery dew and haze, which foretells the glowing beauty of the coming day; what time the sun, with his amorous warmth, shall raise the veil that screens the coy earth, and call upon the universal sky to bear witness to her loveliness.

The air was scented with many a hay-cock and bean-blossom, as it came freely wafted over field and meadow; its stillness was marred by no ruder sound than the soaring lark's song, the lowing of herded kine, the hum of insects, the rustle of leaves stirred by its light summer breeze. All nature seemed filled with sweet and hopeful things; while still the burden of George Page's thought was:—"yet I would I had seen her ere I left Windsor." It had not been repeated to himself above twenty-five times, at the very utmost computation; certainly, he had not measured a furlong's space from his father's farm,—when, suddenly his ear caught sound of a blithe voice carolling some rustic ballad, and his eye fell upon the very form which of all others he had been longing to see.

Yes; there was Margaret Gay singing as clear as a black-bird, carrying a basket on her arm, and stepping at a smart pace along the hedgerow foot-path, which skirted the bridle-way

"Why, what in the name of blest fortune brings thee abroad, and so early?" said George Page, as the young girl turned her head at the sound of his horse's foot.

"I am going across the fields to Ashleigh farm; there's a cotter there, who was once a hind at my father's. Mother heard that his poor wife, and two of the children, are sick of the hay-fever, so she sent me over to see what can be done, and to take them a couple of pullets to make broth of, and some new-laid eggs. And what may take you this way? On horseback, too; it must be some distart errand."

"I go, at my father's bidding, into Gloucestershire;" answered

George Page; "but I can't tell thee well all about it, thou walking, I riding. Either I'll dismount, and sit beside thee awhile under the hedge; or thou shalt get up with me, and let Daisy carry thee to Ashleigh farm, round by the road-way, which, with the help of her back, will be as near as the path over the fields."

"I'll not be the means of making George Page loiter on his errands; and so, mayhap, get his father's ill-word;" said Meg.

"Give me thy hand, then; set thy foot firm on my instep; now give a spring, and up thou art!" And thus she was lifted to his saddle-bow.

"And now tell me, Meg, ——"

"I thought you were to tell me;" interrupted she; for George Page, —doubtless in his anxiety to prevent her falling from the horse,—had passed both arms around her; and, as he spoke, they held her more closely than the danger seemed to require; "you were going to say what causes your journey into Gloucestershire, weren't you?"

"Ay; my father sends me thither, on business of sir Marmaduke's, to one justice Shallow. I shall be gone a bare fortnight, I fancy; but meanwhile I'm glad to have seen Margaret Gay before I set forth, though it be to say farewell."

"'Farewell' for so short an absence, is no hard word to say;" said Margaret Gay. "Better have to say 'farewell' for a fortnight's ride, than 'God be wi' you' for a year and a sea-voyage."

"I'm glad to hear thee say thou had'st rather part with me for a fortnight than a year, Meg. But let me ask thee a plain question or two."

"Thou'rt like to get but wry answers to thy plain questions, if thou hold'st me so tight, George;" said she; "prisoners, thou know'st, are apt to be crabbed in reply to their jailers."

"I am no jailer; I would be none to thee, Meg; I would be thy husband;" said George Page.

"My husband? cry you mercy, what is that but a jailer?" replied she.

"I'll show thee what else, if thou'lt make me thine, dear Meg;" he said. "No grim jailer; but a warm friend, a zealous protector, a loving spouse, shalt thou have of me, if thou wilt have me for a husband."

" Too many good things in one man, to refuse ; I'll think of your good offer, if you'll give me breathing-space. Set me down on the ground ; I can think more at my ease there, than I can here. A free-born English woman pants for liberty of choice, and how can I choose freely when you hug me so tight ? I'm in prison here, and can't give your proposal consideration at large, which is its due. Set me down, George."

" That will I not ; unless you tell me that the gyves hurt you ." said he, letting his arms give her another gentle clasp.

" If I tell you they neither pain me nor offend me, you'll be asking me to wear them for life ;" said she.

" You should never know rougher shackles ; nor worse prison-fare, than bread and cheese with appropriate garnish—and thou'rt too good a housewife not to know what that is ; nor crueller usage than this." The last word was accompanied by something that rhymed to it ; while Meg said :—" If you neglect the bridle thus, master George, I fear me Daisy will take her own pace, and we shall never reach Ashleigh farm to-day."

" I care not how long we are going thither ;" said George Page.

" Is it thus you obey your father's bidding to speed into Gloucestershire ?" asked Meg.

" He bade me ride, not speed ; and I am resolved I will not on thither, until I carry with me thy promise to be my wife on my return, Meg. I've set my heart on it."

" If so, I can but give thee the promise thou desir'st, George ; and to make it better worth the carrying, suppose I let thee know that my heart goes with it ?" said Meg.

The storm of kisses with which her frank words were greeted, may be inferred from Meg's exclamation of " George, you'll frighten the very birds off the trees ! See how farmer Ashleigh's sober cows are staring at us ! But there's Miles Swinkley's cottage. Now set me down in earnest, George. God bless thee ; and farewell !"

With one parting hug, the lover let his mistress dismount ; and then he set forward at a pace that should make up for the time he had so pleasantly lost.

In the afternoon of the fourth day from the one on which he left home. George Page found himself at the gates of master Robert Shallow's dwelling. It was a goodly red-brick house, with a trim flower-garden in front and surrounding the immediate tenement; a spacious orchard, barns, and out-houses, lay beyond; and beyond those again, was a moderately-sized deer-park, with a few acres of grass and corn fields.

When George Page pulled the great gate-bell to announce his approach, there was a rough grinning head or two thrust forth from a stable near at hand—there was a whispering—a boy ran across the lawn, and entered the house by a little side door; then from the principal entrance there issued a man-servant of apparently greater dignity, who was donning an official coat of livery as he came along towards the gate, through which he inspected the stranger on horseback, and enquired his business.

“I come on business from sir Marmaduke Ducandrake to his good friend master Robert Shallow. Be pleased to tell the worthy justice this, and that I crave to see him by the name of George Page.”

“I will bear your message, sir;” and the man disappeared.

Presently he returned; opened the great iron gates with some pomp; and calling to a stable-lad, he bade him lead the gentleman's nag away, while he besought master Page to follow him straight to his worship.

Master Robert Shallow was seated in state, in the apartment which served him as a justice-room, and rose a little stiffly to receive the emissary of sir Marmaduke, as if willing to do him honor; but when George Page had stated his errand, had repeated the knight's greeting, and had delivered the sum he had in charge, with many courteous acknowledgments on the part of sir Marmaduke for the seasonable aid afforded by his esteemed friend, master Robert Shallow, the justice subsided into the slipshod ease, and good-humored babble which was his usual manner.

“Why, this is well, this is well, of my friend, sir Marmaduke. It is noble; believe me, it is noble, to remember his debt, and not leave all heed of it, as many a gay fellow of a courtier would have done, if all slanders were true that men breathe against us gentry, who love a

London life, and a merry; it is well, it is well; at a word, it is well, it is well." [www.fbtool.com.cn](http://www.fbtool.com.cn)

"I shall bear him word of your good esteem, sir, when I reach Windsor with this paper," said George Page, as he folded up the quitittance which the justice had written out, and handed to him.

"Ay, do so, do so, good youth, when you return to Windsor; but that must not be speedily. You must give me your good company awhile, master Page; we cannot part so, we cannot part so; by yea and nay, I cannot part with you yet."

"I thank you heartily for your hospitality, worshipful sir; for a night I will gladly accept it;" said George Page.

"A night shall not serve, master Page; a few days you must spare me. By cock and pye, I will not be said nay. A night shall not serve; in good sooth, it shall not; give me your hand, sir, give me your hand upon it!"

George Page, who was not one to withstand heartiness of manner, shook hands with the worthy justice, and promised to stay the few days he desired; although, in his secret heart, he would have been glad to hasten back to Windsor and to Margaret Gay.

"It is well said, master Page, and it is well said, indeed. Tomorrow I expect some cousins over here to see me. Worshipful master Silence, a brother justice of mine; with his good wife, who was a Shallow—my cousin, Winfred Shallow; and their two children,—my goddaughter Ellen, and her young brother, William; good children, very good children; good and fair, good and fair."

"Right glad shall I be to make acquaintance with so many goodly relations of master Robert Shallow's family;" said George Page.

"By'r lady, master Page, I think the Shallows are a goodly family; we are known in the county, we are known in the county, master Page; 'tis an old coat, an old coat, and a respected coat; it blazons well 'mongst our country scutecheons; its dozen white luces do no shame to Gloucestershire; 'tis a good coat, and an old coat. Can there be more said? It is both good and old."

"It hath worn well, and been born honorably;" said George Page.

“Bodykins, master Page, you say well, and you say well, i’faith And I shall let you see more cousins—more of the goodly family we wot of. Mistress Slender, that was a Shallow—Bridget Shallow—a cousin of mine, dwells here in the house with me, since her husband’s death—a worthy man, master Page, nobody dare say an ill word of him, and he broke his neck in a fox-chase,—and her son, Abraham Slender, worthy to be a Shallow—as he is in blood, indeed and in faith.”

“I shall be glad to know them, sir ;” said George Page.

“And you shall know them ; and know them soon, too. Come with me, good master Page ; we shall find them in the orchard, I warrant me. Come with me ; come with me.”

Justice Shallow, having previously ascertained that his guest had already dined, led the way to the orchard ; and there, as he expected, they found mistress Slender seated, knitting, beneath an apple-tree, beside an oaken table, on which was spread a dessert of fruit and cakes, sweetmeats, and wine.

“Servant, sir ;” said mistress Slender, looking over her glasses at the young stranger, and giving a short nod in answer to George Page’s low bow towards her, as the worthy justice performed the ceremony of introduction. “It’s well junkets and pippins don’t cool, standing in the open air ;” the lady continued, in a kind of mumbling undertone addressed to no one in particular, but aimed at the master of the house ; “but if it had been a good hot chine and dumplings, or a smoking sirloin, it would na’ fared the same.”

It was a fashion peculiar to mistress Slender—no, not quite peculiar to her, for some good ladies have been known to share it in common with her,—but it was a fashion of mistress Slender’s to signify her displeasure at the conduct of those around her, by side-wind remarks, muttered in a low grumbling voice ; and thus, on the present occasion, did she mark her disapproval of her cousin, the justice, and his guest, for having, by their protracted talk in the justice-room, kept the dessert waiting.

But it was the custom with those who knew her, to pay not the slightest regard to these animadversions of hers, since they were spoken



in a sort of colloquy, that claimed no absolute reply ; so now, justice Shallow, as if no such words had been uttered, said to her :—" And where's my cousin Abraham ? Where's he ? He should be here ; he should be here ; I want to make him known to this worthy young gentleman, master George Page. Where's Abraham ?"

" He's down at the kennel, I fancy ; he'll get his legs bit off, or his head torn to shivers, or his back bone rent in twain some of these odd days, if he's let to go among those rampagious hounds, all day long, as he does now ;" said mistress Slender.

" My young cousin's parlous fond of dogs ; his heart's with the hounds always ; he'd take meat and drink with 'em, sleep with 'em, live with 'em, if he could ;" said justice Shallow to George Page ; " he's fond of dogs ; vastly fond of dogs."

" He'll turn to a dog himself, if he's let to be with 'em so much ;" muttered mistress Slender.

" Davy, what Davy, I say !" shouted justice Shallow to the serving-man, of whom he caught a glimpse just then,—the same who had ushered George Page in ; " come hither, Davy ; run, Davy, and bid one of the lads speed down to the kennel, and bring hither master Slender ; tell him I want him here, I want him here. And Davy ! Davy ! Let me see, let me see ; bid William Cook get us an early supper ready ; my young guest here, will be glad of a timely meal after his ride ; and Davy ! Davy ! No—no matter ; go thy ways, Davy."

" The varlet should be told to wear his shoes up at heels, and not be allowed to go about, that slipshod fashion ;" said mistress Slender, looking after the serving-man as he ran off, with his dangling soles flacking against his feet like a loose horse-shoe ; " but he'll have kibed heels next winter, for his pains, that's one comfort."

At this moment, a tall gangling lad, of about ten or eleven years of age, came leaping over a wicket gate that led from the orchard into the park, and came straight to the table, exclaiming :—" I haven't had any dessert yet ! Why wasn't I called ? I'll have some, though, or I'll know why."

He was just going to snatch some of the fruit, when suddenly per

ceiving George Page, he stood looking at the stranger with staring eyes and gaping mouth. The hand which had been stretched out, was shyly withdrawn, and began to fumble with the lash of a whip which he held in the other; winding it round and round his fingers, coiling and uncoiling it, all the time keeping his eyes fixed and his mouth open, gloring at Page.

"Come hither, Abry;" said his mother; "why, what a sight the dogs have made of thee, boy. Here's a crumpled ruff and soiled doublet!"

But the lad did not move. His feet remained glued to the spot; his eyes and mouth were still wide-fixed; and he kept on twisting and untwisting the lash of his whip round his hand. The only sign he gave of having heard his mother, was a hunching shrug of one of his shoulders.

"Thou was't called to dessert, believe me, cousin Abraham;" said justice Shallow; "I sent for thee just now; did'st not meet Davy? I sent him for thee; I sent him to fetch thee; I sent him for thee, to make thee known to good master Page. Know him, good worthy sir; know my cousin Abraham, I beseech you."

The ungainly shoulder hunched once more; the feet shifted and shuffled, as the cub stood first on one leg, then upon the other; hanging his head, with eyes askance, and looking much like sir Chanticleer under the dispiriting influence of a severe fit of cramp. But George Page went towards him, and, in his own hearty way, made acquaintance with him; so that master Abraham was not so long as might otherwise have been, in getting over his shyness sufficiently to answer some of the good-humoured speeches with which Page plied him.

Next day they became still better friends. Master Slender took his new acquaintance to see the kennel; and when he found that George was fond of dogs, and knew a great deal about them, and imparted one or two valuable secrets in the management and cure of some of the diseases to which master Abraham's canine friends were subject; and when, moreover, he found that George Page expressed much admiration of these hounds of his cousin Shallow's, of the mode in which the pack was

trained and treated, of the construction of their kennel, and, in short, praised everything that he could honestly praise, in what was so especially interesting to master Abraham himself, master Abraham took quite a fancy to George Page, and vowed he liked him well-nigh as much as Clowder or Echo.

"By the mass, I'm sorry to part with you," he said to George Page, on the day before the one fixed for his return home. "I thought when I first saw you, you were like to turn out some fine Windsor spark, who'd treat a Gloucestershire lad like a clod or a turnip; but for all there's no court at Cotswold as there is at your castle, I find you can be civil and likely, with us in these country parts. 'Slid, if you had come over me with any of your Berkshire or London airs, I should have been as like to have swunged you as spoke to you, for all you're twice my size, and mayhap twice my years, and so I tell you fairly. But I like ye; and I tell ye that as fairly too, la."

"And I like you too, well, believe me, master Slender;" returned Page; "should your cousin, worshipful master Shallow, ever come Windsor-way, and bring you with him, I hope both he and you will visit us. My father and I will be proud to see you at our poor house."

With many friendly expressions on all sides, George Page left the house of justice Shallow; the worthy magistrate himself coming to the iron gates to see his young friend mount, loading him with greetings to sir Marmaduke, and pressing him to come as soon again into Gloucestershire as might be; while master Abraham hung about him, and expressed his grief at parting, in his own ungain fashion, fairly blubbering out his unwillingness to see him go.

"I would I might be hanged, but I'm sorry to see your horse;" he sobbed, as Daisy, ready saddled, was brought round; "I like not the beast, though I've no cause to hate her. The jade never did me harm, yet I could find in my heart to lash her soundly for carrying you away."

"Forgive Daisy, for the sake of her master, good master Slender;" said Page smiling. "She bears me safely and well, and you must owe her no grudge for doing her duty. So, bid her and me, God speed, and farewell!"

"And Daisy is your good mare's name?" said justice Shallow, as he stood patting her throat, while George Page got into the stirrups; "marry a good mare, and a good name; she is as white as a daisy; a fitting name, a very fitting name; nay, it can't be but Daisy."

Not long after George Page reached home, Frank Ford also returned to Windsor. He too was on horseback, and as he rode into the town, he stopped at the Star inn, where his horse was usually stabled, there being no accommodation of the kind at his father's house. While he stood at the door of the hostelry, drinking a glass of small ale after his hot and dusty ride, Poll Quickly, the bar-maid, who had handed it to him, dropped him a deferential curtsy, and asked whether he would not like a cool seat under the spreading elm in front of the house.

"Thanks, good mistress Polly;" said the young man; "but sooth to say, I've ridden far enough this morning to make lounging here against the doorpost a welcomer change, after so long a seat in the saddle, than the bench yonder. Besides, here I can enjoy a gossip with thee, and thou can'st tell me all the Windsor news, which will be a godsend to one who has been so long away."

"Troth, master Ford, and it's like your worship's kind heart to say so, and to think so. Many's the young gentleman that would hold his head too high, and be too much the gentleman, for being a collegiate, to be gentle enough to care for a gossip with one that can't speak Greek, I give Heaven praise; but you hold it no dishonesty to idle away a half hour with an honest maid, which I detest I am; blessing on your heart for it!"

"Well, and what is the best news with you, mistress Polly; and what's the newest among the Windsor folk?"

"Faith, bad's the best of my news, master Ford, good as it is of you to ask that;" she replied. "A bar-maid's life is not the life of a lady. Travellers are few of them lords, fewer of 'em, angels; and fewer still, have any angels to bestow on the bar-maid; a paltry tester is the ofttest coin that finds its way to her hand, from travellers' pockets; and seldom have they eyes to see that her coif would be all the better for a shilling's worth of ribbon; but that's neither here nor there."

"I would not so disparage the coif thou wear'st now, as to say that it needs a new ribbon ; but here's a shilling that will replace the bright one thou hast, when it fades ;" said Ford smiling, as he took the hint so palpably aimed. "And now for the rest of thy news."

"First and foremost, there's sir Paul Pureton's news ; he's dead ;" said Poll Quickly ; - then master Hugh Evans, the Welsh latin scholar, is to be reader in his place, which will make him sir Hugh, of course ; then there's little old Will Patterly, the barber ; he's joined hands in the dance of death, too ; but he was past his work, so there's no great loss to Windsor, and but small gain to the worms, for such a starveling body as he was, will make but a spare meal for 'em. A plumper morsel they'll get in Dick Cleaveholm, the butcher, who, they say, is well-nigh off the hooks, and can't last a week. A many's the carcass he's chopped up, and now he's to be cut off himself ! Well, Heaven's above all !"

"What a catalogue of deaths thou hast to tell me, good mistress Polly !" exclaimed Frank Ford ; "is there no pleasant news stirring ? Nothing but dismal tidings in Windsor ?"

"Ay now, I warrant me, it's weddings, and not funerals, you young folks love to hear of ;" said Poll ; "well, there's something going on that'll lead to weddings, or I'm much mistook." And she nodded her head mysteriously.

"Indeed ; let us hear that, by all means," he said.

"Why then, it's not for nothing young Ambrose Barley-broth goes about hanging his head, and casting sheep's eyes at a certain merry maid of Windsor ; it's not for nothing that his father and mother asked young mistress Gay's father and mother how their daughter stood affected to their son, which I heard was the case no farther back than yesterday se'nnight, when they spent the evening at the farm."

"And what was the answer to the suit ?"

"Nay, that I've not yet learned ; but I shall, depend on't. Trust me for feretting out the rights of a matter, when I choose. I have an eye, I thank Heaven, and an ear, though you mightn't think it, to look in my face, master Ford. I have both eyes and ears for many a quiet thing, that sly folks think to keep snug to themselves. There's master

George Page, now, fancies he's mighty clever, and that his thoughts are hid up in the clouds, because he stoops his head like a goose going under a doorway."

"Why, George Page bears his head high, and his face open to every gazer;" said Frank Ford, laughing.

"You're right, master Ford, he doth so;" said the imperturbable Poll; "but it's for that very reason, that when he does hold his head down, folks with half a grain of eye and ear, may see he has something to hide in his face and his heart."

"But have you seen him thus? What do you infer from that, good mistress Polly? Do you believe that my friend George Page is in love, as well as Ambrose Barley-broth?"

"Troth, master Ford, I believe what I believe; I refer what I refer; and I know what I know;" said Poll Quickly, becoming more mysterious, in proportion as she perceived her companion's manner denote stonger interest.

"And what dost thou know? Anything for certain, of George Page's liking?" pursued Ford.

"For certain is one thing, and for uncertain's another, and guess-work is a third;" said she oracularly; "but as true as a carp's jawbone stanches a cut finger, so sure is master George Page in love."

"And with whom?" said Ford eagerly.

"Ay, that's the word he keeps so close; but though he speaks it not it's as clear to be seen, to a quick eye, as though he bawled it at the market-cross; and mine's no dull eye, I praise Heaven for it."

"It is bright and sparkling, and will pierce many a heart, I warrant it, when set off by gay colours; let thy next knot of ribbons vie in hue with the rainbow, I pry'thee, mistress Polly;" said the young man, pressing on her an additional gratuity.

"Lord, Lord! see how impatient you young scholars are, when there's anything to be learnt;" said she, pocketing the coin; "you think no price too great for knowledge, and that's a worthy purchase, Lord knows, and I'll bear witness. What can money be better spent in, than in learning, I should like to know?"

"Then let me have thy lore, good mistress Polly;" said Frank Ford; "come, what hast thou to inform me, in the matter of George Page's love? I would fain know who is his choice?"

"As for informing any lore to such a scholar as your worship, it seems a likely thing, indeed, I could; but since the best sprag learner that ever learnt, can't hope to learn what's passing behind his back without being told, why, I'll e'en make bold to tell your worship what has taken place, since you've been away, in young master Page's heart."

"Ay, do, I pry'thee;" said Ford.

"Well then, both the long and the short of it, and the very yea and the no is, that master George Page is in love with one of the merry maids of Windsor—and you know well enough who are the two that bear that nay-name."

"Ay, ay, I know well enough! And which of them, I pry'thee, is George's choice?" said Frank Ford, hurriedly.

"Well, as I told you, I have an eye to see, and an ear to hear; and though he beat about the bush, and wouldn't have had me see which of 'em he had the best mind to, yet as clear as eggs is eggs—speciously new laid ones,—I could make out that he asked most direct questions about mistress Alice May."

"I thought as much;" muttered Frank Ford between his ground teeth, as his thoughts reverted to a certain April morning, when George Page's manner in alluding to Alice's kiss had appeared to him studiously indifferent.

"Yes;" continued Poll Quickly, still more glibly, for his muttered exclamation had confirmed her in the impression which had gradually gained ground with herself, that Alice was in reality the one George Page preferred; "yes, he certainly led most to her praise, when I was speaking of them both; and moreover, soon after that, when I fell in with the two merry maidens, spinning in the porch like notable housewives as they are.—no gadabouts are they, I'll warrant ye, but a blessing to any man for a wife,—I mind me, that mistress Alice asked a many questions about what he thought of them, and what he had sai :

of 'hem ; whilst mistress Margaret was too busy with her wheel to note much what I talked of."

" It's but too clear ; I ever dreaded this. Who could see her, and not love her ? And he has seen her and known her from her childhood ;" thought Frank Ford.

" And now, I'll warrant, we shall have you making up to the other merry maiden ; and so, we shall have a double wedding ; Lord forgive us !" said Poll Quickly. Then gaining assurance from the start with which Frank Ford received this proposition, as he woke up from the momentary trance into which this retrospect had plunged him, she went on to say :—" Well, well, it's a strange world to see ! Young men and maidens will be thinking of loving each other, and marrying, and all kinds of housewifery, and settling, and new relationships, and Heaven above knows what beside ! Marry, your worship's a wag, and knows how to fix upon a comely bride like the rest of us ! And a comely bride she'll make, will mistress Margaret ; and a merry wooing and a speedy wedding may you have of it with her, I say, and I pray too."

" It is kindly meant, and kindly wished ; I thank thee for thy meaning and thy wish, mistress Polly ;" said Frank Ford, as he took his leave of the Star hostelry, and its communicative bar-maid.

That evening there was to be a merry-making at farmer Page's, to celebrate the return of his son from Gloucestershire. All the young people of the neighbourhood were to be there ; and when it was found that Frank had also come home from college that very day, an invitation was despatched, begging him to join the party. He was in no mood for mirth ; he thought of pleading fatigue from his ride, a headache,—anything—to excuse him from going among his friends, two of whom, at any rate, he dreaded to meet. He might have honestly urged either of these pleas for his agitation since he had heard of George Page's love for Alice May had made him feel ill—sick at heart—sick of the world, burning with mortification and a sense of ill-usage. Then again he resolved he would go, and satisfy himself with his own eyes, of what he already felt but too well assured. He thought the pain of seeing them together, and of witnessing the tokens of their attachment, would be even less agony than the tormenting tricks which his fancy now played



him, as he pictured the girl he loved receiving the vows, and responding to the affection, of another lover.

“ Why did I not speak, ere I left her last? I might then have engaged her liking—’twould have been no treachery to Page, had I forestalled him, though I may not now seek to supplant him. For she certainly did once prefer me—a thousand innocent tokens betrayed her—a thousand unconscious confessions of regard showed that I was not indifferent to her—nay, that I was dear to her above others. Could she then forget this, when another than myself spoke to her of love? But yes—women are all alike;—the mere notion of a lover is irresistible to a young girl—it turns her head—and the first man who offers himself to her in that shape, is accepted, with no pause given to reflection that there is perchance one, who has already touched her heart. An avowed suitor is better worth than a silent lover—though secretly preferred as well as preferring—to a young girl, whose vanity is ever her strongest passion. Then why was I this silent lover? Yet, let me not reproach myself, since the blame is due to her lightness of heart, her fickle fancy—no stabler than gossamer or thistle-down—which the first wanton breath wafts elsewhere. I should rather rejoice than repine, that such innate levity, with so much seeming candour, fell not to my share. I might have trusted the affection I thought I read in those soft eyes, and so have gathered future shame instead of present disappointment. Better perhaps as it is! But I will go; that I may learn to look upon those eyes unmoved—to steel myself against their softness by reading falsehood where I once imagined I beheld tenderness and truth itself.”

With his heart full of such thoughts, it may well be conceived that Frank Ford’s manner of greeting his old friends, when he went among them that evening, was not particularly gracious or ingratiating. His brow was moody, his tone was haughty, his speech sarcastic and abrupt.

On his arrival at farmer Page’s, he found all the guests assembled; the dancing had already commenced with great vigour, in the largest barn; and the first thing Frank Ford’s eyes encountered there, was the lithe figure of Alice May, led by George Page, as the young couple performed together with great spirit the evolutions of a country-dance.

He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, so animated, so happy. The fact is, her partner was just whispering in her ear the news that Frank Ford had arrived in Windsor that morning, and that he might be expected among them every moment. There was a sparkling light in her eye, and a bright colour in her cheek, as she bounded along the dance, with her head bent a little towards her partner, listening to his low-breathed smiling words. It was all seen by him who watched them; and,—interpreted after his own fashion,—seemed to confirm all that he had dreaded and heard.

Presently the beaming eye met his; it was suddenly withdrawn, in bashful surprise—the glowing cheek mantled yet deeper in colour, with pleasure at seeing him; but in both startled look and blushing cheek, Frank Ford only read fresh proof; for he thought them evidence of her consciousness that she had wronged him.

“There wanted not spoken words and plighted faith between us;” he thought; “she as clearly knows she has been wanting in faith to me—that she has broken faith with me,—as though we had been solemnly betrothed, and had pledged a thousand oaths, before she sealed a heartless bargain with him. Vain, unthinking girl!”

“You take so strong an interest in the dancing, though but a looker-on as yet, master Ford,” said a cheerful voice near him, “that you have not had time to greet your old friend and neighbour. Come, suppose you lead me to the lower end of the floor, and let us join the dancers together; as neither you nor I have met with a partner, let us take pity on each other. What say you?”

Thus challenged by Margaret Gay, Frank Ford could not refuse, and they accordingly took their places below the rest of the couples, to dance their way gradually up to the top of the set.

But it was not long before Margaret perceived the abstraction of her partner, and the little attention he gave to the requisites of the figure. She rallied him upon it, and asked him if he still prided himself so nightly upon his college studies, as to despise dancing, and Windsor sports and friends; as in that case, she should be provoked to send him another fairy-favor from the old beech-tree in the forest.

"In good sadness, mistress Margaret, I think the sin of contempt may be sooner laid to the account of my Windsor friends than to myself;—I hold them only too fondly in remembrance."

"Nay, old friends cannot be loved too well or too faithfully;" returned she.

"I think so;" he said.

"Then still let your old friends and neighbours dwell in your affection, master Frank; and let us simple bodies have the pleasure of believing we need fear no rivals in your grand new acquaintances, Plato, or Horace. No disparagement to your noble books, but homely wit may sometimes stead a man, where book-learning fails, when a warm friend is at hand to give present advice, and the library is out of reach. Old friends and old books are both valued by the wise man; and master Ford is too wise to disdain the one because he has learned the worth of the other. He, too, who may command the best of each."

"Were I but as sure of my friends' love for me, as I am of mine for them, there could be no danger of any change in our old friendship;" said Frank Ford.

"Believe me, master Ford, the way to make sure of friends' love is to feel sure of it;" said Margaret Gay. "Do not doubt their affection because they may not be always showing it, or telling you of it. The most valuable goods are oftentimes the least displayed by their owner; for too much airing, or bringing into light, will decay or fade the fabric. Be satisfied to know where love is garnered for thee, and do not risk wearing it out, by seeking to have it too much exhibited."

"I care not for the parade of love, assuredly; but may there not be equal risk of finding it flown when we need it, should we fail to prove it is still there by occasional beholding?" said Ford. "May we not even have been too credulous, or too presumptuous at first, in believing that it ever did exist for us? There is my old friend, George Page, for instance; I always fancied he felt the strong regard for me, which I have for him: yet there he is dancing away, with but a nod towards me from a distance, though we have not met for months."

"He will greet you warmly enough, be sure, when the measure is

ended ;" replied she. " You would not have him quit the dance and his partner, to bid you welcome, as if you were a stranger, and needed words of courtesy to assure you of a kind reception ?"

" By no means ; I would not interfere with his duties to his partner, on any account ;" said Frank, with a hurried accent, and a bitterness of tone, that told a secret to his companion.

" So, so ; my gentleman is jealous, is he ? And of poor George, too ! He little knows"—and her thought ended with a smile.

Presently, she perceived that, in the course of the dance, Frank had had occasion to take Alice's hand ; that he had sought to retain it ; but that the figure requiring a quick change of hands, Alice had been compelled to withdraw it hastily from his, that she might return it to her partner ; and after this, Margaret saw Frank's face cloud over more moodily than before.

" You would have me believe in the lasting existence of kind feeling, Margaret ;" he said, biting his lip, " and here I find a friend whom I have known from childhood, and who, I flattered myself, had some regard for me, snatching away her hand, as if I had been an adder among violets she stooped to gather."

" In the ardour of dancing, friendship is forgotten ;" she answered, smiling ; " to the claims of a figure, even those of an old friend must give way."

" Truly, it seems so ;" returned Frank. " To a light-hearted girl, the present claim is ever the most urgent ; be it the figure of a dance—the colour of a kirtle—the image of a new lover—or whatever demands her attention for the time being."

" Do you learn these slanders upon poor girlhood from your favorite authors, master Ford ? Beshrew me, I think we have cause of grudge against them, if they teach you no kinder thoughts of your old friends at home."

Just then the dance concluded ; and George Page came up, with his usual hearty manner, to shake hands with Frank Ford, and bid him welcome back to Windsor.

There was no resisting his cordial frankness, and for a few moments,

Ford forgot all, in the pleasure of finding his hand once more within the grasp of his old friend and companion.

But when George Page turned towards Alice, who was leaning upon his arm, and put her hand within Ford's, saying:—"Here is another Windsor favorite of yours; you must dance with Alice May the next measure;" Frank saw in this but the action of an engaged lover, who permitted his mistress to dance one dance with the new-comer; and in consequence, all his former moody restraint and coldness returned upon him.

This was terribly apparent to Alice, during the silent progress through the dance which they made together. She could not speak, from timidity, from emotion at seeing him again, and from dread of she knew not what, which his manner seemed to forebode; and he, fancying that her silence proceeded from a consciousness of wrong, was equally reserved with herself. At length the dance came to an end; and, leading her to a seat, which happened to be near Margaret Gay, he bowed coldly, and withdrew.

"Why sweetheart, why Alice!" whispered her friend, "look not so shame-faced and downcast, as though thou wert to blame, not he. Out upon it! Here's a trembling white lip, and a glistening eye; and all for what, forsooth? Because a young moon-stricken simpleton chooses to come home and fancy a thousand things, instead of seeing the plain one, straight before his nose. Marry, this is not the way to cure him of his jealous luns, his foolish crochety humours. Trust to me, Alice; and let us teach him a lesson that'll be better for him and for thee, both now and hereafter."

"What would'st thou have me do, Meg?" faltered Alice.

"In the first place I would have thee twinkle away that tear from thine eye, till it shine out with the lustre proper to it; next, let thy lip rather smile, than quiver. So, that's well; thou'rt now more like thyself. Next, I would have thee let George Page behave towards thee as I shall bid him, if he will be won to act a part in the play I would have performed for the entertainment and better schooling of young master scholar there; I half fear I may have some difficulty with George, as I

know how slow these men are to join one against another in a plot, which shall help us girls to a sweet morsel of revenge. Yet I shall constrain him to do as I wish, as he values my kindness, and at the risk of its forfeiture; and thus I make sure of him. Be but thou faithful to our scheme, and I warrant me, between us, we'll read the young collegian a lesson he shall remember."

"Art quite sure thy scheme may not end in being caught thyself, Meg, as it did when we were pent in the bole of the beech-tree, and were not allowed to escape without paying toll?" said Alice, with her usual smile.

"Fear not;" returned Margaret, in the same manner; "fear nothing. Now thou hast discarded that doleful visage, and I see thee wear thy own face once more, I will expect nothing but discomfiture for jealous-pate; triumph for us."

George Page now came towards them to say that a game of Barley-break had been proposed; that the dancers were dispersing, and that the sport was about to commence in the home-paddock.

Margaret Gay hastily found means to inform Page of Frank's jealous freak, of her plan to convince him of his error by allowing him to continue in it for a few hours, and then showing him its absurdity by confessing their own mutual engagement. She urged upon Page that this would be for his friend's future welfare; as it would, in all probability, shame him out of his suspicious folly, and prevent his rendering Alice and himself uneasy by any such whims hereafter.

George Page laughed at her eagerness, but suffered himself to be persuaded to act the part of a favored lover towards Alice for a short space, on condition that the period of Frank Ford's torment should not be unreasonably protracted.

"Never fear, never fear; do you and Alice play your parts truly, and I'll engage for a happy ending. Here, take her hand, and lead her away to the home-paddock, while I go and seek my crotchety student."

Margaret Gay hurried away, and found Frank Ford already upon the ground, standing a little apart from the gay party who were forming themselves into groups and couples, preparatory to a bout at their

favorite game of Barley-break. He scarcely noted her approach, while his eye caught that of George and Alice hand in hand, as they came towards the spot.

"Of course, he couples with her; he waits not the decision by lot which assigns the rest of the couples to each other;" muttered Ford to himself; "they staid behind together, on purpose, no doubt, that he might engage her for the game. Yet he was sure of her—as sure, at least, as a man can be of such a light, inconsequent moth, that flutters around the flame, unconscious of the ardour with which it burns; but she may be singed herself in time."

Margaret stood near to Frank Ford's side, and it was scarce difficult to read in his troubled brow, the thoughts that occupied his heart. "They have made up all the couples, beside ourselves, master Ford;" said Margaret; "let us take our stand together, or we shall not find a place, save in the centre division, and you know what that's called!"

"Ay, it is called 'hell;'" replied he; then added in a mutter; "I am there already, methinks, watching them."

"Are you one of the sober-minded youths who think Barley-break a naughty sinful game, and an ill mode of passing time, master Ford?" asked Margaret Gay, with a sly smile, and a glance at his gloomy look; "I'm told there are such; mayhap, your books have taught you to turn Puritan, or Brownist, or other upturner of eyes at harmless mirth or innocent pastime? Good lack! what a lowering frown at our poor rural play! I fear me, master Ford, all this catching and frolicking, and light running to and fro, with the rest of the wicked doings at this same Barley-break, find but little favor in such grave and worshipful sight as yours"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Ford, as he led the laughing girl to join the players; as much to put a stop to her banter, as that he had any mind to take part in what was going forward.

"They found the middle compartment already occupied by George Page and Alice May; who, in the casting of the lots, according to the laws of the game, had been allotted this station. It was termed being 'in hell;' and it was the duty of the couple thus situated, to begin the

game by endeavouring to catch the rest. When they succeeded, and a fresh couple was captured, a change of situation took place; but there was some difficulty in achieving this, as the couple 'in hell' were bound not to break hands. The others might run hither and thither, separately, as far apart as they pleased, so that they kept within bounds—which were two appointed spaces, on each side the centre portion; the ground occupied in the sport being divided into three compartments altogether.

And now the sport began. As may be imagined, infinite were the scuffings, the hustlings, the shriekings, the pushings, the pullings, the dodgings, the dartings, the screamings, the evadings, and the seekings to be caught, on the part of the several runners engaged in the different sets of players; for, as there were but three couples to each game of Barley-break, so there had to be several sets or games made up in different parts of the field.

In such a sport, where it was the privilege of each swain who captured his damsel, to salute her as she became in turn coupled with him, it naturally led to a great deal of wilful catching, or letting slip, as the case might be, among the players, according as they stood affected towards the object of chase or escape. Connivance, contrivance, voluntary evasion, pertinacious pursuit, all in turn were practised by the young people; and it may be conceived that plenty of opportunity was thus afforded for the carrying out of Margaret Gay's scheme for confirming Frank Ford in his groundless fears regarding the attachment between George Page and Alice May.

At length, after having plagued and tormented him to her heart's content during the whole afternoon, till he was well-nigh goaded into breaking away from the party, and vowing never more to return among them; it so happened that Margaret Gay, once more coupled by the chances of the game with Frank Ford, found herself in the centre compartment, and that it was their turn, hand-in-hand, to try and catch the rest. She could not resist the impulse she felt, to make an attempt at capturing George Page, who ran close past her, at that moment; and who, as willing as she, threw himself in her way, and suffered himself



to become a prisoner. At the same instant, Alice, whose heart was perhaps incapable of longer withstanding the sight of Frank's misery, —which evidently increased with each hour, and was becoming more and more intolerable, and less to be concealed,—brushed so near to his extended arm, that he readily effected her seizure. Somehow, the kiss which thus became his, by right of capture, was yielded with a gentleness that melted his resentment; and made the lover's feelings towards his supposed perjured mistress, partake more of the nature of those he had experienced when he first touched those lips among the park trees, than he could have believed possible.

"There is magic in their rosy softness;" he said to himself; "it is thus that these little witches confound our very senses, making us forget what we see and hear, in the spell of a touch! And yet I have seen him take her hand; I have heard him whisper words that brought the colour into her cheek. Sorcery! Witchcraft! Shall I suffer myself again to be enthralled?"

But the chances of the game now threw Frank Ford and Alice May within the centre compartment together. Thus coupled, thus linked with her, hand-in-hand, all his stern resolutions, his anger against her, were once more mollified and put to flight; it was impossible to harbour resentment against one whose hand trembled within his own, and whose soft blue eyes seemed seeking pardon of his; as he looked upon her, he felt more and more how impossible it was; and soon, his only thought was how to prolong the time of their remaining together within this boundary, which now he found to be anything but 'hell' to him. As this state of feeling somehow communicated itself to Alice, it naturally befel that they relaxed in their attempts to capture the rest of the couples, and cause an exchange of places; so that it as naturally ensued, that the game languished; and, shortly after, it was broken up, and the players dispersed, in groups, to the orchard; where, beneath the cherry-trees, a supper was spread, while still so early that it might be eaten by the glow of the western sun.

The guests were all seated round the oaken tables; merriment, good-cheer, laughter, abounded: good-humoured sallies flew round, drawing

parallels of beauty between the maidens' lips and the ripe fruit that hung from the branches overhead, and saucy hints of the sweet taste of each,—compliments more remarkable for truth, perhaps, than for originality, but which had their merit in the gaiety and sincerity of heart with which they were spoken. The young people flirted, and talked, and smiled; the old folks looked on, well pleased to see their children happy; while all joined in doing justice to the good things provided for their entertainment, after the hearty country fashion of "merrie England" in the olden time.

Suddenly, Margaret Gay's quick eye glanced round the table, and she whispered George Page, who sat beside her:—"I see neither Alice May, nor Frank Ford. My life on't, that little traitress has dropped the mask, thrown up her part, and left the play unplayed out."

"I shouldn't wonder," said George Page with his quiet smile. "I saw Frank Ford lead her apart, when the sport broke up; they took the path towards the meadows; and if Frank Ford's the man I take him for, and Alice May the gentle girl I know her to be, why then he has not rested, nor she stinted, till he won her to tell him the secret of your play, as you call it; which, I take it, has been a tragedy to him."

"Serve him right! She's a silly wench if she let him off so easy," said Margaret; "after so wild and groundless a jealousy as his. He'll plague her with some of these yellow whims, by-and-by, if she take not good heed; mark my word."

"She will take good heed; Alice is as discreet as she's gentle. Come, come, Meg; wish her not to be harsher with her lover than thou wert with thine, when he besought thee to speak out."

"He deserved that she should still have carried on the jest, and played out the play, for his behoof, ere she came to the last speech;" persisted Meg, smiling; "best not hurry on the fifth act."

"Nor wise to keep it too long in delay. Remember his impatience that the comedy should end with what is its right conclusion,—a happy marriage;" said Page; "and talking of that reminds me to ask thee, Meg, when wilt thou fix the day that shall make thee mine? Frank will be for having his wedding on the same day as ours; and in pity to

his jealous qualms,—which will hardly be quite set at rest till he makes sure of Alice, we must appoint an early one.”

“Only in pity to him? Is there no one else thought of, in this haste to fix the day?” asked she archly.

“No, I protest to thee, Meg; I could be content to wait patiently ten, twelve, nay, as many as twenty-four hours, ere we went to church. I would not hurry thee, sweet Meg, only let it be ere the week come to an end, an thou lov’st me.”

“Seeing that this is Friday evening, master Page, I thank thee for thy latitude;” she said, laughing; “but see! here come Frank and Alice. Alack, for my play! It is played out indeed! Who can fail to read ‘impending matrimony’ writ in both those tell-tale faces?”

George Page hastened towards them, to perform his duty of host in securing Frank and his blushing companion a seat at the supper-table; and as he did so, he contrived to convey by his expressive look and his hearty shake of the hand, his congratulation on the right understanding to which all of them had happily come.

On the following day, Frank Ford asked Alice of her father, in form; and while he stepped into farmer May’s house to do this, he left his mistress in company with George Page and Margaret Gay, having all four been walking together. Of course it was by the merest chance that the young people had met; but as they had fallen in with each other, it was agreed between them that they would saunter on for an hour or two through the pleasant glades of Windsor park, so soon as Frank should have performed his errand of hope, and rejoin them.

During his absence, Alice May had walked on a few paces, in rustic goodnatured fashion, leaving the lovers to follow by themselves; but George Page overtook her, and passing her arm within his own, while on his other arm he had Margaret Gay, he declared that love should not make him so unsociable as to let Alice May walk on by herself; and that he insisted on escorting them both, until her rightful companion returned.

Now it happened, that as the young farmer was proceeding thus, with a merry maiden under each arm, all three gaily laughing and chatting, reckoning over the many pleasant neighbourly hours they had all spent

together, and looking forward happily to the many more they still hoped to spend thus, living near each other, who should come by that way, but mistress Poll Quickly, with a large basket on her arm, coming over the fields from Frogmore, where she had been to fetch some cream and butter that was wanted.

She spied Page from a distance ; and also saw clearly enough who were his companions, and how familiarly they were all linked arm-in-arm ; and she said to herself:—" Lord, Lord, if that wicked young fellow be not in sober verity, no less in love than he said he was, with the merry maids, two at a time ! If he be not about to delude them both, I'm no better than I should be, which I am, I praise Heaven for it ! To see the wantonness of this wicked world would make a body pray to be blind, in Heaven's mercy ! To think of him ; and to think of them, letting him bring 'em into such a canaries, is what I should never have thought of two such seeming innocents. But merry and honest too, is rarer than black swans, it's my belief."

As she approached the group, however, some of her virtuous horror oozed out ; giving place to that easy tolerance, which her desire to be on popular terms with everybody, made second nature to her.

" A goodly company, and a fitting, for such a fine warm morning as this ;" she said, as she came up with the party, dropping a curtsy, and smirking at them. " It's well to be a heathen Turk, and a Christian farmer all in one, when a handsome young Englishman would fain look well in more than one fair pair of eyes ; and as long as virtuous maids are willing to be friendly and peaceable, and rather agree in their liking, than fall out and pull caps because one man happens to please 'em both, why, such amical doings is a blessing, I say ; and long may you all go on kindly together, I pray."

" I'm afraid I shan't be able to persuade both my Sultanas to marry me, Turk as I may be ;" said Page, laughing ; " but I hope I may say, I think they both like me well ; and I swear that shall content me."

" That we do, mistress Polly ; we both love George Page dearly and heartily, and he loves us ; dost thou not, master Page ?" said they.

" Right truly, on the faith of an honest man and a farmer—an Englishman and no Turk !" he replied.

“ Well, rest ye merry, good gentlefolks ; ” said Poll Quickly, bobbing a parting curtsy, and feeling rather baffled by their unconstrained manner and laughing words. “ But if black swans are not white angels to those two merry maids, (Heaven forgive me for saying so ! ) ” she continued to herself, as she pursued her way, “ why then I ’ m no judge of birds and angels, or maids either—shy birds and sly birds as mistress Alice May and mistress Margaret Gay both are. ”

Presently she met Frank Ford ; who having prospered in his suit, and obtained farmer May ’ s joyful consent to wed his daughter, was coming along with an alert step, and a beamingly happy face.

“ Poor young man ! ” she thought, as he approached, and she observed his well-pleased air, “ he wouldn ’ t look so cheerily, an ’ he knew what games his sweetheart ’ s going on, when his back is turned, to his studies. Worthy scholar ! he little thinks his learning won ’ t teach him to fathom the wickedness of young girls, nor his books serve him to see through their double-faced masks. I ’ ve a month ’ s mind to help him to an inkling. Give ye good-morrow, master Ford ; ” she said aloud, as she came up to him ; “ you ’ ll be for taking a stroll through the park, this fine morning, I warrant me ; and if you take the glade leaving the castle to your left, I shouldn ’ t wonder but you ’ d stumble on a sight that ’ ll make your eyes open as wide as from now till Martlemas. ”

“ Indeed, good mistress Polly ; and what may that be ? It were a sight to be looked for, in good earnest. ”

“ Troth, master Ford, it ’ s a sight for a good man to see ; a young girl hanging on one man ’ s arm, when if she ’ s an honest girl she should be in another man ’ s arms. And what should you say, master Ford, if I was to tell ye, that such a young girl ’ s name is Gay ; and that the young man ’ s name with the arm she is leaning on, is no other than Page ; and that he ’ s not even content with that, but he must be having two of ’ em at once, like a dog in the manger as he is—a merry maid tucked under each arm ; Lord forgive us ! What say you to that ? ”

“ I think it ’ s very hard he should get both the merry maids of Wind sor to his share ; ” said Ford, laughing. “ I ’ ll after him, and see if he won ’ t give me up one of them. ”

"Alas, master Ford! Would you take up with his leavings?" asked Poll.

"I mean not that;" answered Ford. "I shall take one of the merry maids from him, and leave him the other; and then, thou know'st, he will have my leavings."

"Ah, your worship's a 'cute master of art, and which is more, a bachelor; and which is more, a collegiate; no fox is more knowing, I praise Heaven for it! You'll outwit them yet, I shouldn't wonder. To see what learning and logio is, good heart! Well, Heaven speed ye in shaming the wicked, righting the wronged, and giving all of 'em their due, I pray!"

"Amen;" said Ford, with a laughing nod of farewell to her as he ran on to overtake his friends.

It was not long, ere the two pair of lovers agreed upon the day which was to make them joyful husbands and wives. And when the day arrived.—the friends and relations on all sides assembling and forming a goodly procession; the two brides attired alike, with knots of memorial rosemary fastened to their sleeves, as was the wont; and a rich bride-cup of silvergilt, in which was a branch of rosemary gilded brightly, and hung about with ribbons, borne before them;—it was allowed on all hands that two more comely bridegrooms, than young master Ford and young master Page, two fairer brides than young mistress May and young mistress Gay, or two handsomer happier couples than these young people, had not been wedded in the old church for many a day.

Thus, the two merry maids became the merry wives of Windsor; for with their new dignity came no shadow to cloud their spirits; their housewifely cares sat easily on two girls so thriftily and notably bred; their matronly duties were but light demands upon the time of those so skilled in domesticity,—so home-loving, so home-adorning in their simple affections and accomplishments; and they who had been known among the neighbours for the blithest lasses, were still noted for being the gayest-hearted women in all that fair Berkshire town. Years flew by, and scarce brought any change in their good looks—none at all, in their good-humour and merry-hearted cheer.

Alice was hardly more smiling as young mistress May, than she was as mistress Ford ; Margaret was not a whit less ready for a playful jest, or a laughing frolic, when she had been for many a summer mistress Page, than when she was young mistress Gay.

Somewhat more crumby, plump, and buxom, perhaps, they had become in their fair proportions ; the white shoulders were more ample ; the arms rounder ; the cheeks had a fuller outline, and, mayhap, a less delicate tint of rose ; while neither of their waists were quite so remarkable for slenderness as they had been ; yet still, when there was a dance in the old barn, or a game on the green-sward, Meg and Alice were still as alert as ever in the share they took in such sports, for they found their husbands were to the full as well-pleased to see them there as formerly, and never found that their figures had become more portly, or their steps less active.

Frank Ford had been, in the course of time, left so well off by his father, that he was able to maintain his wife as a gentlewoman, without any necessity for his following his father's profession of lawyer ; while George Page, when his father died, determined from choice, to follow his vocation, as farmer, bailiff, and land-steward to sir Marmaduke Ducandrake. The office brought him in a handsome revenue, and its duties were well suited to his tastes and abilities. Both the friends lived in ease and comfort, and were reputed men of wealth and substance in their native town ; while their wives had households, and attires, after their own wish, with money and time entirely at command, to spend as they pleased.

The wedlock of Ford and Alice had been unblessed by offspring ; though it seemed to be scarcely a matter of regret to them.

Mistress Page had, a year after marriage, brought her husband a little girl ; who became the pet and darling of the whole family. As to her grandfather, farmer Gay, he would have scarce had baby Anne a moment out of his sight, so proud and so fond was he of the young prattler.

It is frequently seen in a large family, that the first grandchild born is received as a sort of fairy-gift, a precious God-send, a kind of wonder

and miracle. It seems a strange creature among so many grown-up persons : and the elders, having been so long accustomed to see their own children men and women, regard this new little being as almost a curiosity, at first ; and welcome it as a renewal of their first paternal joys ever after.

For a long while baby Anne enjoyed this pre-eminence ; for some time she was the only grandchild,—the sole pet and plaything of the family ; the darling, the idol, the dear little creature who was in danger of being spoiled by all the household, as the single representative of childhood among all those grown people.

But she was a good little soul, a sweet simple child ; one of those pleasant natures, that it is well-nigh impossible to render less pleasant, even by the most inveterate spoiling that a tribe of doting relations can inflict ; one of those single hearts and pure dispositions that remains uncorrupted by injudicious yielding ; taking no advantage, learning no tyranny, but seeming to flourish and ripen into a thousand good qualities beneath the sunshine of indulgence. Nothing could prove this better than the birth of her little brother William. After eight or nine years of undisputed sovereignty, another child appeared, to share her rule over the hearts of the fond parents and grand-parents.

But far from seeming to regard this little one as an intruder, or infringer upon her rights of affection, no one welcomed the baby boy with greater delight than Anne,—now no longer baby Anne, but sister Anne. She nursed him, she hugged him, she lugged him about, and would fain have had him never out of her arms, in spite of the hint which mistress Quickly once gave her mother, to the effect that “ if little mistress Anne was allowed to bear about young master in that sort, from pillar to post, alas, no ram's horn, nor no curly-tailed pig would be crookeder than that child's shoulder, good heart ! ”

So far from grudging him the notice, of which she herself had hitherto enjoyed exclusive and undisputed monopoly, little mistress Anne would take him from one to another to be admired ; she would present him to each of the family in turn, that his pretty staring eyes, his button of a mouth, or his funny little nose might be duly inspected ;



and when the laucation of the whole household,—from father and mother and grandad and granny, down to each of the women-servants, and even the farm-labourers when they came in from the fields to their noontide meal,—had all been exhausted, then would she trudge forth, and totter from neighbour to neighbour, with him in her arms, that they might have the advantage of beholding this treasure of a baby-boy, and do all homage to the wonder and delight of her having a little brother.

She learned to dress and undress him ; to lift him in and out of his wicker cradle, to dandle, to rock, and to toss him. No one could get Willy to sleep so well as Anne ; no one could still him so well when he roared ; no one could amuse him so well when he was awake ; no one could hush and soothe him so well on his way to that infant bourne, ' by-bye ;' or watch and protect him from disturbance so effectually when he was once there, thoroughly off, taking a sound nap. She made him as smart as a doll, as neat as a lying-in pincushion, and as clean as a new-scoured dairy-pan ; so that he looked to be always in holiday-trim ; as if each day he was ready for that first church-going, and first party—his christening.

She was deep-learned in his first winks of intelligence, his first blinks of notice, his knowing stares at the candle, his unflinching gaze at the sun. She knew the very first moment of his having uttered his first coo, smiled his first smile ; and when some daring sceptic ventured to hint at this being very like a gape, and another suggested that it might be a writhe of the lip occasioned by some slight convulsion, or other internal discomposure, Anne stoutly declared it was a smile, and nothing but a smile, and that it was in all probability the result of Willy's at that instant beholding an angel.

She it was who declared the precise time of his first distinguishing his mother's face from that of any one else ; she it was who proclaimed his beginning to notice father, and then herself, and then various other members of the family, and then a numerous circle of acquaintance to whom she introduced him, when she found he thus enjoyed the sweets of society. She caught first sound of his earliest articulated Ta ! Pa ! and Ma ! And when she had, with infinite pains, taught him to utter

other more ~~recondite sounds~~, and reach a high perfection in still further elaborated accents, she had always a choice stock of his smart sayings, his saucy answers, his pert witticisms, on hand, to repeat for the delight and entertainment of his friends.

There was only one person who could never be brought to see as much perfection in her little brother William as Anne could wish; and this was her grandfather Gay. The old man persisted in looking upon the boy as a sort of rival to his first darling, and he was often heard to mutter, "he should like to know whatever that brat came for; not but what the child was well enough, a fine healthy baby and all that; but still, what should he come for, and put his darling's nose out of joint? People were all so fond of the young shaver—and all for why? He was a boy—an heir, forsooth. But he'd see, that he would, whether his own darling Anne couldn't be made an heiress of, as well as the best boy that ever drew breath!" And when the old farmer died, it was found that he had made good his words, as far as in him lay, by leaving Anne Page inheritrix of all his hoardings, to the amount of full seven hundred pounds.

When it became high time that William should be removed from her superintendence, and placed under more erudite tuition than a sister,—however devoted,—could supply, Anne still took charge of him as far as possible. He was sent to school with sir Hugh Evans,—now become village schoolmaster in place of Peter Scriven deceased; and every morning might Anne Page be seen, leading her little brother by the hand, carrying his satchel for him, chatting, and laughing, and beguiling the way, as he leaped and jumped at her side, looking forward to the time when she should come, in like manner, to fetch him back again, after the school-hours were over.

Both the children liked parson Hugh; all the children in Windsor liked him; he was good-humoured, fond of his pupils, and more peppery in manner than really strict or severe. He loved better to give them a holiday at some good-natured friend's asking, than to scourge or even scold them for non-attendance, or non-attention at their lessons. He would affect to cross-examine them very closely, upon occasion, and

show them off before their parents, but he would put leading questions, and assist them to easy answers. He was not too grave to join in their sports, or too wise to find entertainment from their diversions. He wou'd give a helping hand at cricket, or a helping kick at foot-ball. He would doff his learned gown, and,—stripped to his doublet and hose,—skime about the field as nimbly as the youngest of them, at prison-bars ; or fly over the backs of his scholars, taking his turn at leap-frog. He was irritable, but kindly ; wrathful when roused, but easily placable ; furious in words, quiet in deeds ; fond of a sly practical joke, but utterly devoid of malice.

He was proud of his acquaintance with Robert Shallow Esq., justice of the peace in the county of Gloucestershire. Could not forbear boasting to the boys of his having been to the same school with that worshipful personage ; used to tell them of certain boyish pranks he and the squire had played together (tho' there was a great difference in their ages) in old school-days ; held up justice Shallow's young cousin, master Slender, as a model for all young gentlemen ; told them his friend the justice had promised to pay him a visit at his poor school-house at Windsor some day or other, should any occasion bring him up to court ; and that if ever such an auspicious event should occur, he would grant them a holiday on the strength of it. At which, all the boys would set up a roaring huzza, and cry, "long live parson Hugh and his noble friend justice Shallow !"

The friendly relations between this last-named worshipful gentleman, and master George Page, had also been kept up during the years that had elapsed since his first visit to the squire's place in Gloucestershire. Master Robert Shallow did not forget that it was Page who had brought him the sum of money, which, after the first enthusiasm of obliging a court knight with its loan, he had had misgivings he might never see again ; and therefore, beside the personal liking the young man himself had inspired, there was always associated with him in justice Shallow's mind (if such a thing may be included among his attributes) the idea (still admitting such possible existence) of an agreeable, and almost un-hoped-for, piece of good-fortune.

Presents of game, a fine buck in season, or a goodly cheese of Gloucester, would often travel up by wain from the knight's seat, for master Page's acceptance; while courtesies of acknowledgment in the shape of some new recipe or hint in farriery, some dog of superior breed, either for coursing or wood-cock shooting, a thorough-bred beagle, a good pointer, or handsome fallow greyhound, would be sent in return from Windsor to the squire, or to young master Slender.

On the squire's side, there were the reasons above-stated, for the friendly feeling he preserved towards master Page; and on the other, the good yeoman—who was, like many men of wealth and substance, fond of opportunities for increasing it—sometimes found himself reflecting that the justice's cousin, master Slender, was now a young man grown, that he inherited a good estate from his father, that he would come into a round sum of money at his mother's death; and then he would speculate upon the eligibility of such a spouse, and the possibility there was of securing such a match for his daughter, by bringing about a marriage between her and master Abraham Slender.

Meantime, Anne Page, unconscious that any such scheme occupied her father's thought respecting her, still found her own chief happiness in the love and care of her young brother William.

On one occasion, as she was bringing him back from school, he asked her to go with him into one of the meadows that lay a little out of the way leading between the school-house and their home, to look at a bird's nest he had spied in the hedge the day before. Anne complied; at the same time saying she hoped William did not want to take the nest.

"No, no, only to peep at it, and to show it to you, Nan; it lies so lightly yet so snug, just among some brambles, that stretch across the dry ditch; nobody would think of looking for it there, though the place is so open to the passers-by,—the path runs close to it."

Coming along this path, the brother and sister met mistress Quickly, who was rather a favourite with the young girl; for she could not help being amused with all the odd scraps of gossip and village news, which were sure to form the subject of talk.

"And how is young mistress Anne? And pretty master, too? Strong

and hearty, I trust; and like the rose, I see. And, I pray, how does good mistress Page, and honest master Page—your worthy father and mother?"

"All as well as heart could wish, I thank you, mistress Quickly;" answered Anne.

Nay, mistress Anne, no thanks to me; though if their well-being stood with me, it's a sorry account of sickness, or sorrow either, they should know by my good will;—but let that pass."

William having eagerly pointed out the nest, in its sly nook, to his sister, now began climbing up a young ash-tree that stood near; to cut, from among its branches, a switch that took his fancy; and while he was doing this, Anne Page and mistress Quickly proceeded with their chat.

"And how are you going on yourself, mistress Quickly?" asked Anne; "I think you told me you had left the Star?"

"Ay, ay, that I did, or it would ha' left me;" replied she. "When that rampaging, rollicking, roystering chap came down to set up,—came over from Staines, and opened this fine new hostelry, the Garter,—why it stood to reason that the shine was clear gone from the old Star. It twinkled and twinkled, and faded and faded, and grew dimmer and dimmer, till it was clear to me that it would soon pop out. It was snuffed out, puffed out, and clapped an extinguisher upon, by the blazing doings of that rantipole host of the Garter, yonder;" said mistress Quickly, pointing with her chin to the quarter of the town where the rival Inn had started up.

"And so you quitted the Star?" said Anne.

"That I did in truth;" replied mistress Quickly; the Star was a sphere that never suited me, for a bar-maid's life is not a life for an honest maid; too much hard work, and too much idleness, in all the idle things that are said, and looked, and chucked under the chin of a maid at an Inn, which you'd find, Anne, if you wasn't a rich farmer's daughter that never need come to such a gradation to gain your honest bread."

"I thought I heard from some one, that you were trying to get a place at the new hostelry?" said Anne.

"And so I did;" returned mistress Quickly. "For tho' a bar-maid's place isn't a pillow, nor yet a bolster, let alone a station for a civil, modest, virtuous young woman, which I detest I am; still when maids are going a begging, places of some kind, or no kind, or a bad kind, are better than no places at all, and must be taken, by a poor maid that has no place else to put her head."

"Then gaffer and gammer Quickly are both dead?" said Anne.

"Ay, that they are, blessings on their hearts;" said mistress Quickly. "I'm alone in the world now; not a 'varsal soul left of us, save my sister Nell. and her husband, Bob Quickly, that live up in London, at the Boar's Head, and he's lately dead."

"Do you not sometimes wish to see your sister? you might perhaps get a place in London near her;" said Anne.

"What should I do, burdening a poor widow in Eastcheap?" said mistress Quickly. "I'll rather slave my fingers to the bone, and live on the flesh of 'em, than go to be a burden on her who has nothing to give or to spare."

"Well said, mistress Quickly;" said Anne.

"Nay, I've as much proper spirit as my neighbours, I hope;" said mistress Quickly; "and wouldn't think of going to trouble one who hasn't a doit but what she wants for herself."

"And can't you find a place to suit you here?" said Anne. "There must be plenty of good places in Windsor for such an excellent house-keeper as you would make, mistress Quickly. I will speak to my good mother about it."

"Blessings on your heart, and on hers too, for your kind intent;" replied she. "But I'm not without my hope of getting a place that would suit me to a tittle, which I have in my eye. There's a parlous clever French doctor come down here, in attendance on the court, they say; one master doctor Caius is his name; and I'm told that he wants a good creature that'll keep his house in order, and do all for him; for he has no wife to take care of him, and make his house what it should be; and I'm to go there to-morrow and offer myself. The service will be hard—a great charge,—no other woman-servant but myself kept; but I shall try for the place, and do my duty by it, when got."

"I've no doubt you will;" said Anne. "And pray how is mistress Ford? Mother and I haven't seen her a whole age—it must be full four days. Have you seen her since?"

"Troth, mistress Anne, that I have. And its in pecks o' troubles I found her, and what is more, bushels of canaries, about parting with that gill-flirt maid of hers, who she thought was a treasury, but who I said all along was a trollop and a trumpery. Alas, the sweet woman was much deceived in the baggage! Oceans of ribbons, and hogsheads of finery and frippery would never have contented the vanity of that wench! But she's been sent tramping I'll warrant you. This was my doing. What, said I, will you waste both wage and food upon a good-for-nought, and a ne'er-do-well, and a gill-flirt, that spends all she has upon ribbons, and fly-by-skies, and gimcracks? But even this mightn't have opened mistress Ford's eyes,—who's too sweet a soul by half, for the wicked ones of this world, who are on the watch to cheat the over-kind and over-soft, like mistress Ford, blessing on her heart for it!—if it hadn't been that the wench made away with a ring of master Ford's, and a gilt set pocket-glass of her mistress's; and then at last they believed me, and sent her off at a minute's warning, bag and baggage."

"Then mistress Ford is without a waiting-maid, now?" asked Anne.

"I helped the sweet woman to another, I give Heaven praise;" said mistress Quickly. "I named to her that Tib Prat wants a place, and would suit hers; Tib, the niece of mistress Prat of Brentford, you know; you've heard of her—some folks call her the fat woman of Brentford—and some evil-minded people go so far as to call her the witch of Brentford—but they're no christians, no, nor no conjurers either, that would fix the name of witch—however fat she may be—upon mother Prat, poor old soul."

Her brother William, having now cut his switch, and also chosen a good stout ash stick that he thought he would clip and polish for his father's use, Anne took him by the hand, and bidding mistress Quickly farewell, said she would call over at mistress Ford's that afternoon with her mother, and learn how their friend was getting through her domestic troubles.

"Ay do so, of all loves, it'll be a charity;" said mistress Quickly; "the sweet woman has been yearning her heart to see your good mother I know."

"Nan," said William to his sister, as they pursued their way home together, "shouldn't you like to go down into Gloucestershire, and see that capital old deer-park, and that famous dog-kennel, and all the pleasant jolly things that that old justice has got down there at his place? I should! I wish the justice would ask me, and that father would let me go for a visit. I should like to stay there a month. It would be so jolly. And I should like to know master Slender. Father has told me about him; he seems to be a funny kind of a chap."

"He seems to be little better than a fool, from what I can hear of him," said Anne, laughing; "and mother thinks so, too; I can see; for all father, with his kind heart, tries to make the best of it, in what he tells us about him."

"O, I shouldn't mind that! I shouldn't mind his being a fool, a bit, Nan. He'd make all the more fun—and I love fun! And then, some folks say, fools are mostly good-natured, and perhaps he'd be good-natured to me, and let me play with his dogs, and ride his horses, and lend me his rod; I dare say he has one, and I do so want to fish."

"I think that's a mistake, Will, about fools being good-natured;" said his sister. "I have a notion that fools are obstinate, opinionated, and apt to be sulky, and no man who's either of these can be good-natured."

"Is master Slender any of the three?" asked William.

"I know nothing of him. I never saw him, thou know'st. But I've a fancy I shouldn't like him. If he's a fool, I'm sure I shouldn't; and I have a shrewd notion he's that."

"Still I should like to go and see him and his uncle, at their nice old place;" said William, as they reached their own door.

While this conversation was going on in Windsor, matters were taking place in Gloucestershire, which, so far as William's seeing the persons in question, were likely to bring about his wish.

Justice Shallow had been made somewhat uneasy by having his at



attention aroused to symptoms of a preference springing up between his cousin, Abraham Slender, and a certain Alice Shortcake, a baker's daughter, who lived in the nearest village to Shallow Park. The old gentleman would never have had the perspicacity to make this discovery for himself, but the lynx eyes of a mother had acquainted mistress Slender with some particulars which she thought betokened the fact, and she forthwith consulted her cousin Shallow upon what had best be done to save her son, and the darling of them both, from the ignominy of such a match.

She had come home in a state of vast perturbation, one evening, from a large party that took place in the neighbourhood ; she was full of indignant grumbings, irate murmurs, and wrathful objurgations, against "mixed society," "shameful carelessness in associating people of consequence with nobody knows who," and such-like outpourings against the promiscuous nature of the assemblage, which she and her son had been invited to join. It is more than probable that the worthy lady's growls would have been suffered to pass unnoticed, according to custom, had not justice Shallow's curiosity prompted him to enquire a little into their cause, in this instance. For a fit of the gout had prevented his accompanying his cousins to the party ; and he felt the usual anxiety of a provincial gentleman to hear the news, "all how and about" his neighbours

The affair had been a festivity, to celebrate the season of *Hallowmas*. The master of the house was a country gentleman, more hearty than nice in his notions of hospitality. He thought the chief merit of an assemblage of the kind consisted in its comprising all the prettiest faces, and all the gayest sparks, and all the best dancers, and all the pleasantest partners, and all the merriest hearts, and all the jolliest toppers that could be collected for miles round, to fill his old hall, and to enjoy his good cheer, and each other's society ; and he accordingly asked every one of the handsomest girls, and comeliest young men, gentle or simple that he knew. He was not particular about birth or station ; provided they were good-looking, good-humoured, it was all he asked—and he forthwith asked them.

After dancing came all kinds of sports, and charmed spells proper to All-hallow Eve. There was the nut-burning; the stealing out of the kiln all alone in the dark, to wind the clue of blue yarn, that the mysterious hand might seize the thread, and the mysterious voice might declare the christian name of the future spouse; the solitary winnowing in the barn, that the apparition of the destined lover might appear; with other magical rites and observances.

It may readily be believed that master Abraham Slender offered a tempting mark for the tricks and jests of many a merry young damsel among the company. But there was one especially, who made it a point to single him out as a butt for her waggery in all the schemes for hoaxing and bantering which she conceived, and the occasion warranted.

This girl was named Alice Shortcake, who, though no higher in rank than a baker's daughter, had yet more than sufficient guarantee for her admission to this party in her more than ordinary share of good looks. She was a bouncing, bright-eyed, cherry-cheeked damsel of about fifteen; she had tip-top spirits, no inconvenient misgivings about delicacy, or good taste, or refinement, or fastidiousness; she cared not a jot for any one of them, and it is highly probable that she had never so much as heard of them.

Her eye in an instant fastened on master Slender as excellent game; and she resolved never to leave him, until she had played off the whole artillery of her All-hallow Eve jokes, upon his devoted person. He was her target, her quintain,—destined to receive the whole shock of her wit-buffets, and practical-jeat-blows.

She was abetted in all her plots by a lusty young miller, her swain and sweetheart, who relished as heartily as herself these devices against the young squire; resolving that when Alice Shortcake had done with him, he would have a turn at him himself, and see if his pockets as well as his person, mightn't be made to yield good sport. There was a bowling-green, and a skittle-ground, and a racquet-court, and a shovel-board-room, all attached to this house, in either of which, master Slender might be turned to account, by some means or other.

They managed so well between them, that before the night's revels

www.libtool.com.cn felt his breast pierced thro' and thro' by  
 eyes (though mingled with a sort of dread  
 well-nigh emptied by the skilful handling of

to enumerate half the tricks the young girl played  
 he evaded by very simplicity. When she pro-  
 the charm of dipping his shirt-sleeve in the  
 and watching it dry by the fire, alone, that he might be  
 his future wife come and turn the garment, he said :—  
 cold, you know ! And tho' I'm not such a weakly  
 might think, to care about the risk ; yet, to stand shiv-  
 another garment of such consequence, and for so long, is  
 Beside, who knows whether  
 might be quite dry when I put it on again,—and so another  
 and cold-catching ! Truly, for my own part, I care not  
 I thank ye."

penalty, which would have secured himself a prize, he also  
 from the same cause.

Shortcake had engaged him in the performance of a spell, which  
 to be conducted in the following manner. He was to take a candle,  
 a room by himself, where there was a looking-glass ready set ;  
 glass he was enjoined to keep his eye steadily fixed, to comb his  
 and eat apple, all the while, until he should see the face of his des-  
 bride peep over his shoulder.

"But what if I come to the end of the apple, and no face appears?"  
 "An apple is soon eaten ; and then what am I to do?"

"You'll find a supply ;" said Alice Shortcake, pushing him into the  
 darkened room ; where, by the light of a single glimmering rushlight  
 shaking in his hand, he found a mirror hung with black, close beside  
 which stood a dozen or more of apples, and a comb.

"There's enough of 'em, sure enough !" he muttered, setting down  
 the candle. "I hope the bride's face will show itself soon ; I shall never  
 get through all those, else."

He stood opposite the mirror, looked at himself therein, as steadily

as he could, took the comb in one hand, drew it through his long flaxen locks, lifted an apple in the other, and, digging his front teeth into the peel, took a resolute bite.

"Pah!" exclaimed he, just about to sputter forth the mouthful, "It's a crab, I verily believe! Sour as verjuice!" But, bethinking him that he might break the charm, he swallowed; with a wry face took another bite, scrunched that, and swallowed; and so went he on, combing, and scrunching, and swallowing, and keeping his eyes faithfully fixed on the glass, with not one instant's loss of gravity at the wry faces, or yellow hanks of tow hair, combed through with stolid perseverance, which were reflected before him.

Not so his tormenter. She was not proof against this combination of delicious circumstances. She had crept on tiptoe behind him, to watch the working of her spell; but when she beheld its actual fulfilment,—so far beyond the most sanguine expectations she had allowed herself to form, even from her victim's promising appearance,—the sight was too much for her powers of risible controul, and she was fain to scamper out of the room and throw herself into the young miller's arms, to have her laugh out in the passage, where he was waiting for her.

"He's at it still;" she whispered, between the burst of giggles that she vainly endeavoured to suppress, for fear they should reach the darkened room; "for the love of laughter, go and have a peep! But restrain thy guffaw, lest he overhear, and cease crunching. I'd have him eat till he burst! And, oh, look at his goggle grey eyes peering through his lank hair, that he keeps combing and combing right over them. What a dear ninny 'tis! I could have smacked his face, and pelted it with the apples, for very delight at him, had I not hoped to see him munch 'em all up. Go, go! But, softly; I pr'ythee!"

But just as Yead Miller stole to the door, he met master Slender stealing out, muttering:—"I shall as soon venture at it, as any man, for so rare a sight; but cholic's a fearful thing—it nips shrewdly—and I'll eat no more. Hullo! What's that? Oh, it's you, Yead Miller."

"Ay, it's only me, master Slender;" said the fellow, as gravely as he could; "but what else have you seen? Anything? any one? What sort

of face was it, peeped over your shoulder? Let's know, what like mistress Slender is to be."

"Truly, I saw no face, not I;" replied he. I saw nothing. I heard something, indeed; but——"

"What, what? What was it like?"

"Mass, it was most like a girl smothering a laugh; and my mind misgave me, that it was no spirit, but a true fleshly woman; and i'faith I'd ha' proved it, by turning round and catching hold of her; only, it isn't seemly to lay hands on a woman against her will, and before she's aware; and so, I let her be, forsooth. But I half repent me; for if it was that merry black-eyed thing that I am in two minds it was, I'd ha' a squeeze or a kiss for my pains; but then mayhap, she'd have slapped or pinched, for women are despiteful things when they're vexed."

"Ay, truly are they, master Slender, and vexed enough she'd ha' been, had your worship revenged yourself that way;" said the miller. "Best as 'tis. And now let you and me away to the shovel-board room. I've some right good smooth new shillings, fit for play, that your worship shall have for the nonce, an' you will."

"Nay, I'll be well-pleased to buy them of thee, Yead Miller;" said master Slender. "I love the game well; and shall be glad to make the bright broad pieces mine own."

These several attacks upon her son, had not escaped the notice of mistress Slender; and they were what caused her to be so highly incensed against the indiscriminate assembly, where a miller and a baker's daughter had had an opportunity of playing off their tricks upon so exalted a personage as the young squire, master Abraham Slender. She had not failed to perceive also the impression created by Alice Shortcake's black eyes; and this it was which she confided to her cousin Shallow, beseeching him to aid in averting the frightful consequences to which it might lead.

The worthy justice promised; but just at that time, it happened, that his attention was diverted from the subject of his young cousin's possible enthalment, by the unexpected advent of one of his old town acquaintances, sir John Flastaff, who, with three of his retainers, came down to Gloucestershire on a long-promised visit.

This visit proved anything but agreeable to the host. Matters were carried with so reckless a hand by the knight and his riotous followers,—they committed so many extravagances, bred so much disorder,—and behaved with so little regard to decency, that instead of the amicable terms on which the two gentlemen had hitherto maintained their intimacy, they parted, this time, with threats of seeking redress on the one side, contemptuous defiance on the other.

Master Robert Shallow brooded on these wrongs, and meditated means of obtaining the vengeance he sought. He thought he would go up to Windsor, where the court at present was, and state his wrongs in the proper quarter; he bethought him, that thus he might enjoy the pleasure he had often promised himself, of seeing master Page again, and at the same time fulfil an engagement of long-standing with sir Hugh Evans, his old school-fellow, who looked forward with pride to having him under his roof. He had just made up his mind (again the word slips in unadvisedly, speaking of the worthy gentleman) on the many eligible features of the plan, when one more circumstance was added, which made him decide upon the Windsor expedition as the wisest possible device, to obtain his own wishes, and to remove his cousin at once from a dangerous vicinity.

It happened that justice Shallow, while making the above reflections, was pacing up and down a sunny open space in his deer-park near to the high road, when he heard voices; one of which was a woman's, and the other he recognized as his cousin Slender's.

"Nay, but master Slender," he heard the damsel's voice say, "I'm sure your worship won't refuse me so very a trifle as a puppy."

"I know not about trifles, mistress Alice;" replied the voice of Abraham Slender; "but I know the dog's as good a dog as any in Gloucestershire—be the other the best hound that runs—and I can't part with him to be given away to Yead Miller, which, I know, is what you'll do."

"Not I, if'faith;" replied Alice; "I want him for a pet for myself; and you won't refuse me—me—eh, master Slender?" And the tone of voice became very appealing. "I'm sure I couldn't refuse you a dog, or anything else that you asked of me, master Slender."

"But you have no dog—and I ask no dog of you, mistress Alice ;" said Slender.

"But is there nothing else you would care to have of me, master Slender? I would fain show you I can refuse you nothing, if I may coax you to part with the dog, for I've taken a fancy to him."

"He's a gift of master Page's, and I daren't give him away, lest my cousin Shallow should chide ;" said Slender ; "and as for aught else I could wish of you, beside a dog—there might be something I could fancy, but that I overheard Yead Miller once say, if any man ever took such a thing of you, he'd take him a blow of his cudgel should last him his life."

"And what was it no man was to get of me without Yead Miller's good leave, I trow ?"

"If I tell you, will you give me your word not to be angered? You'll be curst, mayhap, if I say the word ; many women can't abide to hear it spoken."

"What is it, good master Slender?" said the voice in so coquettish a strain as did not forebode any violent offence, should he muster courage for the utterance.

"Marry, no less than—a—a—kiss ;" faltered he.

A little shrill scream followed, which seemed to scare master Slender, and which he hastened to appease, by exclaiming :—"Nay, it was his word, not mine, and I'll sooner be hanged than make it my deed, if you'll only cease screaming, and tell me you're not angered !"

"Pshaw !" muttered the voice of the damsel, as she seemed to fling from him, and quit the spot.

Presently, the long legs of master Slender appeared above the top rail of the stile which divided the park from the road ; and in another moment, himself came into the open space where his cousin Shallow was, who said, as he approached :—"What woman was that you parted with just now, coz ?"

"Woman? I know of no woman ;" said master Slender, with more than his ordinary sheepishness of aspect.

"Come, come, that shall not serve, cousin. Come cousin, come cousin, confess, confess."

"I know not what to confess," said master Slender.

"Confess that you care more for that wench, than you'd have me know of, coz. Confess that; I know who the woman is. Confess that you like her too well. Confess, coz; confess."

"I know not what 'tis to like any woman. I know not what 'tis so much as to look at a woman in the way of liking."

"Do you look at them in hate, coz?"

"Nay, I know not that; but I know not what 'tis to look upon them in any liking."

"I doubt that, coz; I doubt that. This wench seemed quite at home with you, methought."

"Oh, we've met before. I don't mind the young woman. I—I—care not that she should not come near me; but I never seek her, not I. If she come after me, so; if she have a fancy for me, why so, too; I can't bish her away from me like a dog, can I? Or bid her not follow me, can I? You would not have me rough to her, would you, uncle? It's an ill thing to be rough to a woman, uncle, I can't abide to be rough to a woman."

"Well, you needn't be rough, coz: but you needn't encourage her, neither. What I would have you do, is not to encourage the girl, coz. Do you mark me? Do you conceive me, coz?"

"Very well, uncle."

"Why, well, then; let her not fancy that you encourage her. For it would not sort well with the honor of an old family like ours, coz,—that may quarter, and write himself esquire, coz,—for master Abraham Slender to wed with Alice Shortcake, the baker's daughter."

"You know her then, uncle?" faltered master Slender.

"Marry, that I do; and I will pardon all, if thou wilt pleasure me, coz, by going with me to Windsor; where sir Hugh Evans, a worthy friend of mine, shall show thee, as a good churchman should, the sin and wickedness of marrying beneath your degree, and the weakness of trifling with a girl's hopes. It is very wanton dealing, both."

"But ere I go with you to Windsor, uncle, I would fain get back a book of mine, that I lent to Alice Shortcake. It's a choice garland of riddles that I took with me to make merry with, at the All-hallowmas



feast ; she wouldn't be gainsaid but that I should let her have it for awhile. We so laughed over it together, that it passed."

"Well, coz, thy man Simple shall go over, and ask her for it in thy name ;" said justice Shallow.

"I doubt if she'll give it to any one beside myself ;" muttered Slender ; "she sets store by the volume, I know ; and in truth, it's a dainty book of riddles. It's well-nigh as full of sweet conceits, as my book of songs and sonnets, with its pretty fal-lal-las, and hey-nonnys, merry tolde-rols, and witty rhyme-burdens. I care not to be without it, on any occasion of gravity and moment, like a journey ; or of pleasantry, such as meeting with new acquaintances. And I dare to say we shall pick them up as rife as daisies, at Windsor. I shall have need of my book, uncle."

"And thou shalt have it, coz. Peter Simple shall fetch it thee. Never fear, never fear. And by'r lady, 'tis well thought on, and 'tis well thought on, indeed ; thy man Simple shall attend us to Windsor. We shall need a trusty varlet ; and he is one, he is one,"

And thus the journey to Windsor was settled.

There, meantime, some changes had taken place. Sir Marmaduke Ducandrake died. As he had never married, and had no son, the estate fell to his nephew, of the same name, a young man about town, with a slender purse, and expensive tastes, to whom this windfall was most welcome. He came down to take possession, bringing in his train, a number of idle young companions, whose gay manners and congenial pursuits had won his living. Partly from conviction that it could not be in honester hands, partly from indisposition to any exertion of body or mind, which a change must have produced, the young gentleman left the management of his affairs still with master Page ; merely renewing his engagement as bailiff to the estate.

Among the young gentlemen who had accompanied their friend, the new sir Marmaduke, down to Windsor, was one master Fenton. He was gay, but not heartless, like the rest. He was of gentle birth ; had somewhat wasted his patrimony in town pleasures, thinking some day to repair his fortunes by a wealthy marriage ; but possessed a nature capa

ble of being touched, and rendered generous, by excellence. He had met Anne Page more than once by chance, coming with her little brother from school; had been struck with her simple beauty; had formed acquaintance with her, and begun to flatter himself that she found nearly as much pleasure from it as himself; while gradually it struck young William, that his sister left him oftener and oftener to find his way to and from school by himself, unless his mother would be his companion, which she frequently was.

On one of these occasions, when Anne Page had forgotten that it was the hour for fetching her brother, because she happened to be walking with master Fenton in the meadows, whom she had by the merest accident met there, it befel that mistress Quickly came upon them, just as the young people parted.

"A fair day to fair mistress Anne, is a fair wish, and i is mine, in good sooth;" said she; "I need not wish her fair company, for that she has just parted with, I see;" added she, with a sly glance in the direction of master Fenton's retreating figure.

"Wilt thou step with me to our house, and see my good mother, mistress Quickly? She will be glad to see you, I know."

"And what would she say to me, I wonder, did she know whom I have just seen exhorting her daughter in her walk?" said mistress Quickly; "truly, I think, she'd chide if she knew how comely a young gentleman I find him; for well I know, all her wish is, that her daughter should find my master, master doctor Caius, the comeliest man in Windsor."

"Good lack! mistress Quickly, how wouldst thou I should find any comeliness in such a grimacing ape and chattering pie as that, and withal a splay-footed duck, for his gait and his quackery?" said Anne Page.

"Nay, pretty mistress Anne, it is none of my wish that thou shouldst find any likelihood in the Frenchman—for all he's a doctor, and more than that, my master. But by my truly, I think your good mother would have you like him, for all that."

"I fear me, she would; but in truth I cannot;" said Anne.

"To be sure; how can you, with young master Fenton by you, to compare?" said mistress Quickly; "but yet a mother's will is to be thought of, and I could wish——"

"Speak not of it, good mistress Quickly; but I pry'thee tell me, how mistress Ford likes her new maid that thou commended'st to her—or any news thou wilt, i'faith."

"Well then, it's kindly enough mistress Ford has taken to Tib Prat; but it's master Ford that cares not to see any good in the poor maid, because, forsooth, she's niece to the fat woman of Brentford, whom he vows is a quean, a cozening fortune-teller, and I know not what. What though? A woman must live, I trow! She must earn her honest penny! She must eat, I hope! But I hear there's to be grand doings on your birthday, next week, mistress Anne. A goodly feast it'll be, I warrant me. And you'll be sixteen years of age, I give Heaven praise."

"And thou must come to the feast, mistress Quickly;" said Anne Page; "I must have thee present. Thou wast at my christening, thou know'st, and if all be true, at my mother's, before me."

"Troth, mistress Anne, that I was; and a specious christening, both of 'em, I warrant ye. But I must be going. Out upon it! My master will be home before me; and then there'll be no end to frowns and cracked English, and hub-bub, and find-fault, and to-do!" said mistress Quickly, with so sudden a recollection of her domesticities, as might have led to the suspicion, that having gained her object—an invitation to the birthday feast,—she had leisure to remember her duty.

The feast was no less magnificent, than had been mistress Quickly's anticipations touching its probable arrangements. It was on a scale suited to a wealthy and a fond father's desire to honour his daughter's birthday.

Among the guests, were young sir Marmaduke, and the troop of friends he had staying with him, including master Fenton; there were also some late arrivals in the town, hangers-on of the court, gentlemen with whom Page had from time to time made a slight acquaintance. Of these latter, happened to be sir John Falstaff. There was also a numerous concourse of friends and neighbours. Sir Hugh Evans was there,

who mentioned to master Page a letter, which he had received from their friend justice Shallow, announcing his intended visit to Windsor, and hinting at some of the motives which induced him to come.

Master Page told sir Hugh he was glad of this, as Falstaff being at present there, it might lead to a reconciliation, he hoped, between the justice and the knight, which he should do his utmost to bring about.

Sir Hugh promised "to use his best discretions and benignities" to help on so amicable a project; but as for sir John, when he heard who was expected, he only said:—

"What, justice Shallow? Poor devil! He'll hardly care to meet me, or look me in the face; he owes me money—some thousand pound strong; or so. But he needn't fear me; I'll not press the debt. He shall have time. I'm a moderate man,—save in the girth; exacting only in the span of my sword-belt. My belly craves amplitude of doublet; but for mine own desires, they are limited—to excess."

Master Robert Shallow and his cousin Slender arrive in Windsor. They are welcomed by their friends.

Master Page's scheme for a son-in-law assumes form and substance.

Mistress Page has still her own project for Anne's future husband; but meanwhile her attention is distracted from the subject by a strange proposal on her own score, which forces from her the exclamation:—

*"What! have I 'scaped love-letters in the holiday time of my beauty, and am I now a subject for them? Let me see."*

She has no sooner re-read the paper, than to her comes mistress Ford, saying;—

*"Mistress Page! trust me, I was going to your house!"*

---

The comedy of the twin letters, with the reception and retaliation they meet, is played out in "double excellency." The writer of the story, therefore, has now only to refer to her master's writing, and invoke his aid in his own words, saying:—"Give me thy hand, celestial; so."

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## PASSAGES IN THE PLAYS

IN RELATION TO  
FACTS, NAMES, AND SENTIMENTS,

WITH WHICH IT WAS REQUISITE THE TALE SHOULD ACCORD.

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### TALE I

- Page 33, line 26. "Now, Balthazar,  
As I have ever found thee honest, true,  
So let me find thee still."—*MERCHANT OF VENICE*, Act iii, s. 4.
- Page 49, line 4. "An unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd?"  
*Idem*, Act ii, s. 2.
- Page 54, line 3. "It is your music, madam, of the house."  
*Idem*, Act v, s. 1.
- Page 66, line 30. "Do you not remember, lady, in your father's time, a Venetian, a scholar, and a soldier, that came hither in company of the Marquis of Montferrat?"—*Idem*, Act i, s. 3.
- Page 77, line 19. "This house, these servants, and this same myself,  
Are yours, my lord; I give them with this ring."—*Idem*, Act iii, s. 2.
- Page 79, line 10. "There is a monastery two miles off."  
*Idem*, Act iii, s. 4.
- Page 80, line 19. "Who comes with her? None but a *holy hermit*, and her maid."  
*Idem*, Act v, s. 1.

Page 85, "So is the will of a living daughter curb'd by the will of a dead  
line 13. father."—*Idem*, Act i, s. 3.

Page 87, "Take this same letter,  
line 20. And use thou all the endeavour of a man,  
In speed to Padua; see thou render this  
Into my cousin's hand, doctor Bellario."—*Idem*, Act iii, s. 4.

## TALE II.

Page 123, "Had he not resembled  
line 16. My father as he slept, I had done't."—*MACBETH*, Act ii, s. 2.

Page 150, There is historical authority for the name of Macbeth's mother being  
line 11. Doda; that of his wife, Gruoch; and that of his son, Cormac.

Page 164, "We will establish our estate upon  
line 20. Our eldest, Malcolm; whom we name hereafter  
The prince of Cumberland."—*MACBETH*, Act i, s. 4.

Page 169, "The Norway lord, surveying vantage,  
line 26. With furbish'd arms and new supplies of men,  
Began a fresh assault."—*Idem*, Act i, s. 2.

Page 169, "The merciless Macdonwald  
line 28. (Worthy to be a rebel; for, to that,  
The multiplying villainies of nature  
Do swarm upon him) from the western isles  
Of Kernes and Gallowglasses is supplied."—*Idem*, Act i, s. 2.

Page 170, "What beast was it then,  
line 7. That made you break this enterprise to me?  
When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
And, to be more than what you were, you would  
Be so much more the man. *Nor time, nor place,*  
*Did then adhere,* and yet you would make them both:  
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now  
Does unmake you."—*Idem*, Act i, s. 7.

## TALE III.

Page 243, *King*. "I would I had that corporal soundness now,  
line 15. As when thy father, and myself, in friendship  
First tried our soldiership! He did look far  
Into the service of the time, and was  
Disciplined of the bravest."—*ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL*, Act i, s. 2.

- Page 246,  
line 16. "He was famous, sir, in his profession, and it was his great right to be so: Gerard de Narbonne."—*Idem*, Act i, a. 1.
- Page 256,  
line 24. The countess Rousillon addresses her steward as "Rinaldo."  
*Idem*, Act iii, a. 4
- Page 257,  
line 25. "His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,  
\* \* \* \* \* heart too capable  
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour."—*Idem*, Act i, a. 1.
- Page 268,  
line 23. "You remember  
*The daughter of this lord?*  
*Bertram.* Admiringly, my liege: *at first*  
*I stuck my choice upon her, ere my heart*  
*Durst make too bold a herald of my tongue:*  
Where the impression of mine eye infixing,  
Contempt his scornful perspective did lend me,  
Which warp'd the line of every other favour;  
Scorn'd a fair colour, or express'd it stol'n;  
Extended or contracted all proportions,  
To a most hideous object: Thence it came,  
That she, whom all men prais'd, and whom myself,  
Since I have lost, have lov'd, was in mine eye,  
The dust that did offend it.
- King.* Well excused:  
\* \* \* \* \*  
Send forth your amorous token for fair *Maudlin*."—*Idem*, Act v, a. 3.
- Page 270,  
line 14. The king, quoting his friend, the late count Rousillon's opinion of young fellows at court, says he called them:—  
"Younger spirits whose apprehensive senses  
All but new things disdain; whose judgments are  
Mere fathers of their garments; whose constancies  
Expire before their fashions."—*Idem*, Act i, a. 2.
- Page 270,  
line 22. Bertram disdainfully and ungenerously says, when refusing to take the poor physician's daughter for his wife:—  
"She had her breeding at my father's charge."—*Idem*, Act ii, a. 3.
- Page 270,  
last line. "Whose beauty did astonish the survey  
Of richest eyes; whose words all ears took captive;  
Whose dear perfection, hearts that scorn'd to serve,  
Humbly call'd mistress."—*Idem*, Act v, a. 3.
- Page 273,  
line 22. *Vide* the scene in the fourth act, where the soldiers are cross-questioning the blindfolded Parolles. They are there called by their names of "Dumain"; but among the *Dramatis Personæ*, they are styled



"young French lords, that serve with Bertram in the Florentine wars;" and in the scenes where they appear, the prefix to their several speeches merely stands thus:—1 Lord, 2 Lord. Their moral excellence is best proved in the conversation they hold together 'respecting Bertram' at the beginning of this scene. It is 1 Lord, the elder captain Dumain, who utters the celebrated sentence:—"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues."

Page 275,  
line 12. Parolles, on his return to Rousillon after his disgrace, addressing the clown, says:—"Good monsieur *Lavatch*, give my lord Lafeu this letter."—ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, Act v., a. 2.

Page 280,  
line 7. *Hel.* "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to Heaven: the fated sky  
Gives us free scope; only, doth backward pull  
Our slow designs, when we ourselves are dull.  
\* \* \* \* \*  
Impossible be strange attempts, to those  
That weigh their pains in sense; and do suppose  
What hath been cannot be."—*Idem*, Act i., a. 3.

Page 282,  
line 16. "My father left me some prescriptions  
Of rare and prov'd effects, such as his reading,  
And manifest experience, had collected  
For general sovereignty; and that he willed me  
In heedfullest reservation to bestow them,  
As notes, whose faculties inclusive were,  
More than they were in note: amongst the rest,  
There is a remedy approv'd, set down,  
To cure the desperate languishes whereof  
The king is render'd lost."—*Idem*, Act i., a. 3.

Page 283,  
line 4. *King.* "How long is't, count,  
Since the physician at your father's died!  
He was much fam'd.

*Ber.* Some six months since, my lord."—*Idem*, Act i., a. 3.

Page 283,  
line 15. *Countess.* "Her father bequeathed her to me: and she herself, without other advantage, may lawfully make title to as much love as she finds: there is more owing her, than is paid; and more shall be paid her, than she'll demand."—*Idem*, Act i., a. 3.

Page 285,  
line 3. Lafeu asks Parolles (Act ii. a. 3) "Why dost thou *garter up thy arms* o' this fashion! dost make hose of thy sleeves!" And in the fifth scene of the fourth act, the old lord tells the countess:—"No, no, no, your son was misled with a *snipt-taffata* fellow there; whose villainous *saffron*

would have made all the unbaked and doughy youth of a nation in his colour: your daughter-in-law had been alive at this hour; and your son here at home more advanced by the king, than by that *red-tailed* humble-bee I speak of."

- Page 287,  
line 1. The clown says to his mistress, the countess, "If I may have your ladyship's good will to *go to the world*," [said to be a cant phrase, meaning, 'to be married,'] "Isabel the woman and I will do as we may."  
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, Act i., s. 3.
- Page 289,  
line 25. "This is your devoted friend, sir, the manifold linguist, and the armpotent soldier."—*Idem*, Act iv., s. 3.
- Page 290,  
line 3. "Of six preceding ancestors, that gem  
Conferr'd by testament to the sequent issue,  
Hath it been own'd, and worn."—*Idem*, Act v., s. 3.

## TALE IV.

- Page 306,  
line 21. "So much duty as my mother show'd  
To you, preferring you before her father."—OTHELLO, Act i., s. 3
- Page 320,  
line 17. "She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, that she holds it a vice in her goodness, not to do more than she is requested."  
*Idem*, Act ii., s. 3.
- Page 338,  
line 21. "My mother had a maid called,—Barbara:  
She was in love, and he, she lov'd, prov'd mad,  
And did forsake her: she had a song of—'willow,'  
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,  
And she died singing it."—*Idem*, Act iv., s. 3.
- Page 342,  
line 18. "So delicate with her needle!—An admirable musician! O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear!—Of so high and plenteous wit and invention!"—*Idem*, Act iv., s. 1.
- Page 344,  
line 5. "A maiden never bold;  
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion  
Blush'd at herself."—*Idem*, Act i., s. 3.
- Page 345,  
line 30. "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd;" with the rest of the speech preceding in context.—*Idem*, Act i., s. 3.
- Page 347,  
line 23. "'tis most easy  
The inclining Desdemona to subdue  
In any honest suit; she 's fram'd as fruitful  
As the free elements."—*Idem*, Act ii., s. 3.

- Page 348,  
line 32. *www.libtool.com* "That song to-night,  
Will not go from my mind: I have much to do,  
But go hang my head all at one side,  
And sing it, like poor Barbara."—*Idem*, Act iv., s. 3.
- Page 364,  
line 12. "This Ludovico is a proper man. \* \* \* I know a lady in Ven-  
ice, who would have walked barefoot to Palestine, for a touch of his  
nether lip."—*Idem*, Act iv., s. 3.
- Page 374,  
line 24. This idea is in accordance with an ingenious suggestion of Mr. Charles  
Knight's, conveyed in a note to Act third of 'Othello'; Pictorial Edition.
- Page 376,  
line 9. "These things to hear,  
Would Desdemona seriously incline:  
But still the house affairs would draw her thence;  
Which ever as she could with haste despatch,  
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear  
Devour up my discourse:" OTHELLO, Act i., s. 3.
- Page 376,  
line 29. *Iago*. "She did deceive her father, marrying you;  
And when she seem'd to shake, and fear your looks,  
She lov'd them most.  
*Oth.* *And so she did.*—*Idem*, Act iii., s. 3.  
In these four little syllables, is involved Desdemona's fate. Had her  
husband been able to refute *Iago's* charge of the tacit deception she  
once practised, all would have been well. Thus subtly, but impres-  
sively, does Shakespeare draw the moral of his characters and their  
history.
- Page 377,  
line 13. Sorrowfully is the reader referred,—in confirmation,—to the colloquy  
between Othello and Desdemona (Act iii., s. 4); where he demands the  
handkerchief.  
*Oth.* "Lend me thy handkerchief.  
*Des.* Here, my lord.  
*Oth.* That which I gave you.  
*Des.* *I have it not about me.*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
*Oth.* Is't lost! is't gone! Speak, is it out of the way!  
*Des.* Heaven bless us!  
*Oth.* Say you!  
*Des.* *It is not lost; but what an if it were!*  
*Oth.* Ha!  
*Des.* *I say it is not lost.*

*Old.* Fetch't, let me see it.

*Des.* Why, so I can, sir, but I will not now."

Not five minutes before, she has asked Emilia where she could have lost that handkerchief, adding:—"I had rather have lost my purse full of crusadoes." Profoundly mournful in its meaning,—as we may interpret it (morally, though not dramatically),—is her husband's subsequent exclamation:—

"Had she been true,  
If Heaven would make me such another world  
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,  
I'd not have sold her for it."

Page 379,  
line 2.

What! Michael Cassio,  
That came a wooing with you; and many a time,  
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,  
Hath ta'en your part."—*OTHELLO*, Act iii, s. 3.

Page 379,  
line 11.

"Three great ones of the city,  
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,  
Off-capp'd to him."—*Idem*, Act i, s. 1.

Page 380,  
line 4.

\* \* \* \* \*  
"Did beguile her of her tears,  
\* \* \* \* \*

My story being done,  
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs."

See the whole exquisite description of that "pliant hour," as given by the wooer himself.—*Idem*, Act i, s. 3,

Page 380,  
line 21.

"This was her first remembrance from the Moor;  
\* \* \* \* \* She so loves the token,  
(For he conjur'd her, she would ever keep it),  
That she reserves it evermore about her,  
To kiss, and talk to." \* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*

"a handkerchief,  
Spotted with strawberries."—*Idem*, Act iii, s. 3.

Page 380,  
line 27.

*Bra.* "Call up my brother."—*Idem*, Act i, s. 1.

Page 381,  
line 10.

"Send for the lady to the Sagittary."—*Idem*, Act i, s. 2.

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TALE V.

- Page 385,  
line 10.      Shakespeare's commentators have spent much labour in endeavouring to reconcile the discrepancies of detail in the character of mistress Quickly, as it appears in the three plays of Henry IV. (1. 2.) and V., and in the comedy of the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' supposing identity of person. Here, the gordian knot has been cut, by making them two different women,—sisters: one, the spinster of the comedy; the other, the hostess and widow of the historical plays.
- Page 393,  
lines 5 & 6.      The christian names of mistress Ford and mistress Page are thus determined. When Mrs. Ford says:—"I could be knighted;" her friend replies:—"What! Thou liest! sir *Alice* Ford!" And afterwards, in the same scene, Page addresses his wife, with:—"How now, *Meg*!"—*MERRY WIVES*, Act ii., a. 1.
- Page 396,  
line 8.      We find the christian names of master Ford, and master Page, thus indicated:—*Mrs. Page*. "Whither go you, *George*?—Hark you!"  
*Mrs. Ford*. "How now, sweet *Frank*? Why art thou melancholy?"  
*Idem*, Act ii., a. 1
- Page 404,  
line 4.      "Three of master Ford's brothers watch the door with pistols;"  
*Idem*, Act iv., a. 2
- Page 434,  
line 21.      "And how doth my good cousin Silence?"  
*Sil.* Good morrow, good cousin Shallow.  
*Shal.* And how doth my cousin, your bedfellow! and your fairest daughter, and mine, my god-daughter Ellen! \* \* \* I dare say, my courn William is become a good scholar."—Henry IV., Act iii., a. 2.
- Page 435,  
line 3.      Slender says:—"I keep but three men and a boy yet, *till my mother be dead*."—*MERRY WIVES*, Act i., a. 1.
- Page 461,  
line 18.      "Did her grandsire leave her seven hundred pound?"  
*Evana.* Ay;—"Idem, Act i., a. 1.
- Page 462,  
line 3.      *Vide* first scene of the fourth act, in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor.'
- Page 462,  
line 21.      "How now, sir Hugh! no school to-day?"  
*Evana.* No, *master Slender* is let the boys leave to play."  
*MERRY WIVES*, Act iv., a. 1
- Page 463,  
line 6.      *Slen.* "How does your fallow greyhound, sir? I heard say, he was out-run on Cotsale."—*Idem*, Act i., a. 1.

Page 463,  
line 17.

*Shal.* "We have linger'd about a match between Anne Page and my cousin Slender, and this day we shall have our answer.

*Slen.* I hope I have your good will, father Page.

*Page.* You have, master Slender: I stand wholly for you: but my wife, master doctor, is for you altogether."—*Idem*, Act iii., a. 2.

Page 463,  
line 23.

*Mrs. Ford.* "My maid's aunt, the fat woman of Brentford; \* \* \*

*Mrs. Page.* Come, Mother *Prat*, come, give me your hand."

*Idem*, Act iv., a. 2.

Page 462,  
line 2.

*Simple.* "Book of riddles! Why did you not lend it to *Alice Shortcake* upon Allhallowmas last."—*Idem*, Act i., a. 1.

Page 472,  
line 17.

"Two Edward shovel-boards" [the broad shillings of Edward VI., sometimes called so, because they were used in playing at the game of shovel-board;] "that cost me two shillings and two pence a-piece of *Yead Miller*."—*Idem*, Act i., a. 1.

Page 473,  
line 10.

"I will make a Star-chamber matter of it: if he were twenty sir John Falstuffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire."

*Idem*, Act i., a. 1.

Page 477,  
line 2.

"Besides these, other bars he lays before me,—  
My riots past, my wild societies;  
And tells me, 'tis a thing impossible  
I should love thee, but as a property.

*Anne.* May be, he tells you true.

*Fenton.* No, heaven so speed me in my time to come!  
Albeit, I will confess thy father's wealth  
Was the first motive that I woo'd thee, *Anne*.  
Yet, wooing thee, I found thee of more value  
Than stamps in gold, or sums in sealed bags;  
And 'tis the very riches of thyself,  
That now I aim at."—*Idem*, Act iii., a. 4.

Page 478  
line 10.

"He cannot abide the old woman of Brentford; he swears she's a witch."—*Idem*, Act iv., a. 2.

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