

R U N N E M E D E .



AN ANCIENT LEGEND.

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RUNNEMEDE.

An Ancient Legend.

IN THREE VOLUMES.



BY LOUISA SIDNEY STANHOPE,

AUTHOR OF

THE BANDIT'S BRIDE; THE CRUSADERS; THE SIEGE OF KENILWORTH;
FESTIVAL OF MORA; AGE WE LIVE IN, &c. &c.

Where are the chiefs of the times of old ? They have set like stars that have shone.
We only hear the sound of their praise. They were renowned in their years :
the terror of other times. OSSIAN.

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tered: his ear was deaf to every pleading—his heart was dead to every hope—his bleeding spirit, stricken and broken, spurned at the enjoined duty of submission: and for whole hours, alive but to the magnitude of his loss, did he remain, like one, without helm or guidance, drifted by alternate gusts of passion: now, yielding to hysteric bursts; now, marbled into wan and tearless dependence.

“Morning finds us where night left us,” said O’Carroll, creeping close to the side of the morbid and melancholy Walter. “A man, your honour, soused in one of the bogs of dear Ireland, must die, if he tax not his own strength.”

Walter raised his dim eyes.—“In an evil, like the present,” he asked, “what can strength avail?”

“In every evil—and the world, God-wot, teems with evil!” quick rejoined O’Carroll—“a man’s own strength is a man’s best helper.”

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The axiom was plain and unvarnished : it was spoken too by one of Nature's roughest children ; yet did it bring conviction to the sick mind of Walter. He remembered that we are bidden to wrestle long and manfully ; that sorrows, and disappointments, and afflictions — like light and shade in the colouring—serve but as trials, in this our sublunary pass ; that dazzled by unclouded sunshine, we should but stumble in our wanderings ; that the human heart, elated by a too prosperous destiny, needs the counter-scourge of opposition to impress of its own unworthiness :—and rousing, like the chafed lion, into fury, still rampant, writhing in the anguish of the sting, he felt that individual grief must yield to the stormy tide of necessity ; that private wrong, like thistle-beard in the wind, must be as nought to the one o'erwhelming call of public duty : he felt himself, in the present momentous juncture, bound to the fortune of

the oppressed; grappled, by more than faith, by gratitude and by principle, to the confederate nobles, in espousing the wrongs of the murdered prince Arthur, in bosoming the just hate of the bereaved earl of La Marche. Chance, or Providence, he trusted, might yet unreave the deep mystery of Matilda's disappearance, might yet yield to his thirst for vengeance, the recreant knave who had spirited her from her home: for the busy wanderings of imagination, settled upon the wily palmer, whose tongue and whose eye had played traitor to his calling; who, in the outward seeming of holiness, had profaned his mission, outraging with unhallowed passion the pure ear of innocence. But how to follow, how to trace, how to fasten a quarrel on one, who was a stranger in person; one, whose very name was unknown?

“God direct me!” he would ejaculate, as these perplexing difficulties rose in array before him—“God direct my erring
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ing judgment! gift too my angel child with more than woman's courage; gift her with fortitude, to play a Roman part, to martyr life, in preservation of her honour!" And then he would dwell on the purity of her mind, on that instinctive pride, which forms the glory and the safeguard of woman: he would take comfort to himself, in her remembered principles, in her firmness under ill, in her patience under trial. "She will come forth, as gold, as pure gold!" he would exclaim in the exulting confidence of the father. "Be the fire fierce as the burning furnace of the king of Babylon, she will pass through the midst unsinged!"

Spurred by necessity, and instigated by the bosomed hope of yet rescuing his hapless child, Walter hailed the hour of departure with something like thankfulness: he besought the prayers of the church, and he left in the hands of the pastor-abbot, a rule of conduct, should

Heaven so will, that Matilda, escaping the trammel, sought again the shelter of her home. It was a written document, penned with zeal and trust; and first greeting her with paternal love and pious benediction, it bid her hasten with all speed to the tendered guardianship of the duchess Constantia; there to tarry in fitly fellowship, until his death or glory, should cast a deeper shade or brighter ray upon her fortune.

Passing o'er his brief sojourn in the court of the duchess Constantia, his dire explanation of his successful mission, his joy in the safety, and comfort, and gratitude of the orphan Margaret—we tarry not again until after the successful siege of the castle of Loches, until the whole of Touraine was added to the conquests of the French arms: then passing over the brief truce obtained, by the interposition of the pope Innocent the Third—nor dwelling for a moment, on the strifes and merciless persecutions
of

of intolerant zeal, known in the sanguinary crusade, preached and prosecuted by the pope's mandate against the Albigenses—we pitch our tent, and collect our forces, in the vicinity of Damme, eager, sanguine, and confiding; awaiting but the order of embarkation, to realize the dream of invasion, to carry fire and sword into the home territories of the false and perfidious John. But that God, who to the prayers of the pious Abraham, promised mercy to a populous city, in the 'approved righteousness of ten; that God, willed not a whole nation to bleed, through the turpitude of one single sinner: besides, the early supremacy of that naval valour, which for whole centuries has stamped

“ All British ground which lies under the ocean,”

waited but the season to erect its growing fame; and the destruction of the French navy, lying in the road of Damme, consisting of *seventeen hundred* sail, suddenly

denly and ably attacked by the English fleet, under the command of the earls of Salisbury and Boulogne, gave to hereafter ages the bright earnest of its future and its still brighter triumphs.

But though Walter was the last man who ever drew sword to turn in the face of a foe, strong and imperious necessity bore him wounded and bleeding in the simultaneous rush who fled before the depopulating strides of the victorious English: and passing rapidly over the return of Philip Augustus, his burning the city of Damme, plundering Bruges, sacking Lisle, and departure out of Flanders:—for in the page of romance, events lose their order, and dates become subservient to circumstances—we next find the father of Matilda, signaled by his intrepidity, by the favour of the viscount de Thouars, and by the mysterious signet, the gift of the unknown palmer,—immediately in the train of the earl of Dreux, summoned by
king

king Philip into Brittany, to oppose the advance of the king of England, who, with a mighty force, landing at Rochelle, and crossing Poitou, had reduced many parts of Anjou.

“ Let him come on,” said the buoyant and the youthful prince Louis : “ let him come on, my good lords ; and by the blood of the Capets, we will give him, cool courage, and firm steel !”

“ Ay, and we will give him a grave, if God so will it !” And the lord de Retel laughed in the lightness of his heart.

“ I would he were now within the reach of this good sword !” mused Walter, sickening at the gay pageant before him : for many a plumed crest waved in the breeze, and many a gorgeous symbol, sparkling in the rays of the sun, gave token of noble bearing—“ I would I could now beard this John of England, and grapple with him unto death !”

It was not habitual rancour—it was

the crowd of indignities, trials, and wrongs, heaped at the hands of the royal murderer, which, as fuel to the flames, changed the still current of his feelings, and turned his blood to gall. Walter was a man more sinned against than sinning—a man, prone to error, as all men are; but impulsive goodness, and genuine urbanity, and undeviating honour, in the fitful compound of human inconsistency, counterpoised all its common every-day dregs:—he had been the slave of circumstances, and he now lived the victim of injustice.

“What if he dare our good city of Nantes,” remarked the prince; “shall we not give him warm cheer, my lords?” and he looked with proud triumph on the close ranks of his followers—“Shall we not make the dastard spirit quail, who seeks for rule in deeds of murder?”

“Marry, will we!” exclaimed De Retel, “and drive him, halt and limping, back, to crave a cataplasm at the hands
of

of beauty. The pretty Isabel, forsooth, will have but sorry pastime!"

"Fit meet for the traitress," said the count d'Eu. "I would her heart be torn with the like thorns she scatters in my brother's pathway! I pray of her no more, my lord: the name of Isabel is poison to me."

"Think you, she fashions not her own scourge?" asked De Retel; "think you, the jewelled diadem always retains its brightness? What if we could pierce within her closet—what if we could dive within her heart——"

"A woman's heart!" interrupted the count, and he spoke with irony and rancour—"a woman's heart, forsooth, like unto a woman's face, is full of trick and subtilty! From the cradle to the grave, she loves to cozen, to torment, and to destroy. On my soul, I would trust my body with the crocodile, rather than my peace in the hands of woman."

"Beshrew me," resumed De Retel

but yours is a bold spirit to wage war with the charming sex! I would rather live and die their dupe, if it should chance so." And then he turned to prince Louis, and spoke again of the advance of king John, scoffed at the tame submission of the English, and marvelled how men could be found to wed their fortunes to such a leader.

Walter was all ear: for though torn in the strife of warring passions, and writhing beneath the smart of festering ills, the propinquity of his mortal foe, rousing from the deep absorption of private sorrow, gave all his hopes to vengeance.

"The native bond betwixt the monarch and the subject, resolves the seeming inconsistency," observed the Count d'Eu. "Men, born and reared to quiet calm submission, know not how to snap the rivet. It must be oppression, persevering systematic oppression, which goads to wild revolt."

"Then

“ Then be the revolt speedy ! be the revolt effectual ! ” exclaimed the baron Fitz-Walter, a nobleman, who accused of treason, had fled from England, and leagued himself with the forces of France. “ If aggression holds forth one single plea, be the subjects of John of England absolved of all offence. God-wot, my lords, he labours for his own debasement ! Odious alike in all his bearings, his insolence, his tyranny, and his impositions, drive to the headlong leap of desperation.”

“ Yet still he moves with thousands in his train,” said the lord de Retel ; “ still he wields the sceptre of his greatness.”

“ He moves a blight upon the hopes, upon the peace, upon the prosperity of a whole nation,” quick rejoined Fitz-Walter ; “ a blast upon a reeking world ; a commissioned bolt from heaven, to ravage and destroy.”

“ Power,” remarked the count d’Eu,
“ unless

“ unless tempered with moderation and with justice, is as a limed twig to snare the soul : leading from crime to crime, from enormity to enormity, it leaps all barrier, and tramples on all law. Power——”

“ Ay, for a season,” significantly interrupted the baron Fitz-Walter : “ but where is the surety for a tyrant’s safety ? —where the bond to indemnify from violence ? Not in the heart of the subject : for oppression, loosening the link, destroys the mighty chain of social compact ; oppression, wantonly, wilfully enforced, is as hot breath to the igniting fire of rebellion.”

“ We lack not the aid of rebellion,” exclaimed the dauntless prince Louis : “ here, upon our own ground, we lack nought save opportunity. Let him come on, and try the mettle of our nature !”

As he spoke, his eye glanced with exultation o’er his followers, and his look and his smile tokened defiance. Alas !
he

he dreamt not the insufficiency of human strength; he dreamt not the futility of human dependence! Dizzy in the springtide of youth, and health, and promise, he dreamt not the reflux of that tide, which now—as some gay bark, with all her pennons floating in the breeze—bore him on his prosperous fortune: the lesson of dependence he had yet to learn; that lesson, which adversity brings home, even to the hearts of princes!

In a season like the present, when the firebrand of war, ravaging the fair fields of France, trampled down her vineyards, and laid waste all her promises, Walter had no heart for war's mimic games. He sickened at the tilt and the revel; he shrank away from the light hilarity and sportive jests of the thoughtless and the happy; nursing the cares of a mind fraught with care, forgetting the trials of the past in the anxieties of the present—for time had shed no light on the
dark

dark tale of Matilda's disappearance—though attached to the forces commanded by the earl of Dreux, and diligent in the discharge of his military duties, in the hours of relaxation, when lighter sports prevailed, his mind was given to the conjured sorrows of his absent child; his aim, his study, his ability, how to pierce the mystery, and drag the hidden secret into light. Often had O'Carroll been dispatched on errands of espial, to explore, almost without clue, every whisper gathering into rumour, every tale which gallantry and knight-errantry fashioned: but though the Quixotic spirit of the age furnished many a wild romance; though many a damsel sighed in durance, and many a doughty knight gloried in his bonds and in his spells, the parental heart reaped nought of solace. As the dove, wandering o'er the troubled face of the waters, O'Carroll ever returned to the expectant presence of his master, without one single

gle olive-leaf savouring of hope : all was desolation and dreariness : the flood had indeed passed over the garner of his promise, and barrenness and emptiness prevailed.

Not once, in all the busy fluctuations of his fortune, since exchanging his own quiet home, for toil, and war, and active life, had he encountered the palmer, from whose hands he had obtained the signet-ring, which had gained him the favour of the powerful and the great : his brother too, was swept from earth, or captured in the train of the earl de la Marche ; for that nobleman, in a chance skirmish with the English, had fallen into the hands of his relentless foe : nought then remained to the unhappy Walter, save interest in the well-being of his adopted charge ; and sometimes, like a winter sunbeam, gleaming amid ice and snow, would the remembered benefits and the heartfelt gratitude of the absent Margaret, chequer the deep
blank

blank of his prospects. An agent in the hands of Heaven, he had placed her in security, above the pressure of want and woe : and though she had changed with the ever-shifting fortunes of her royal protectress ; sometimes in her own duchy of Brittany ; sometimes flying before the advance of her enemies ; sometimes in the court of Philip Augustus :—for still did France veil a war of interest and peculation beneath the high-sounding plea of generous assumption of the wrongs of others :—she was safe—she was comparatively prosperous ; sharing the smiles of the duchess Constan-tia, and living, perchance, to brighter days, and more substantial happiness.

“ God be praised, I have shed joy in the path of one Margaret !” thought Walter, softening almost to tears. “ Perchance, had my own wedded Margaret—had our own cherub Margaret, been spared me, in their paths I might have shed gall. Wretch ! wretch, that I am !

my

my destiny has been the ruin of my whole race."

The approach of O'Carroll varied not the colour of his musings: it was but shifting from woe to woe; for his gaunt form, seen through the gloom of twilight, recalled the hour of first encounter in the streets of Angers—his piloting to the desolate tower;—and quick followed, the horrors of the storm, and all the despair, and all the death-struggles of Symmachus O'Chahargy. The start of Walter was as the start of one crossed by the fiend of evil destiny; again did the strange concatenation of events bleach his cheek to clay; again did he stagger back, as though the acknowledged murderer lay before him.

"'Tis I—'tis Conner O'Carroll, your honour. I come, craving counsel; for I am after hunting one friar Dennis, who holds the keystone of the lady Margaret's fortune."

"Friar Dennis," repeated Walter,
and

and he pressed his hand on his forehead, to collect his scattered thoughts.

“ Ay, by St. Patrick, friar Dennis ! He shrived the soul of a sinner, just twenty months back, here, in this very city of Nantes. Speed me, I pray your honour, and I shall catch him, now, before he sails for Palestine.”

“ Friar Dennis, of Mellifont Abbey, in the county of Louth ?” asked Walter ; and so wild, and so mournful was the thrill of recollection, that it flooded his eyes in tears.

“ Evil betide me !” said O’Carroll, mournfully, “ I am always marring where I would mend. Your honour, I have just caught scent of one friar Dennis ; but whether of Mellifont Abbey, or whether of Louth, or whether even of dear Ireland, by the powers, I know not !”

At any other moment Walter had smiled at the simplicity of O’Carroll ; now, alas ! a smile had been mockery to his
his

his feelings : every warring passion rose and rioted within him ; grief, and indignation, and despair : the isle of his birth—the cherished cradle of his infancy—the dear home of his happiest hours, was the spot interdicted, was the spot hemmed in from approach—guarded with jealous hate, and menaced with the forfeit of ignominious death. Oh, what a string of misery, outrage, and horror, grew out of time's dark shadows ! A few brief years, and from splendor and power—like unto the plunge of the sultan of Egypt, in the mystic tub of the Chec Cahabaddin—his transition had been want, and peril, and woe : from affluence he had passed almost to mendicancy ; from the rule of others, to the drudgery of manual toil !

“ 'Tis a dark picture, yet is the moral salutary,” mused Walter, “ for it speaks the emptiness of human trust.” And then he struggled down the load within, and strove to fashion his thoughts to

to the immediate subject which agitated the well-meaning O'Carroll. "I would learn further of this friar Dennis," he said: "be brief, and give me the clear story."

"Truth will I, clear as the sun in the heavens. This friar Dennis, your honour—By St. Patrick, and I am after believing the selfsame friar Dennis who shrived and who holds the shrift of my dead master; for they have both dealt out the selfsame penance, and that speaks them to be one and the selfsame man—just twenty months back, was here, in this city of Nantes, tarrying with the brothers of St. Nicholas."

"Proceed, O'Carroll, I lack proof."

"Ay, and you shall have proof, strong as certainty. A friend, an acquaintance, a dweller here in Nantes, just twenty months back was sore laden with a bleeding conscience:—he was an artisan, your honour; and artisans are not always over scrupulous in matters of conscience.

Well,

Well, he was very sick, and he needs go to confess ; and his penance was the like penance awarded my late master.—For nine whole years, each and every morning, at the tolling of the ave-bell, was he to repeat, nine times, the entire salutation of our lady, *Ave-Maria gratia* :—at six of the morning clock, nine *Ave-Marias* :—at twelve of the noon clock, nine *Ave-Marias* :—and at six of the even clock, nine *Ave-Marias*. Well, your honour, this selfsame penance, of which I closely questioned, was given by a wayfaring monk sojourning in the convent of St. Nicholas, and the monk was called friar Dennis :—and when I visited the convent of St. Nicholas—for I have sifted it to the very bottom—this friar Dennis had slipped away for Palestine : and now I would be after following this friar Dennis, and craving for the confession of one Symmachus O'Chahargy.”

“ And

“ And if you could overtake him, O’Carroll, what then ?”

“ Why then—” and pleasure burnt upon his cheek, and brightened in his eye—“ I should be serving the good and the beautiful Margaret.”

“ ’Tis a wild chase,” said Walter, thoughtfully.

“ Arrah ! and I would be the wild goose to follow it,” quick rejoined O’Carroll. “ Speed me, I pray you ; and may I be burnt for a heretic, your honour, if I suffer one Dennis to pass without questioning !”

“ But twenty months,” observed Walter, wondering at the wildness of the enterprise : “ and how to follow, and whither to steer your course.”

“ Age is stiff-jointed,” eagerly replied O’Carroll ; “ and friar Dennis was bound to many a religious house in his route to Marseilles. Now, your honour, with God’s good grace—” and the certainty of success glowed in every feature—“ I
will

will be after calling at every religious house betwixt here and Marseilles, and query whether I tread not upon his heels."

"What though you tread upon his heels even to the water's edge," said Walter—"Alas! my poor fellow, should it prove so, think of the disappointment, the risk, and the labour."

"The disappointment, your honour, might go wellnigh to try one's spirit: for the risk, forsooth, I have light heels and a firm heart: and for the labour—holy St. Patrick! in the service of a friend, I value labour no more than I value a brass farthing. Speed me, I pray you, on the venture; and betide what may, my conscience will be the lighter."

"On such an errand, and in such a season of turmoil and blood," mused Walter; then giving words to thought, and shuddering as he spoke—"What if I speed you to your death?"

"We must all die," said O'Carroll;

and though twilight had deepened into night, and the scene and the stillness was solemn, his voice lost not its firmness. "The mort-cloth, your honour, may tend me here, as well as on my mission: and, by the saints, I had rather march and meet the foe, than tarry till he overtake me!"

"'Tis an ill theme for banter," said Walter, gravely. "Man lives in death, O'Carroll; and his strongest hold is thin and weak as the silkworm's line."

"Banter, your honour! By the mass, and I am as ill fitted for banter, as a lamb in the fangs of the tiger! God's truth! banter and I are sworn foes: if I chance laugh on the one side my mouth, woe come after, I am sure to cry on t'other! No—no, I have had no heart for banter, since I quitted dear little Ireland."

Walter groaned aloud: it was the chord, the vibrating chord to all his sorrows: and though touched by a random hand,

hand, yet did he writhe beneath the chastening. Quick recovering himself —“ I would not curb your spirit, my honest friend, or infect you with my morbid fancies. Holy Heaven! the name of Ireland, is as oil on consuming fire; the dream of Ireland, as a deathblow to my fortitude.”

“ Worse luck !” exclaimed O’Carroll, “ for dearly do I love to talk of Ireland: but we will sink even Ireland, your honour, if it gall your green wounds. And now for friar Dennis; for I lack but a God-speed, to start with the first cock-crow.”

“ And when you return, O’Carroll,” asked Walter, “ should the chances of war have called me hence, or have cradled me beneath the sward, what fresh course of fortune will you adventure ?”

O’Carroll mused for a moment, then hastily drawing his hand across his eyes —“ The Jezabel !” he murmured—“ I’ll have nought else to do with her, if she

play such scurvy tricks. Arrah! fortune, your honour! By the powers, it will be evil fortune to me! No—no, the like never yet befell a true Christian: and so, by your leave, we will meet here in Nantes, and unriddle friar Dennis together.”

“ May it prove so!” sighed Walter, long after he had lost sight of his faithful follower; yet was there a feeling within, an ice-chilling foreboding, a presentiment of trial to come; or, was it, that calamity had lain a hand so heavy on him, that he could picture nought, save endurance and persecution!

On the third day-dawn of O'Carroll's absence, ere yet

“ The fiery streaks with purple beams,
Dispersed the shadows of the misty night,”

a wild tumult, gathering in the suburbs, banished rest from every warrior-breast: an alarm-signal from the out-posts proclaimed the advance of an enemy, and the
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the hated name of John of England, like a scathing blast from heaven, panic-struck the inhabitants of Nantes. Nought was heard, save the shrill braying of the trumpets; nought seen, save busy troops of men and horses, gathering for the fray. Prince Louis, awakening from the beamy dream of youth and happiness, buckled on his war-gear. It was military ardour, it was the thirst for conquest, the heart-yearnings for renown, which gave him, an eye so bright, and a step so buoyant! It was Fame, wreathed in laurels, and tending to immortality, which swelled so high in the mailed breast of all his gay contemporaries! Not so with Walter: vengeance burnt upon his cheek; vengeance braced his nerves to iron: the hour had wellnigh dawned, the pined-for hour, to bring his wrongs to issue; and never did soul more dearly crave for ought of earthly bearing, than his to measure sword with the usurper John.

Day gradually advancing, and dissipating every wreathy vapour, brightened the rich suburbs and far-spreading country. The Loire sparkled beneath the refulgent sunbeams, and scarce rippling in the breeze of heaven, bore on its glassy bosom, the mild freightage of a cloudless sky : all in nature was placid harmony and bland content ; all with man, riot and confusion : it was a striking contrast ; yet it passed unnoted on the mind, like many a contrast, as striking and as flagrant.

Cries of terror and dismay rose from amid the mixed multitude : children and women, crowding the streets, bandied the tales of rumour ; and busy conjecture, swollen into reality, and distorted into truth, magnified, as in every emergency, the real evil. King John, heading his thousands, had lain waste the whole province ; and each returning scout, furnishing fresh food for busy calculation,

culation, confirmed his advance upon the suburbs.

Spurning at the cold policy of self-caution, and cased in the adamantine breastplate of his own courage, prince Louis smiled at the implied danger; and collecting around him his brave band, gorgeous in the ensignias of his high birth, stood in the midst, eager for pre-eminence, and panting to head the van of hazard. Fresh sounds gathered, and fresh tumults rose. Was it the blast of trumpets in the distance?—or was it the mere coinage of a fervid fancy? Certain it is, it quickened his even pulse, and blew to flame his warrior spirit.

“Betake thee to the saddle, my lords,” he exclaimed: “the enemy are at our gates. On—on, for victory! The greater the numbers, the greater the glory!” Then, with one bound, he crossed his war-horse, and waving high his snow-plumed casque, the next instant saw him galloping over the bridge, outstrip-
ping

ping the fleetest, and daring the brunt of hostile swords.

Although time has enwrapped in his dark mantle the minutias of that distant period, history records the bridge of Nantes as the scene of prince Louis's capture and humiliation; when, too venturesome, and too eager, spurred by the concomitant rashness of youth, he sought to beard the foe, and fell amid the toil of strength and numbers. History speaks also of many of his followers perishing by the sword:—and though perhaps it enumerates not that same Walter so prominent in our present memoir—still, as that *same Walter* lived signalized and marked in the early annals of the thirteenth century, the flight of romance becomes admissible, in numbering him—not among the slain—but among the victims of that day of disaster!

Walter was the first to track the footsteps of his royal leader; and he grasped
the

the sword, the prized gift of the viscount de Hautefort, and he felt a thousand hearts swelling in his brave bosom, when the trumpets sounded a charge. Glancing over the well marshalled ranks of the foe, he encountered not the adversary he sought ; for it was not the king of England—it was one high in the service of the king of England, who met the brunt of prince Louis's rash ardour. The next instant, and like the dark and rolling waves of ocean, one universal fray prevailed ;—the next, and earth's green bed was strewed with heroes : malice and party-hate grappled unto death ; and every warrior-sword, gleamed “ ferrible, as the streaming meteor of night.” Walter felt not the smart of many gushing wounds ; he felt nought save the hope of conquest : his helm was bruised and battered ; his corselet hacked in twain ; yet did he fight like Ossian's heroes : “ he strode in blood ; he stood like a rock in the midst of a roar-

ing sea :”—nor till the shout of victory rose in the capture of prince Louis, till mortal faintness steeped all his faculties, did he drop upon the blood-stained earth, as powerless, and as unconscious, as those, who with the morning light, had arisen in vigour ; but whose light, and whose vigour, was now set, and quenched in death.

CHAPTER II.

“ ——— Like the breath of pestilence,
War's scourge lays waste all that it rests upon.”

IN a land, cursed as the theatre of war, torn, and distracted, and rent with turmoil, depopulated by the sword, and desolated by fire and party-hate, not even the holy sanctuary of religion can secure against the mad and infuriate passions

sions of men; like an overwhelming flood, breaking down every dam, and sweeping away every barrier, foaming, raging, spurning all of human order, and laying waste all of divine ordinance!

For a season, Matilda knew no cessation to her grief, no single balm to her anxiety and her terror; the night waned among strangers and in tears, in bitter reflection and in woe-fraught anticipation; for life seemed despoiled of every colouring, and futurity uncheered by one single ray, chequering the darkened pass 'twixt earth and heaven. In vain the pious sisters, zealous in the cause of grace, enjoined conformity and submission; in vain they dwelt on the shallowness of sublunary happiness: Matilda could only weep; for though her ear was open to the homily, her heart bled beneath the probe. Young in years, and untutored by misfortune—for too sure the afflictions of others comes not home to our own bosoms—she had yet

to learn, for the better exercise of her faith, that oft,

“ ————— All-pitying Heaven,
Severe in mercy, chasteneth in love ;”

she had yet to learn, that at best, by gentle and almost imperceptible gradations, the links in the great chain of human life become loosened, and our hold upon earth and earthly things, shallow, and perishable, and unsubstantial, as ourselves ! She had yet to learn, that “ born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards,” the warfare of our spirits, and the trials of our fortitude, cleansing and purifying from the dross of flesh, fits it for the change of hereafter blessedness ! What was it, that the morning-sun was cloudless, that its beams, piercing the storied panes of the chapel, shone, as if in mockery, on the altar which had sanctified the pledge of her virgin faith ! Alas ! the bridegroom was far distant ; and the lovely bride, like some melancholy

choly ringdove wailing its mate, could only sigh forth her plaint, and brood, almost to madness, on the strange colour of her destiny.

The little cell in which she had sought sanctuary, subordinate to the rich monastery of St. Claire, was tenanted by six solitary sisters,

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot;”

and weaned from every terrestrial calling, and dedicating life and strength to offices of holiness, and living in prayer, in penance, and in peace, they could yet weep for others' woe, and pity those whom the storms of adverse fate most desolated.

“What boots it, whether in trial or in joy, we toil out an inheritance of grace?” asked the gentle sister Clarisse, leading into the garden, and striving to lure the mourner from the contemplation of her sorrows. “The fevered dream of life, my poor child, is soon ended,

ended, whether the cold heart, stilled in death and cradled in earth, beat in the sunshine or in the shadow: nay," and she tried to smile, "I know not whether shadow be not the better suiting of the twain; for adversity thaws the ice which prosperity too often scatters."

"Alas! sister," and Matilda sighed heavily, "however it prove so, the lesson is hard to learn."

"Reason, and reflection, and religion, will make the lesson easy," rejoined the nun. "In the world, we are the slaves of our own feelings, hunting after shadow, and wearing out youth and health in the mere chase: in the world, we spurn what is offered, and crave for what is withheld; we are blind to our own good, and dull to our own interest; we——"

"God wot I have seen little of the world," interrupted Matilda, "and all I crave is peace."

"And would you model your own peace?"

peace?" questioned the sister—"would you fashion your own destiny?—would you take poison to your bosom, and weo the heaviest curse entailed on man?—' He gave them their own desire: therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble."

"Not so, sister. I would eke out the blessing, in lowliness of spirit, in humility and prayer."

"Be the prayer accepted!" piously pronounced the nun—"be the blessing vouchsafed!"

Matilda looked up, and her own perturbed heart felt to imbibe the quietude, and submission, and reliance, which spoke in every feature of the holy Clarisse. Her veil, floating like a darkened cloud, half shadowed her forehead; her mild eyes were raised to heaven: cares, not years, had ploughed deep furrows: her face was pale with lenten fare and midnight watching; yet did meek and legitimate devotion, impart such holy
zeal,

zeal, such perfect trust, such un murmuring quiescence, that, as a radiating glory, it bore the earnest of hereafter heaven!

“Once,” she resumed, heedless of the interest she elicited, “I bled beneath the seeming scourge—I weakly rebelled against the ordinations of Heaven: but now, the trials of my youth appear but the salutary chiding of mercy. I can revise them; I can dwell upon them, and bless the hand which dealt out the chastening; for every pang I have felt, every woe I have mourned, was but the gradual weaning of the spirit from the delusions and snares of the world.”

“Ah, would I could think like you! would I could act like you!” sighed Matilda. “But my heart, sister, feels lone and tempest-tossed; my heart——”

“Religion will still the tempest,” interrupted the nun; “religion will calm every rough rude breaker. Often has it poured consolation upon the bleeding wounds

wounds of my spirit, and been as my towering rock of dependence, when all of earthly hope has failed. Go with me to chapel, my poor child: kneel with me at the foot of the blessed cross; cast your burden on the redeeming love of a crucified Saviour; and the green wounds will become healed, and the grace to endure and to submit will be vouchsafed."

But though Matilda found consolation in the Christian piety and meek conciliation of the sister Clarisse; though she walked with her in the garden, and prayed with her in the chapel, and aided her in many an imposing rite of faith; still the slow flight of the long, long days, brought a renewal of care and thought: grief preyed upon her bloom, and anxiety aggravated every ill, which war, and circumstances, and adverse fate could threaten. A whole week had waned since the bridegroom had fled from the altar, and still was she doomed to the goadings of suspense; still did she

she watch and wait in vain : no messenger gladdened the lone season : no breath of busy rumour, no single intimation of a world beyond, varied the still monotony of cloisteral seclusion:—all which might have passed—all which had passed, was shut out: news of her father—news of her mysterious lover—news, to make glad, or to make sick the heart, was alike withheld. It was a melancholy blank in her short life; a blank, perhaps, more trying than active sorrow; for active sorrow brings with it the necessity for exertion, whereas, the stilly poison of suspense, sapping, and corroding, renders blunt and flat all of native energy.

Another and another day dawned and closed, and alternately was Matilda sunk into listless inaction or goaded to the mad stretch of desperation: now, praying for mortality's last rest of earth; and now, brooding on the venture of flying her abiding place, and daring all the horrors

rors of distance and war;—not in search of the husband whose very name was unknown, but in search of that distant home, from which she had been so fatally deluded:—there, perchance, to gain tidings of her father, or to crave counsel at the hands of the white monks of Cîteaux.

It was a wild and a visionary project, yet did she mentally pursue it, until the hazard seemed as nought, and the venture but the mere calling of duty.—“It is but fitting the sluggard should awaken,” she exclaimed, eager to win the sister Clarisse to her interest. “Who knows,” and a fearful shudder crept over her, “whether this long, long slumber, has not called down the judgment!” And then she explained her deliverance from the power of De Mauleon, and her calm and unmurmuring sojourn beneath the protection of her deliverer.

The nun listened attentively to every intricate winding in her strange story:
the

the arrival of the palmer at the convent of St. Mary; his visit to the cottage of Walter; his confident assertion that his signet-ring would open to the wearer a pass even to the presence of the king of France:—all alike bespoke him high in office and in power:—office and power too resolved his easy supremacy over the recreant De Mauleon;—and next, his hasty marriage stood revealed, in the extreme loveliness of his youthful bride; for never was woman fitter fashioned,

“ ——— To create
Wonder and love in man !”

But his quick abandonment, and his absence, and his persevering silence, baffled all the conjectures of busy fancy.

“ Strange !” mused the nun; then speaking aloud her thoughts—“ So wild, and so variable, is this world of change, that I, who for many years have tenanted a religious cell, ween not how to resolve actions and motives.”

“ I

“ I can resolve all, in misfortune, in overthrow, perchance in death,” and Matilda burst into tears.

The nun bent over her in sorrowing commiseration : the fearful throes of the mourner recalled the trials of her own youth ; and the tear which swam in her eye, bore token, that however the cold rules, and colder regimen of the cloister, may deaden, they exterminate not the feelings of the heart.

“ I would but seek out consolation in the known safety of my dear father,” sobbed Matilda—“ I would but tell him all of the fearful past ; and then—then ———”

“ And your husband ?” questioned the sister Clarisse. “ Should he return—should he crave you at our hands ?”

Matilda looked up : that name, that electric name, awakened the blush and the smile ; but the blush and the smile, and the momentary kindling of hope, vanished ; like the lightning,

“ Which

“ Which doth cease to be,
Ere one can say it lightens.”

“ Alas! alas!” she faltered, “ I may chance see him no more.”

“ And you may chance be happy with him,” eagerly resumed the nun; “ and you may chance surmount all of this world’s ill. List to me, poor child, and learn to estimate that blessed chance.” She smothered down a sob—she raised her shadowy hand to brush away a blinding tear—then mastering her feelings: “ Like you, I once loved, and was beloved,” she pursued. “ I approached the altar with a worshipped bridegroom: favoured by Heaven and by man, I felt to have no wish ungratified—I glanced around with exultation in my heart—I met his eye of love, and my brain grew dizzy with o’erflowing happiness. Perhaps I was too confident; perhaps I had forgotten our slim—slim thread of life. Like you, I saw him in health and strength; like you, I heard the vow consecrated:—

secreted : — but — unlike you,” and her voice was broken, and her features grew convulsed, “ I saw him borne a corse from the altar.” She paused for a moment, and for a moment did she yield to the burst of lingering feeling ; then slowly dropping her beads, and inwardly praying against the interdicted weakness—“ All this I saw,” she continued, “ and yet I live to tell it ; all this——”

“ Spare yourself, dear sister,” implored the sympathizing Matilda, “ nor teach submission by a tax so keen. Oh, yes ! I do feel grateful for that blessed chance, which so wofully contrasts your own sad story.”

“ The reality,” said the nun, forcing a melancholy smile, “ did not kill me : why then should I shrink from the recital ? Perhaps, had he lived, my very felicity had been the bait to tempt me to my ruin ; perhaps, I had forgotten to be humble, to be grateful ; perhaps, deeper, more irremediable woe had been mine : but no matter : 'tis reality I would narrate ; it

is the past ill, tending to shew your now existing ill the lighter. List to me, my poor child, and learn to be grateful, learn to thank Heaven, that the world is not yet quite barren. I had no father, no mother, to sooth and to share my sorrows: the grave had closed upon them both: and standing alone, as it were, with every link severed, and a heart formed for love, marvel not, that I loved one born of earth, with a love which turned despair into madness. Many—many winters have desolated creation; and many—many summers have re-decked creation in her own garb of loveliness; yet well do I remember the transition from joy to agony. I saw him totter and fall—I saw his glazed eye—I saw the roses of his cheek give place to death's wan livery—I cast myself beside him—I could not speak—I could not shriek—I could not shed one tear. All my powers were numbed; all my faculties suspended: a world of lead lay cold
at

at my heart, yet did my brain burn with internal fire. I was mad, quite mad, lady; and weeks and months passed away ere I awoke to reality. But why weary with the recapitulation?—why wear away the present hour, with the dull slow progress of recovery? I did recover to health and to strength; but never, never, to peace of mind. The world itself seemed changed; for, alas! the jaundiced mind diseases all it looks upon: anticipation, that richest balm to the wounded spirit, lay buried in the grave of my lover: the past was torture; the present unblest; the future, uncheered by one single ray of promise. Mine was not the love of the myriad; not the love, which glows, and dies, and is forgotten: mine, was the love of principle; the love, founded upon known worth, and reciprocity of feeling; the love, which once felt, becomes eternal! What was it, that the world sought to lure me back into its circles:—my world was the

lone sword which closed upon my lover : —there, eluding every eye, and bosoming wild and blessed fancies, did I watch the gloaming of twilight, and invoking his freed spirit, and piercing the shadows of time and of eternity, did I frame the first pure wish of wedding my future life to holiness.”

“ And here,” said Matilda, sympathizing in the tale of early woe, “ has sorrow’s sharpest thorn been blunted ; here, has the true estimate of life been elicited.”

“ Yes, here,” resumed sister Clarisse, and the smile which dilated her features was heavenward, “ the true estimate of life stands revealed, in faith and in piety ; for here, has the distilled dew of grace been shed upon my spirit ; here, has my festering wound been healed.”

“ Here, you are at peace, you are resigned,” observed Matilda, yet wondering, how that peace, how that resignation, could have arisen.

“ Say,

“ Say, too, and calm and contented, and tarrying in glad submission the awful fiat of human destiny,” replied the nun. “ Prayer, my child, and occupation, have wrought the miracle. In the world, I had hours and days for thought : here, I have neither days nor hours of my own : devotion, and the duties of my calling, rouse me into action : devotion, as the sun, dispelling the vapours of ideal night ; the duties of my calling, impressing the home-lesson, that industry and usefulness, as the bee, extracts ever its own honey. But hark ! the bell chimes to the even-song : the shadows are fast lengthening, and we must to chapel. There, my daughter, cull thou the heart’s-balm ; and rise, and seek thy pallet, refreshed and humble : sleep will come at thy wooing, and the morning sun will find thee fitter fashioned to the day’s trial.”

Matilda followed to the chapel ; and as she was bidden, in the chapel, at the

step of the altar which had sanctified the vow of plighted faith, did she strive to lay down the burden of her cares, and to gather, in their stead, the peace-yielding balm of grace and faith : there did she pray for her father—for her husband—for herself—for the destitute and the sore-laden—for the sin-bound soul—for the bruised and broken spirit—for all who were sorrowing and oppressed ; and she joined in the holy psalmody, and she aided in every pious rite, until, as the sister Clarisse, she almost began to feel, that the trials and travails of earth, like unto flitting clouds over a summer sky, ripening to fruition, frames and models the human mind to every dispensation of Divine Providence.—“ And here,” she mused, glancing timidly around, “ if it be thy will, oh, Saviour of the universe ! that I wither and die, teach me to curb the backslidings of unruly nature, and to tutor my stubborn heart to thy inscrutable decree !”

The

The night-breeze scarce waved the shrubs and flowers as Matilda sought the garden ; she struck into the loneliest path, eager to escape the scrutiny of eyes, to commune with herself, to sift the inward spring of feeling, that whether to enthusiasm, or whether to a firmer, better source, might be traced, the calm she had bosomed in the chapel. If to enthusiasm, like every gust of passion, it might fade and die, and repentance be awakened ; if to true and genuine piety, then did the cloister hold forth the fittest resting-place. But though Matilda knew little more of the world than if the cloister had indeed been her abiding-place ; though its manners and its customs were hid in shade ; its virtues, all visionary ; its vices, summed, in the persecution of her father, and the lawless violence of De Mauleon ; still her heart turned to the world ; and its ties and its associations, glowing in the form of her mysterious bridegroom, imparted

such gay and brilliant colourings, such thrilling hopes, and such rainbow fancies, that to forget them, to desert them, to muffle them in the shroud of profession, was an effort, too mighty, a sacrifice, too vast for woman's strength. She yielded to the light fantasy; she lured the cheating vision; she threaded the mazy pathway, heedless of the waning hours: the blessed chance, contrasting the woe-fraught story of the sister Clarisse, seen through the fevered medium of a buoyant spirit, augured hope and bliss; and lulling every fear, and diligently chasing every inquietude, with a mind, as calm, as the star-spangled heavens above, she retraced her steps, and stealing to her narrow dormitory, soon wooed that rest which innocence ever bosoms.

In our progress to the world of shadows, how often does the storm, riding on the sunbeam, proclaim the instability of all things earthly! how often does the
o'er-

o'erwhelming blast of calamity, crowding on the very trance of enjoyment, baffle human skill, and human penetration!

Matilda had sunk to sleep in hope, but she awakened in wild terror. It was not the voice of storm and tempest, not the howling of wind, or the roar of thunder; but it was a commingling din of sounds, discordant, grating, terrific: it was loud pummelling, and louder shouts, which rang through every corner of the holy dwelling. The chamber too was filled with suffocating smoke, and a lurid ray, quick brightening into flame, gave fearful meaning to the strange confusion.

She sprung from her bed of rest; she hurried on her clothes; she burst open the door; and when she entered the gallery, a scorching flame felt to envelop her. To pause was death. In such a moment, was it nature to pause? Oh no! Though a heroine, Matilda was

human nature ; and she fled for life, and she struggled for life, unconscious whether that protracted life might tend to rejoicing or to anguish. By a low door she escaped the burning gallery ; and at the instant that she found herself in the open air, she heard a piercing shriek, and she saw a veiled sister flying from the flaming pile. She followed—she gained upon her ; she heard a second shriek ; she saw her totter and fall. It was the last shriek—it was the sister Clarisse !

Convulsed and dying, Matilda sunk beside her ; and when, mingling with the yell of a thousand demons, with a fearful crash, the roof and the walls fell in—when a black and shapeless mass alone remained of the late peaceful fane to holiness, the nun, struggling, half raised herself. “ The miserable remnant ! the sole wreck ! ” she ejaculated ; then closing her eyes, to shut out the reeky desolation—“ Mighty Jesu ! oft-times tremendous in mercy, oft-times merciful

merciful in wrath ; for a hidden, for a blessed cause, hast thou dealt this visitation !” A sickening spasm seized her ; the shudder of death chilled her stiffening limbs ; she dropped her head on the bosom of Matilda ; yet still did the spirit struggle. “ Thy will, be to thy erring creature, law !” she gasped out. “ Through fire—through violence, be the pass to thy presence !” She clasped the hand of her terrified supporter ; she pressed it tighter and tighter ; she looked up, and a smile, wintry and faint, illumined her features, and a bright and a dying gleam gathered in her eye. Suddenly her hand relaxed its pressure ; her head sunk back ; and in one deep-drawn sigh, her freed spirit winged to its kindred angels.

No tear bedewed the cheek of Matilda ; no cry escaped her : strangely calm, she felt wound to ought of earthly vicissitude, to ought of human daring : she heard the shouts of triumph, the jar of

commingling voices, the tramp of feet ; and even when an armed host crowded into the garden, desperately firm, she continued holding the breathless corse of the departed nun.

“ —————Come what, come may,
Time and the hour run through the roughest day.”

So wrote our immortal bard : and Matilda ran through that roughest day in her life, with a consistency and resolution, marvellous in her own eyes : it dawned upon her, a sojourner in the calm cell of religion ; it closed upon her, a captive to the arms of an enemy : and so wildly rapid had been each fluctuation, that it bore rather the contexture of a dream than the chances of everyday existence.

The voice and the interference of authority had alone stayed the brutal ribaldry of the soldiery, when, in the garden, loudly descanting on her beauty, they would have torn her from the cold
clay

clay she supported. She looked up, and she beheld a tall stranger, hastily approaching, whose jewelled cap, and waving plume, spoke him noble. The soldiers broke way, and the stranger doffed his cap in token of respect; yet when his eye fell upon the wan face of the departed nun, he shuddered fearfully back.

“She is past harm,” said Matilda, meekly—“I would I were as safe!”

The stranger felt the reproach; he placed his hand upon his breast.—“Lady,” he exclaimed, “you cannot mourn the mad havock of intemperance more than I mourn it. Worlds would I give, to restore yon holy dwelling, and its harmless inmates; but the scourge of war has fallen, and reparation is impossible.”

“A grave,” murmured Matilda, bending her lips to the cold forehead of the sister Clarisse.

“Yes, a grave, lady, for this departed

sister—and for yourself, protection, on the honour of an English noble.”

Matilda led to the spot on which had stood the little chapel, but not one stone remained upon another: the aisles, the sacristy, the altar, all—all, had yielded to the ruthless sweep.

“ Here, in consecrated ground,” she said—“ though all this ground be holy—still, in this place, on this spot—” and she paused, where so late had stood the altar, at which she had plighted her virgin faith to the mysterious palmer. The universal ruin felt prophetic of a doom of sorrow, and her tears streamed as she marked out the narrow grave of the nun;—and heedless of the bitter tax upon her own feelings, she saw the earth delved, and she saw the earth close upon all that was mortal of the departed Clarisse:—then, turning to the noble who had upheld her through the trial—“ Accept my gratitude,” she pronounced,
“ and

“and be your humanity, sir knight, my best pledge of security.”

“Fear not, lady: never yet has the honour of a De Cantilupe been forfeit: my word and my sword be your surety. Here,” and he forced a smile, “my calling is rough and ill-favoured; but a soldier’s province is obedience, and disaffection ever draws reprisal.”

“Dreadful, deadly ^{not} reprisal!” sighed Matilda, glancing o’er the defaced and blackened record of human wrath.

A sudden cloud scared away the smile, and the fine features of the lord de Cantilupe, like unto her own, became grief-struck.—“Not all the usages of war can familiarize such a wreck,” he feelingly exclaimed; “the human wreck, I mean, lady;” and he shuddered, as he bent his eye on the new-made grave of the nun. “Holy Mary!” he ejaculated, dashing away the starting tear, “one little half-hour had saved all: had I arrived one little half-hour earlier, this cell, and its
pious

pious votaries, had been spared, perchance to pray for us! But we cannot awaken the dead," striving at composure, "neither can we recall the blast of a moment: we may lament, and we may mourn; and I shall lament, and I shall mourn, lady, when the long grass and the moss-weed thick mantles these monuments of war. But now of the present—I pray you, tax my courtesy." And he questioned of her prospect, and named the wish of quick restoring her to her family.

Alas! Matilda's heart sickened in that desolated prospect: *the blast of a moment* had blighted all the blossoms of promise, had cast her on a wide world, without shelter, almost without hope.—She hesitated; she scarce knew how to answer.

"Lady," resumed the lord de Cantilupe, "I await your bidding. Name the service, and if duty clash with inclination, my care be to submit you to safe
and

and honourable guardianship : name your family, and then——”

“ War and misfortune have scattered my family,” interrupted Matilda. “ On earth, my lord, I have no home.” She clasped her hands as she spoke; and though so young in years, and so rare in beauty, she looked as one familiar with ill fortune.

The warrior sank into deep thought, then attentively surveying her fast-fading and flushing countenance——“ Throughout the whole of these distracted provinces,” he remarked, “ no single haven of security remains : other religious houses may fall, as this religious house : other victors may not feel compunction. Lady,” and every feature beamed with the benevolence within——“ I have a father—a family ; I have a sister, whose nature is to feel for others’ woe. Once in that asylum, misfortune will not reach, persecution will not harm you.”

“ Oh ! that I were now in that asylum !”

lum!" exclaimed Matilda; "that I were now safe from the storms and the perils of the world!"

"I take you at your word, lady," quick rejoined the lord de Cantilupe; "and soon transferred to gentler keeping, will my sister Millicent chase every tear."

From that instant no time was yielded to thought: preparation and execution were as one: hurrying from the scene of conflagration and outrage, at Rochelle—where king John and his youthful queen Isabel sojourned in triumph at a few brief conquests—consigned by the lord de Cantilupe to the protection of an old and tried vassal of his house, Matilda embarked on the dancing wave; and swayed by a destiny, as fickle as the dancing wave which bore her, lost sight of the shores of France, and soon exchanged them for the then as troubled shores of England.

CHAPTER III.
.....

“ Though dark, as the troubled face of the deep,
Be all of prospect here ; there lurks a ray,
In conscious worth, to qualify the storm.”

EVERY one who reads the annals of their own country, knows that the turbulent reign of king John teemed with all that was vile, and arbitrary, and vindictive : and however good may spring out of seeming evil ; however, through the morbid haze of tyranny and oppression, a bright and brilliant sun arose on the plain of RUNNEMEDE, destined to invigorate and ripen to perfection the jurisprudence of England ; still, that morbid haze, gendered in menace, violence, and indignity, spurred to the mighty effort of general manumission !

Casting our eyes o'er that blistered
page

page of crime and human turpitude, we find all that is odious and mean ascribed to that unhappy prince; destructive to his subjects; disastrous to himself; living at enmity with God and man; trampling on all of justice; violating all of faith and honour; alternately, the opposer and slave of the church; now daring, and now cowering beneath the fulminated ban; ridiculing the threat of hereafter judgment, yet weakly, wickedly, yielding his kingdom, in shameful vassalage to the see of Rome. Nay, in every relative tie—or historians have conjured a monster of their own—we find him also wofully deficient: as a son, as a brother, as an uncle, as a friend, as a man, alike an alien to principle, alike a hardy violator of every bond of trust. But passing over the heavy controversy arising in the death of Hubert archbishop of Canterbury, and the pope's election of cardinal Langton—the king's war with the clergy—his confiscation of
their

their estates—his rigorous persecution of all the primate's adherents—the woful period of interdict, shrouding all England in gloom—the systematic policy of the sovereign pontiff—the abject humiliation and terror of the king, arising in the threat of foreign invasion—his formal renunciation of his crown, at the feet of Pandolf, the pope's legate, thereby acknowledging, and yoking the kingdom in tributary vassalage—his gradually awakening to the fraudulent and interested conduct of the apostolic see—his recall of the exiled prelates—his seeming penitence for past violence, and his reparation to the monks and abbots whom he had dislodged and persecuted:—stay we the attention of our readers, to that period, chequering the inky die of his reign, when rallying from the vexations of the past, for a brief season, he reaped something like victory and triumph; for in his letter to the earl-marshal, dated Rochelle, and now on record

cord in the Tower, he boasts of the surrender to his arms, of twenty-six castles and fortresses !

Be it that period, then, when England was finally freed from the papal interdict, and when England's king still sojourned in Poitou ; for it was at that period, that on the deck of her small vessel, Matilda first distinguished the looming of distant land ; and soon—for the wind swelled the canvas, and the prow cut through the rippling waves—did that distant land,

“ That precious stone set in the silver sea,”

grow into giant mould ; white, and coned, and towering, like some mighty bulwark, hemming in with safety, and frowning defiance even to the inroads of ocean's self ! It was not the land of her father, and yet her heart throbbed more than it were wont ; it was not the land of her husband, and yet it felt to offer her a resting-place. She had heard from
Adam

Adam Morley, the aged yeoman, to whose care she had been intrusted by the lord George de Cantilupe, much of the worth of the baron his father, much in praise of the lady Millicent his sister; and she looked forward to the calm harbour of their home and their friendship, with a feeling almost amounting to hope.

“On my troth, lady,” said the good yeoman, watching the tears silently chasing each other down her faded cheek, “but my lord the baron, and the lady Millicent, will soon lure back the sunshine. Tarry till we once gain the banks of the Welland, and then you will fain smile.”

Matilda tried to smile, but the effort was as mockery to her feelings.—“I may be grateful—I am grateful, my kind Adam,” she replied; “but grief is a heavy taskmaster.”

“In age,” said Morley, feelingly, “grief may be deep, and still, and lasting—I grant it in age, because age, as
a win-

a winter-sky, tokens little other than storm : but in youth, in scarce full spring, as with you, lady, grief must be lost in the blaze of coming summer. Age has nought to look to ; youth has all to look to ; age sees nought save the grave ; youth sees nought of the grave ;—for even though the grave be prematurely dug, the pass is hid in flowers. But let us talk of Heringworth, I pray you, lady ; for spite of war and warriors, there does my heart rest.”

“ Your abiding-place ? ” asked Matilda.

“ Ay, lady, I was born in the nigh hamlet, almost within the shadow of the castle-walls ; and there, boy and man, have I numbered well nigh threescore summers ; and there, if God so will it, would I be gathered to my fathers. But,” and he spoke with emotion, “ should duty summon again to the field, then be my grave within the shadow of my lord’s banner.”

Matilda

Matilda gazed on him with reverence and respect: his cheeks were bronzed with long service; his temples strewed with the frost of age: gratitude and principle wedded him to the fortunes of his feudal lord, for even against nature was he content to lay down life in tributary homage.

“If it should chance so,” he pursued, heedless of the notice he elicited, “then shall this good sword again fly its scabbard; and if it should chance counter, why then, with God’s grace, Mable and I, knit in Christ, will toil the last hill of our pilgrimage together:—and whichever of the twain first reach the goal, the riven must pray for patience, and tarry the coming hour.”

“Your wife;” and Matilda’s voice thrilled the sympathy she felt.

Morley hesitated for a moment, then drawing the back of his hand across his eyes—“Ay, lady,” he replied, “the wife of my youth: her, who has sipped with
me

me out of the one cup, whether of joy or of sorrow; and her, who to the end, will repose on the one pillow, whether it be of down or of thorns.—We live hard by the castle of Heringworth—askaunt one corner of the chase; and there, hid in woods, stands our snug dwelling. My Mable was the fosterdam of the lady Millicent: and often, ere the sun has drank the dewdrops, does the dear child, with cheeks out-blushing the rose, and steps, sportive and light as the young fawns in the pasture, come to crave a blessing.”

“Then the baron de Cantilupe, and the lady Millicent, abide alway at the castle of Heringworth,” said Matilda.

“My lord the baron oftentimes visits estates far distant,” rejoined Morley; “and at Christmas, and at Easter, and at Whitsuntide, I have known him join the court-revel of our liege the king: but the lady Millicent, save when a sojourner in the nunnery of St. Mary de la Pree
at

at Northampton, has ever lived at Herringworth. Marry! she is a God-send to the country round! so good to all who lack; so benevolent, and so gentle! but for the early blight of the beautiful baroness, there lives not a happier family in all Christendom. Would you believe it, lady, when broken down by sickness, she visits the meanest hind, and with her own white hand, administers such salves and simples, as she has learnt to decoct at the convent? Ay, and she is so kind to all who are sorrowing; she deals such gentle words, and is so prodigal of favour! I often think, forsooth, her breath is like the south-wind, softening and mellowing all the storms of the past: yet has she a rare spirit too in a good cause; for I have seen her fair face flush crimson, and her blue eyes kindle flame, at the mere tale of oppression!"

"She must be very amiable! she must be very dear to the heart of her brother,"

ther," observed Matilda, "for he too scatters kindness with a lavish hand!"

"It is the nature of the whole family!" proudly resumed Morley. "Not a vassal, on all of my lord's manors, young and old, who would not follow my lord George de Cantilupe to the death. Marry! when they were dear children together, I have seen them wrestle, and run to distribute the dole; and many a petty grievance have they righted, and yet gained the good will of all, by begging off the adjudged forfeit. On my troth, and I do believe, my lord the baron had sunk into the grave with my lady baroness, but for the love of those two dear children:—they, God speed them! nestled, and warmed his heart, and melted all the ice which cold grief had scattered—for they taught him to hope:—and like two beacons, set up in a drear land, they did but shine the brighter, as the night of sorrow thickened."

"Then

“ Then the brother and sister were alike very young, when Heaven judged fit to deprive them of their mother,” said Matilda, sympathizing in the past woes of the family.

“ The lord George was five years old, and the lady Millicent had breathed just six weeks in this rough world, when the beautiful baroness, worn to a shadow, left us all to mourn. It was fell consumption, which, like the canker in the rose, preyed on her strength, and bent her to the tomb. Though eighteen years have passed away, well do I remember every solemn scene at that most solemn period. Alas!” and Morley’s voice faltered, “ it seemed as a blight upon us all—perchance, to teach us, that youth, nor beauty, nor rank, nor riches, can stay our inevitable doom. I saw her in her coffin, sweet saint! and never did my eyes rest on aught so lovely!—and I saw her borne to her last bed of earth. The baron followed; and his suffocating

sobs, and his heart-rending anguish—I can see all—I can hear all, now. He—he——The baroness lies buried in the chapel,” struggling for composure—“and I never go into that chapel, lady, but with awful reverence and godly fear. It stands within the limit of the chase; and so thick is it shrouded in yew and cypress, that the noonday sun ne’er finds an entrance.”

“But of the dear baby,” questioned Matilda. “Alack! that the bud should live when the stem was broken.”

“Ay, and live to be as sweet a bud as summer ever ripened!” returned the veteran. “My Mable, at the selfsame season was mourning the death of her own new-born babe; and she took charge of the nursling, and she reared it at her own bosom, and she soon transferred to it all the love she had borne her own darling. But anon you will see the lady Millicent, and then you will say her fosterdam may well bosom pride.”

“’Tis

“ ’Tis a just pride,” said Matilda, “ where worth is so apparent.”

“ I could tell a thousand anecdotes to stamp that worth,” quick resumed Morley, ever eloquent in the praise of those he loved. “ Methinks I can see her now, tripping like any fairy, over the green sward, her blue eyes shining through the light clusters of her flaxen hair;—now, chasing butterflies; and now, culling posies, and bringing the brightest to me, and climbing on my knee, and placing them in my doublet. But I weary you, lady. Alack! I forget, a stranger can heed but little of a stranger.”

“ A stranger but by name,” feelingly exclaimed Matilda, “ is it for me to tire of the virtues of my benefactors? Know you not, good Morley, I go to Heringworth, portionless and destitute?”

“ Now—now, I have wounded you,” and Adam looked the sorrow he felt.

“ Tell me then, I pray, of the lady

Millicent, and of the baron, and of the lord George de Cantilupe, that I may learn to love and honour them ere I share their bounty." It was a bitter thought, and the tear started in spite of the assumed smile.

"For eight long years," said Morley, "the lady Millicent was a boarder in the nunnery of St. Mary de la Pree: and there, whilst we were mourning her absence, she was studying under the pious sisters, and perfecting herself in all necessary to a baron's daughter: and when she came back to the castle, she could read her missal, and play on the virginal, and shape flowers, and forms, and figures in her loom, almost as beautiful as herself. Ay, lady, and she was so grown—so tall, and so graceful—that but for the same blue eyes, and the same flaxen hair, and the same sweet face, I should have guessed the nuns had played false, and kept our dear laughing child to themselves! And I may add, the same heart
heart

heart too," pursued the exulting veteran; "for God wot, her heart was as richly stored as her head; and all she had ever loved in childhood, remained, as prized, and as dear, as though she were a child still! Sometimes she would mount her palfrey, and with her brother, amble through the chase; and sometimes, decked in forest-green, she would take his bow, and aim to hit the target—and she would joy in the falcon-bells, too—and she would trace the swoop of the goshawk: but these were lighter pastimes; and oftener, would she be found, in the midst of her damsels, embroidering scarfs, to bestow on the heroes of the tilt-yard. But though her spirits were as light as health and prosperity could make them, she mourned sorely, when we mustered our strength, to attend the summons of my lord the king; and she hung on her brother's neck before he mounted his war-horse, and she wept and sobbed as if her young

heart was breaking. My lord George strove to chide, although a tear on his own cheek, belied the words he uttered. He was—*he is* as brave a knight, lady, as ever wielded battleaxe; for though so happy in his own home, long had he panted for other than mimic warfare! Well, when we quitted Heringworth, the lady Millicent stood upon the outward beacon-tower, waving her kerchief, and watching, doubtless, as long as our steel caps sparkled in the sunbeams. My own Mable, too, took it heavily to heart; for king John——But we must not bay the actions of princes; we must leave them and their motives, alike in the hand of God, who alone holds power over kings.”

Morley ceased for a moment, as though judgment and duty were at variance; then banishing the ungracious thought —“ Unlike others who were bidden, we joined the royal standard at Portsmouth,” he continued; “ and a goodly appear-
ance

ance we cut, forsooth—for we mustered fifty foot soldiers, and fifty horse, and thirty archers, and twenty arcubalisters, besides esquires, and haunchmen, and the like: for my lord the baron was proud to have a portly bearing to his son;—and he harangued us all himself, and he held out rewards and honours, and speeded us with his blessing:—and not a heart in the whole assemblage, who felt not *that blessing*, as pure and salutary, as a blessing of the church. Alack, lady! the herds of mercenaries and hirelings assembled at Rochelle, did but cast slur on the fair fame of the soldier. My lord the king willed swift and desperate vengeance; and fitted to the office, they moved with fire and sword; and they deluged the green earth in blood—as though man, forgetful of his own weakness, could wrench from the Eternal, the privilege to punish. But God be praised,” and he spoke with grateful fervour, “we are away from the smoke and the

fire!—and the cry of innocence, and the plaint of oppression, will never rise up against a true follower of a De Cantilupé!”

He ceased, for Matilda clung death-sick to his arm: it was the scene of conflagration—it was the last shriek of the sister Clarisse, which, living on fancy, frightened every hope of peace. Morley entered into her feelings: he had a mind above his station, and he grieved at the pang he had witlessly inflicted.—“Forgive me, lady,” he implored. “My young lord has told me all. Ah! those cruel—cruel mercenaries! bent on ruin and pillage, they have desolated all the provinces. One half-hour earlier, and the votaries of religion had been spared: but war is a sad game; it maddens men’s minds, and hardens men’s hearts, and in their frenzy, and in their headlong ardour, they forget to be human. Save to the glory of my lord the baron, never more may I return to the haveck! and
for

for the glory of my lord the baron," and zeal, lighting up his eye, imparted almost the fire of youth to his visage—"wedded to my standard, will I live and die."

England, when first Matilda stepped upon its sea-girt shore, was not, as now, the blessed isle of liberty and independence—thick set with fair towns and goodly villages—a haven from the storm—a refuge to the oppressed—an asylum to the sore-laden—a home to the destitute—a land, flowing with the milk and honey of genuine charity—the seat of native benevolence—the teeming womb of philanthropy and Christian love! No! England was then a barren and a dreary waste, overrun with woods—meet harbour for wolves and prowling ruffians—swayed by a home-tyrant, and torn with mad broils and civil contentions. But far be it from us to note the many flagrant instances of oppression which passed unheeded in those days of violence;

instances, proclaiming the giant strides of power, unchecked by law, and the overwhelming misery, ever attending the tainted fount of public justice! Then, were the great and the rich, the arbiters of their own disputes, the avengers of their own quarrels: chivalry, fanned into flame by the elegiac touches of minstrels and troubadours, had attained the climax of its frenzy; the valiant arm, was as the guardian genius of virtuous helplessness; the recreant and uncourteous knight, as the fell magician of a nursery story: courage, fidelity, and personal honour and martial pride, were the prime attributes of the hero, the main spring in the huge wheel of human intercourse, the bond, the spur, the life of social order.

But tarry we now in our good town of Northampton, at the gate of the convent of St. Mary de la Pree; for there did Matilda claim the largess of a night's lodging; and from thence, the succeeding

ing

ing morrow, did the baron de Cantilupe, accompanied by the lady Millicent, and attended by Adam Morley and a goodly train of followers, receive her at the hands of the mother-superior.

A bright sun, like liquid diamonds, sparkled on the Welland, and the breath of a genial spring, so soft and tempered, tokened of coming summer, as the cavalcade entered the chase of Heringworth. The trees, half budding, were clothed in Nature's palest livery; and the earth,

“ Full of fresh verdure, and unnumbered flowers,
Wide and wild, spread
Unbounded beauty to the roving eye.”

Matilda looked up; she saw before her, huge walls and towers, and battlements, and signs of strength and war; above her head she saw a cloudless sky—and at her side, the smiling face of hospitable greeting! This then was England! the boasted rule of the usurper

per John :—she thought of the bloody strides which had possessed him of that rule, and she shuddered as she thought.

“ You are weary,” said the lady Millicent, marking that fading cheek and that inward chill. “ Be rest and quiet then the fittest welcome to Heringworth.”

Matilda pressed the hand extended ; she read pity in that mild blue eye, and kindness, and sisterly love, and bland urbanity, in every fair and gentle feature.—“ I am a stranger, lady,” she faltered : “ the land—the customs—all—all foreign.”

“ Only to-day,” rejoined Millicent—“ I will grant all strange to-day ; but to-morrow you must know us better.”

That morrow found Matilda with a calmer spirit and a lighter heart, and each returning morrow did but note the truth of Morley’s picture. It was not the prejudice of blind zeal which had proclaimed the baron amiable ; neither

was

was it the warm glow of partial fondness, which had decked the gentle Millicent in almost angel-guise.

Unlike many of the nobles of that dark period, who, coming in with the Norman conqueror, ruled with arbitrary sway, exacting, menacing, torturing, and incarcerating within their jurisdiction—the baron de Cantilupe was as the parent of all his vassals; the redresser of their grievances; the admonisher of their backslidings; the friend of their sorrows; the avenger of their injuries. He was a man, who even in this age of civilization, would have been a blessing and an ornament to the circle in which he moved: as it was, he shone a brilliant comet in a dark sky:—as St. Pierre says of the man of science—“ Like the torch, illuminating all around, and remaining himself in obscurity—” for he preferred the calm pleasures of domestic life, the still path of contemplation and of nature, to the jars and contentions of public service.

vice. Much to deplore, and more to condemn, he ever returned from his periodical attendance at the court, with dissatisfaction and sorrow rankling in his bosom, with his judgment and his duty warring with each other: for he saw the weakness and the wickedness of the prince to whom he owed allegiance; he saw him made up of treachery, cruelty, ingratitude, and licentiousness; the pliant slave to his own passions, the unbending tyrant o'er all beside: he saw, and he trembled at the brewing mischief, gending in the indignities heaped upon the nobles—at the hidden train spreading throughout the land, and needing but the quickening match to blazen into flame:—and he would reseek the comforts of home and the society of his children, fervently blessing God that his own sanctuary had not been invaded by the foot of levity and the scathing breath of lawless passion. The lord George de Cantilupe was meet
to

to represent a father so honoured ; for he had lived within the zenith of that father's virtues, until his own heart had imbibed their colouring, and every eye was turned to him, as man seeks the rising sun—not forgetful of the sun which warmed him yesterday—but hopeful of the like warmth and the like bounty. And Millicent too, the cherub comforter, the handmaiden of the baron's charity, the disseminator of joy throughout the castle !

“ ————— With golden hair,
And eyes as blue as the blue dome above,
And voice as tender as the sound of love”—

Millicent drifted on the southern gale of prosperous fortune, unacquainted with grief, unvisited by sorrow ; was gay, and light, and sportive, as the “ lark, who dries his feathers, saturate with dew, beneath a rosy cloud.” Millicent—but human action is the fittest, fairest estimate of human character : be it from fu-
ture

ture circumstances then, that we elicit the character of each inmate of Heringworth.

CHAPTER IV.

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“Versatile and fitful, likened unto  
Shadows in the moonbeams, or sunshine in  
An April sky, is life, and all of life!  
To-day prosperous—to-morrow adverse.”

**MORE** than a fortnight had passed since Matilda had become a sojourner in the family of the baron de Cantilupe, and Millicent had mourned the havock of war, and wept the death of the hapless Clarisse and the unoffending sisterhood. She had asked a thousand questions of her brother: how he had looked—almost what he had said—and she had dwelt on the moment of rescue, and she had blessed,

ed, again and again, the happy chance, which had given her a friend so beloved.

“ Little did I dream,” she would exclaim, yielding to her pleasurable feelings, “ when weeping adieu on the neck of George, that he would speed to me such a God-send. Ah! good may indeed arise out of seeming evil; and when he is safe landed, I shall no more murmur at the summons of king John.”

Matilda sighed heavily. Alas! the storm which had swept away her hopes, had arisen in that dire summons: the myrmidons of king John had fired her sanctuary, and cast her adrift upon a sea of peril. 'Tis true, she had found shelter; but the clue of her destiny seemed to have perished with the pious sisters of St. Claire: her father—her husband, might seek that cell—might linger among the blackened fragments—might mourn her dead—might steep her fancied grave in tears. The thought was maddening; her cheek turned pale; her  
start

start was palsied : and when Millicent, pressing to her side, under the promise and hope of alleviation, questioned more closely of the past, she spoke of her father—of a dear, dear friend—but the name of husband died upon her lips. It was not reserve—rather be it to the source of maiden diffidence, fearing the mention of a tie so new—for Matilda, open as day, longed to disclose every particular of her strange story : but her story teemed with the secrets of others : her father—her husband—the two dearest beings in existence dealt in mystery : besides, she was now in the land, sway- ed by the known enemy of that father, of that husband ; and a word, a breath, by leading to any possible recognition, might tend to their undoing. How then to satisfy the importunity of kindly interest, yet to preserve the integrity of trust : she feared to speak ; she feared almost to move ; she feared the tax of  
cold

cold caution—yet greater still, she feared the peril incaution might excite.

“Perchance we may pour oil into the festering wound,” whispered Millicent. “Dearest Matilda, my father’s will to serve, is less bounded than his power.”

“I know it—I feel it,” murmured Matilda: “but my sorrows, my griefs, are beyond the reach of friendly service.”

“Oh, no, not so! if in life, the service be mine.”

Matilda mused for a moment, then, with an averted eye, and faltering tongue, she told of her peaceful home on the banks of the Gartampe; of the avocation to which misfortune had driven her father; of his toiling out health and strength in the garden of the white monks of Cisteaux: she told of his absence from the cottage—of the wily toil which had lured her from its shelter—of the storm which had driven to the watch-tower—of the timely rescue;—  
and

and she paused not, until a sojourner in the little cell of the sisters of St. Claire.

“ And there, alas! the clue dies,” she continued. “ They may seek, but they cannot find me : all is lost in that universal desolation—for though in the same world, we are shut eternally from each other.”

“ Fear it not,” said Millicent, eagerly. “ There lies an alternative yet—the white monks of Cisteaux.”

“ Dearest lady !” and Matilda looked the gratitude she could not utter.

“ Know you the name of your deliverer ?” asked Millicent, starting from deep thought.

“ I know him, but as a palmer, visiting St. Mary’s monastery.”

“ There too the brothers of Cisteaux may aid us,” quick rejoined Millicent. “ I see but one course : a messenger to St. Mary’s convent—and may God direct the rest !”

“ Alas! you dream not the hazard,”  
fear-

fearfully observed Matilda. "In times like these, how dare a messenger from England hope safe convoy?"

"We will hope every thing, and dare every thing, to lure back peace," exclaimed Millicent: "peace is a desperate stake, Matilda, and we will essay much to win it. Do but tarry until I talk to my dear father; and trust me, he will then do more than talk."

But the baron was absent from Heringworth; he was visiting a distant manor, and it might be whole days, it might be more than a week before his return: disappointment and misfortune had inured Matilda to submission; and though she sighed heavily, she strove hard to lure the mere semblance of that peace she could not bosom.

The little dwelling of Adam Morley, hid in a coppice of oak and birch—humble as his hopes, yet capacious as his wishes—was often the tarrying point of the lady Millicent. There, forgetful of every



every disparity of fortune, would she, as when in early childhood, crave the blessing of her fostermother ; and there, would she prattle of times long past, until those times, glowing out of years and distance, would clean expunge all of recent remembrance. It felt as her home still ; for strong indeed is the local tie which weds the heart to its first impressions—perhaps the strongest tie in our lives—for the associations of infancy are seldom mixed with sorrow !

The sward still drank the dew, and the pansy, and the buttercup, and the lowly daisy, looked fresh and bright in the breath of a May morning ; blossoms greeted the eye in every bush ; and all that was gay, and all that was balmy, spoke in the new-decked beauties of creation.

“ I wonder ;” said Millicent, turning from the sedgy borders of the Welland, and striking into the narrow path leading to the cottage of her fosterdam, “ how the human mind can sink in list-  
less-

lessness and inaction ; how, neglectful of the bounties vouchsafed, man can forget to be grateful. 'Tis only to visit the fields as they now are—to see nature awakening from the long trance of winter—to feel joy, and gratulation, and hope.”

“ Think you not,” asked Matilda, “ existing circumstances may bar out the spirit-balm ? Think you not, the mind may partake of the desolation within ?”

“ Ay, truly,” replied Millicent : “ but God seldom wills a prospect quite desolate : with the scourge he gives the unction ; and cold must be that bosom, which wages against his dispensation. I think the trials of his appointment, few—I think the trials dragged down upon ourselves, manifold.”

“ Ah ! but those trials fall not singly,” remarked Matilda : “ however we make action our own, woe is entailed upon our kindred.”

“ True, and that stamps us account-  
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able beings," quick rejoined Millicent ; " accountable to our Maker, to society, to our own hearts ; for sure the heaviest mildew to transgression, must be in the misery diffused. Yet have I heard the lady abbess of St. Mary de la Pree say, that if man were always grateful, he would be always happy. She embalmeth gratitude in the heart as a prime virtue : for to be grateful, is never to throw off the consciousness of service :—and to feel the consciousness of service, is ever to be humble, and just, and good ; is to feel our own littleness ; is——But see, yonder stands my dear nurse !" And with one bound, she sprung into the garden, and cast herself on the neck of the dame.

It was a picture, lovely as the picture she had sketched of instinctive gratitude ; for it was the picture of nature's self ! young, and beautiful, and beamy, pouring out her heart's feelings to the upholder of her years of helplessness !

“ And

“ And not one remembrance for me ? ” said Morley, approaching from the house.

She looked up ; she smiled through her flaxen ringlets, like the sun through a silver cloud.—“ Ay, a myriad,” extending her hand. “ And now tell me of my dear George when beyond sea ? for I would fain know how he looked when heading his gallant troop, and how he felt when he dispatched you for England.”

“ He felt as a brave man must feel when doing a good action,” replied the veteran : “ and he looked, dear lady, when bestriding his war-horse, as a De Cantilupe ever looks—proudly conscious of living in the hearts of all his followers.”

Millicent bent her blue eyes on the ground ; she had plucked a sprig of woodbine, and she now tore and scattered the blossoms in very wantonness—“ I wonder——” and then she ceased.

“ Wonder, like time, plants wrinkles,”

said the dame, laughing. "No, no, my sweet child, you must not begin to wonder yet."

"I wonder," concluded Millicent, "whether my brother George will come back to Heringworth alone."

"Belike he may move in goodly fellowship," observed Morley—"I ween with the king himself."

"But here, into Northamptonshire; here, to Heringworth," quick resumed Millicent. "I mean, whether—whether—Good Adam Morley, do tell me, who are his best friends, and nearest associates?"

"Marry! I have seen him often with Philip, lord Basset, of Wycombe; and with Robert, lord Vauxe; and with the lord Geoffry de Geneville; and with William Rivers, earl of Devon; and with the brave knight, sir Hugh Neville."

"And with no other knight? Think, good Adam Morley, with no other knight?"

knight?" and she glanced wistfully towards him.

"Ay, dear lady, with a knight, who would give more than a knight's fee, to see you, as I see you now."

Millicent blushed, for the veteran looked archly in her face, as he continued—"A knight, with a milk-white plume, and a crimson scarf, thick dotted with silver aglets. Know you such a knight, dear lady? or must I remind you, how sir Eudo de la Zouch strove with sir Henry de Braibrooke, and won that scarf at Rockingham Castle? And must I tell you, how the knight prizes that glittering badge of lady's favour? and how——"

"Pshaw! Adam Morley, I remember all about that silly scarf: but do think of it no more—do talk of it no more."

"'Twas a proud day, too, dear lady!" pursued Morley. "By the rood, and my lord the baron felt it so; for there was none braver than a De Cantilupe in

the tilt, and none fairer than a De Cantilupe midst the rich bevy of dames who glittered round the arena! Marry! but many a bosom throbbed with envy that day, which had never felt envy before."

"Alack!" and Millicent breathed a heavy sigh, "there is no call for joust now. Mimic war has yielded to real war; and those, who late fought for pastime, fight in sober earnest."

"For honour, and for dear life," said the dame; and grateful did she feel, that the partner of her weal and woe was snatched from the hazard.

Matilda's thoughts, active in self-torment, winged back to France; she saw the field strewed with heroes—she saw her father—she saw her husband, wading through a sea of blood; perhaps wounded unto death; perhaps, sinking, without one hand to succour. The thought and the sob were as one: that thought seared away the roses of her complexion; that

that sob awakened the sympathy of her companion.

Millicent, in a moment, was at her side; her white arms cast around her neck; her gentle features strongly indicative of contrition and of sorrow.—“ Ah, woe is me, I am always wounding where I would heal!” and she kissed the cheek of the agitated girl.

“ Not you, dearest Millicent; not you, but circumstances. Think, if you were torn from all you most loved in life; and torn, like me, beyond the chance of reunion: think, if your father; if——”

“ Too sure I should die”—and Millicent spoke in the rash ardour of feeling; then quick recovering, and striving at reparation—“ But you must not harbour such dreary pictures; you must look to a brighter morrow: only tarry until the return of the baron, and his aid and his counsel will cheer us all.”

“ But, dear lady,” asked Morley, striving to shift to a lighter theme, “ have



you forgotten the handsome knight, who, in the joust at Rockingham Castle, bore away the crimson scarf spangled with silver aglets? Marry! I can see him now, as he knelt for the gorgeous prize, and as he hid it, half play, half earnest, in the sanctuary of his bosom. And do tell how that mischievous scarf has raised a ghost in the woods of Herringworth, and how the very fairies might dance to the sweet music of his song. I remember well"—and he spoke with mock solemnity—"just one week before we mustered our forces for the war, chasing that ghost myself. I saw him standing on the slippery brink of the moat, and hanging, as it were, on the stream of light issuing from the casement above; and he was close wrapped in a grey cloak, and his cap was doffed of its plume; and he raised his lyre, and drew forth such magic tones, that I hid myself behind one of the great oaks in the park to listen."

"It

“ It was a beautiful night !” said Millicent, eagerly. “ The moon was at full ; and the blue sky was as thick set with stars, as——”

“ The silver aglets on the crimson scarf,” interrupted the veteran.

“ Pshaw ! I wish that scarf was at the bottom of the moat.” And a tell-tale suffusion died the very temples of Millicent.

“ Oh, no, lady ! for if that scarf were in the moat, the lord Eudo de la Zouch would be in the moat also. I wage, that scarf counts next to his breviary ; for he clings to it as to a priest’s reliquary : perchance”—and he spoke with playful meaning—“ it bears the horoscope of his nativity ; for on my troth, it must have magic in it.”

“ As how ?” and Millicent forgot the banter in the eagerness of inquiry.

“ Why, lady, the brave knight,” rejoined Morley, “ wears it at sunrise and sunset ; in the camp, and in the field ;

parleying with friends, or bearding foes. I have seen him full oft with my lord George de Cantilupe; but never without that scarf, since the day he first won it at Rockingham Castle: nay, I query, whether the knot has been loosened, which your own taper fingers wrought."

Was it in the words of Adam Morley, or was it in the scarf, that magic lurked? be which it may, it lightened such a smile in the features of Millicent, that it looked like the heart's sunshine: and long after she had returned to the castle, did that smile beam as a halo of glory—did that gentle heart, so kindly in all its bearings, throb with pleasurable emotion!

Rumour, with her hundred tongues, then, as now, brayed to the winds, the pigmy deeds of earth; then, as now, bruited the bursting of an air-bubble: for what are the actions of vain-glorious man, in this immensity of space, more than the air-bubble, inflated, one moment.

ment, and lost the next, in the concussion of a single straw! We glance back upon the record of ages:—we read of the stormy passions, waging against honour, and against peace:—we see the strifes and the turmoils of ambition, the mad contentions of hate, the bigoted zeal of party; we see men, like the troubled waves of ocean, rolling impetuously forward, combating, battling, raging! spending and wasting strength! breaking, sinking—to follow up the metaphor—amidst shoals and rocks! or, at best, borne on the stream of time, dissolving, disappearing in eternity, as the billow on the sand-incrusted strand! We read of the demigod and the hero; we read, until, in the words of our motto, we are tempted to exclaim—“*Where are the chiefs of the times of old?*” And Ossian will tell us—“In the dark and narrow house they sleep, beneath the dusky wind.”—And the spirit of inspiration will tell us—“In the place of *our*

appointed rest." But to return to the voice of busy rumour.

The baron de Cantilupe bore with him to Heringworth the news of the famous battle of Bovines, which, in the total rout of his opponents, perpetuated the glory of Philip Augustus, and advancing the honour of the French arms, struck terror and dismay into the hearts of surrounding princes. Thousands had paid the debt of life: the field was scattered with slain; and the victor, laden with proud trophies, returned in triumph to his capital. A truce too betwixt England and France was noised abroad; and the father's heart, in that talked-of truce, joyed in the hope of a son's return: not that self swallowed up the native feelings of patriotism; but he had long despaired of king John's recovering by the sword what he had lost by slothful inaction. He had seen these fair provinces of France—ceded to the first duke Robt. by Charles the Fourth, surnamed the Simple,

Simple, and annexed through three successive centuries to the crown of England—weakly and pusillanimously relinquished; he had seen what in the mere man he could but despise: but as we have before observed, in the wisdom of Solomon he bridled his tongue, and he strove hard to shut his eyes to the imbecility and waywardness of “the Lord’s anointed.” The feverish exultation, arising in the subjection of a few fortresses and castles, had not expunged the biting conviction of past disgrace: he had predicted nought of permanent success; for he knew king John despised and hated by his nobles; and well he knew, the king who reigns not in his people’s hearts, can ne’er depend upon his people’s fealty! He anticipated then the safe arrival of that loved son, whose fall would desolate the winter of life, without rallying the fame, or renovating the eclipsed glory of his country.

“But, dear father,” asked Millicent,  
“judge

“judge you the king himself will return to England?”

“Doubtless,” replied the baron. “During the enforcement of the truce, not a sword will be drawn; and things, and places, and persons, will abide unchanged.”

“And the prisoners?” questioned Millicent.

“They too, my child, will tenant their several dungeons. I would it could be counter; for alas! my spirit misgives me, and my heart aches when I think of the earl de la Marche.”

“The earl de la Marche!” ejaculated the horror-struck Matilda—“say you, my lord, the earl de la Marche?”

“Yes, lady, the earl de la Marche is a prisoner in the hands of his enemy.”

“God preserve him then!” and Matilda’s voice was utter despair.

“What mean you?”

“I mean, that he has little to hope from man.”

The

The baron shuddered, but he wished not to betray his own fears.—“The earl de la Marche,” he observed, “is now a prisoner in Corfe Castle. He may be treated with rigour, but I trust not with cruelty.”

“The rival and the captive of John of England can expect little,” said Matilda; and then she strove to question of all connected with his capture; but the circumstances and the feelings, linking those she loved to the cause and forces of the earl de la Marche, subdued her fortitude; her spirit failed her, and she burst into tears.

The baron pitied feelings he could not decipher; he read the agony of her mind, in the heavings of her bosom, in the heavy struggles for strength and firmness—Millicent bent over her; but gently putting her back, and chasing every tear from her eye, “I am myself now,” she exclaimed. “Your pardon, my lord, remembrance was overwhelming.



ing. There are events in our lives, which wage direful warfare with the spirit."

"True," said the baron, thoughtfully. "But in a life, so short, in the very springtide of youth, surely the shaft cannot have pierced beyond the surface. Perchance," and he marked her attentively, "the earl de la Marche is no stranger. If so, lady, be ignorance excuse for the abruptness of disclosure."

"Not so, my lord: however the fates of those I most value be linked with the fate of the earl de la Marche, I never beheld the earl de la Marche in my life. Fear not to speak. 'Tis the warm espouser of a just cause, whose overthrow I mourn; 'tis the avenger of a bloody tragedy; 'tis——"

She ceased, for she remembered the baron de Cantilupe but as the subject of king John, and she feared to wound where she had received favour.

The baron read her feelings in the  
vivid

vivid blush which spread over her countenance.—“ I know all you can say,” he exclaimed — “ I too can estimate the quick sense of honour: but the heart must not always pilot the actions, else, I fear me,” and he forced a smile, “ it would often run counter to necessary policy and general harmony. I speak as an old man; as one, retiring from life and all its bustling varieties—I have weighed existing ills in the even balance of dispassionate reflection, and I find them more supportable, than the threatened chaos of insubordination.”

“ But the earl de la Marche,” asked Millicent—“ dear father, tell us the storm which blew him to England?”

Thought and sadness clouded the brow of the baron—“ I could wish it to be expunged from the record of time,” he replied—“ I could wish it to be clean blotted from the nomenclature of human action. The evil passions of evil men admit no barrier: scoffing alike at God  
and

and the world, they dare the brunt of hereafter judgment. Alas! to minds innocent as are your own," and he took a hand of each, and smiled affectionately upon them, "how can the dark woof of revenge be unreaved? Had the earl de la Marche been the captive of war—had he been taken in open honourable contention, I had viewed it as a dispensation of heaven, awfully mysterious to our finite capacities: as it is, I mourn him as the victim of treachery; for the malice of hell alone can have wrought the mischief."

"As how?" and Millicent and Matilda questioned in a breath.

"Hugh le Brun, earl de la Marche," resumed the baron, and he shuddered as he spoke, "despoiled of all outward ensignias of nobility, and attended but by a few followers, was seen and recognised by some secret foe. He was hemmed in—he was cut off from all of succour; and without the power of defence, almost  
without

without the knowledge of danger, he was cruelly and systematically betrayed into the power of an inveterate adversary. But woe be to the man," and the baron spoke with heartfelt fervour, "who saddles private malice on public service! woe be to the man, who suffers the quickening spur of revenge to influence his actions! He may exult in the seeming fruition of his wickedness: but sure as the seed-time is followed by the harvest, so sure, will he drag down misery and shame upon his own head."

He ceased; he dashed a tear from his eye; for the painful pressure of circumstances overcame his feelings.

"Not at the head of his followers—not in the strife of honourable warfare?" asked Matilda, rallying from deep thought.

"Alas, no! almost unarmed—almost without resistance."

"Then was he accompanied by nought save dependants," and Matilda spoke eagerly

gerly and anxiously. "Are you sure, my lord, there were no followers—no single follower in arms?" And she felt to breathe more freely, for neither her father, or the palmer, wore the badge of servitude.

"The earl de la Marche," replied the baron, "detached from the main body of his army, and attended but by a few domestics, was journeying on some private call of his own: he had no knights, no men-at-arms around him. I speak gospel-truth, lady; for I heard it from the mouth of one who saw him captive."

"And the recreant, the invidious foe," said Matilda. "My lord, know you his name?"

"Your pardon, fair maid," after the hesitation of a moment; "I fear to cast slur on the fame of knighthood. Report gives it to one, who having detached himself from the service of France, now leagues with the forces of England: but  
report

report is full often a slanderous medium, and well should we ponder ere we circulate her fables."

"Did they bring the earl de la Marche forthwith to England?" asked Millicent.

"No, my child: they took him to Rochelle; and the young queen Isabel, who was with my liege the king, fainted dead away when she heard of his capture. Perchance it was compassion, or it might be the misgivings of conscience."

"And what said the king?—and what thought the king?" importuned the lady Millicent.

"You question too deeply," rejoined the baron.

"The thoughts of men are known only to themselves: certain, his actions spoke him wrath, for the prisoner was forthwith shipped for England."

"Surely," and Millicent spoke in the ardour of genuine nature, "the royal Isabel

Isabel will zealously espouse the fortune of the once-admitted candidate to her favour; surely, if she possess a heart, speedily will she cause to be withdrawn all restraint upon his freedom."

"I fear it may prove a perilous adventure," remarked the baron; "I fear —"

"Yet would I essay it," interrupted Millicent, "though it cost me my life."

"I do believe you, my dear girl; because your heart, pure and undefiled, possesses all its native attributes. But think you, the woman, who for the glittering bauble of a crown, could relinquish such a man as the earl de la Marche, would risk that glittering bauble upon the mere principle of reparation? Think you——"

"Perchance," again interrupted Millicent, "the beautiful Isabel sought happiness in splendour: is it marvel then, my dear father, that she find it shadow?"

"The happiness of young minds is  
ever

ever took highly wrought to be other than shadow," remarked the baron: "borrowing colour from buoyant spirits, they strew life's path with roses; and ere they half way track that path, woefully are they wounded with the thorns! But this is strange doctrine to preach to such hearers. Dearest children," and he spoke with solemn fervour, "may the thorns which are destined to spring up in your path, be so tempered with the calm blossoms of contentment and moderation, that if life be other than all sunshine, it may be less than half shadow!"

"I would venture much myself," said Millicent, thoughtfully, "to aid this poor prisoner. On my life, if the queen stand inactive, I shall judge her little other than a murderer."

"Millicent," and the baron frowned, "your language is too strong. Who talked of murder?—who dreamt of murder?"



der?" yet his own cheek waxed pale at the suggestion.

Millicent cast her arms around his neck.—“ It would not be the first murder,” she emphatically pronounced; and then she kissed his lips, to stay the reprehension.

“ You are a strange, wild, froward girl,” said the baron, rallying a smile: “ but you must be wary, dearest,” fondly returning her caress: “ such words, unwittingly spoken, would ruin us all.”

“ Ah! but not here, my father: 'tis the honest language of my feelings, and sure I may speak it here.”

“ Not even in the solitude of your own closet should you risk it,” quick rejoined the baron. “ Suspicion, my child, is a frail bulwark to rest on, and where ought savours of doubt, 'tis Christian charity to bide on the side of acquittal.”

“ Doubt,” incredulously repeated Millicent :

licent: "dearest father, can there be a doubt when——"

"We will discuss this point no further," interrupting her. "Mystery is ill fitted to human judgment: 'tis the great Searcher of hearts, who alone readeth the thoughts and the actions of men."

## CHAPTER V.

.....

"——— Ah! pity, that the hours of bliss,  
Flit as a subtle dream; that all the gay,  
And bright, and buoyant hopes, which summer yields,  
With summer fades!"

"I CANNOT rest to-night," said Milli-cent, stealing into the adjoining chamber of her friend.

"Neither can I," exclaimed Matilda, who was seated in the jutting bay of the huge casement, attired as when they had

parted two hours before. "I have been thinking," and as she spoke, she raised her dark eyes to the deep blue sky, "whether the silver rays of yon beautiful moon, can penetrate into the dungeon of the earl de la Marche."

"And I have been thinking of the earl de la Marche also," resumed Millicent. "Would I were a man for the next few days, that I might do more than think of him! or, would I were in the train of the royal Isabel, that I might spur her to the rescue! I like not that Corfe Castle:—it savours of treachery. It was there, that by order of the cruel Elfrida, her step-son, Edward the Martyr, received his death-wound:—and from there, little more than twelve months ago, was Peter of Pomfret dragged to the town of Warham, and hanged with his ill-fated son:—and there, if walls could speak, in this very reign of king John, has many other deeds of darkness been perpetrated."

"Alas!

“ Alas! and in many other castles,” sighed Matilda, her thoughts taking wing to the dismal tower o’ertopping the Seine, and her lifeblood curdling at the foul murder of the ill-starred prince Arthur.

“ Ay, in Windsor Castle,” returned Millicent, lowering her voice to a whisper: “ ’twas there that the hapless wife and children of the baron William de Brause were doomed to death through the slow torture of hunger; there——”

“ Virgin Mother!” and Matilda clasped her hands in wild horror.

“ ’Tis true, or the whole world fables,” pursued Millicent. “ The hapless baroness gave too slack rein to speech, and for the indiscretion of a moment, she called down the vengeance of a relentless persecutor. ’Tis many years back; but I have heard Mabel and Adam Morley talk of it, and deplore the misery, which one bad man, gifted with power, can deal out upon the multitude. The whole

family had fled away from England: and when king John, with a mighty army, subdued Ireland, in the province of Meath, his ire was kindled anew, in discovering the wretched baroness; and he caused her to be laden with heavy fetters, and he sent her and her children—for the baron had escaped into France—close prisoners to the castle of Windsor; and there, by his special order, did they all perish for lack of food. And he——”

Matilda grasped tight hold of the arm of Millicent.—“ Can such things be?” she asked, her own tender heart sickening at the direful story—“ Can rancour, so deadly, live in the breast of man?”

“ They tell many, many tales, well-nigh as fiend-like,” replied Millicent, creeping close beside her: “ for in Ireland, he moved like a pestilence, persecuting, attainting, and murdering. ’Twas in Ireland, that the De Lacey’s were driven from their rich inheritance.”

“ And who were the De Lacey’s?”  
asked

asked Matilda, marvelling at a turpitude so monstrous.

“ Ah! that is another foul tale to the mortal prejudice of king John,” answered Millicent. “ The De Lacey, the lords of Meath and of Ulster, incurring his heavy wrath, were forced to abandon their castles and their lands. They too fled away for life: but like the patriarch Jacob, when he fled from Padan-aram, they bore with them all that was most precious: for the heart which doomed to death the baroness de Brause and her helpless family, had surely dealt to them a fate as merciless.”

“ And did they escape the malice of their enemy?—did they fly beyond the reach of pursuit?” eagerly questioned Matilda.

“ They fled away in disguise,” continued Millicent. “ Adam Morley says, from the kingdom, far beyond the ken of king John’s scathing vengeance: and though, perchance, doomed to adversity

and endurance, who knows, but they may have been happier and calmer than if dwelling within his rule."

"If they bore with them the consciousness of right, if they bosomed the peace-yielding unction of integrity, then," fervently exclaimed Matilda, "would I not exchange their ills for the thorn-incrusted diadem of their persecutor."

"Neither would I the bonds of the earl de la Marche for all the splendour of the faithless Isabel," observed Millicent. "Sure," and she breathed a fluttering sigh, "she could never love, else had the transfer entailed death. I am sure no earthly power could tempt me to withdraw my heart—that is," and a rosy blush played o'er her features, "if I had once yielded it."

"I should think not—I am sure not," said Matilda, her thoughts dwelling on the mysterious palmer. "Oh no!" ardently, "it could not have been love;  
it

it must have been mere preference, arising in gratified vanity."

"And yet," resumed Millicent, "fame gifts the earl de la Marche with all that is attractive, decks him in all that is dangerous to the peace of woman. Young, handsome, heroic, romantic, enthusiastic, devoted, he moved in the court of the count of Angoulesme, the envy of his own sex, the admiration of ours: and until king John beheld his affianced bride, the beautiful Isabel, the compact of hands seemed as the compact of hearts. But king John, unused to curb the wild flights of his wildest wishes, caught by the dazzling charms of novelty and youth—though himself a husband—strove not against the loose unhallowed frenzy of passion: under some weak pretence, he divorced himself from his queen Avis, the heiress of the earl of Gloucester; and soon, through the propelling medium of ambition, gained to his cause, the interest and the influ-



ence of the earl of Angoulesme. The glitter of majesty prevailed; the omnipotence of power bore down every feeble resistance: Isabel fled away from her compact, and left the bereaved bridegroom to muse on his wrongs, and curse the shallowness of woman's faith."

"And did the royal spoiler bear the smiling mischief forthwith to England?" asked Matilda, deeply interested in the injuries and sorrows of the earl de la Marche.

"He bore her in exultation and in triumph," rejoined Millicent, "and they were both crowned at Westminster, by Hubert, archbishop of Canterbury: and as if he could not too firmly institute her queen of England, the year following, they were again crowned together, on Easter-Sunday, at Canterbury, in the cathedral-church."

"And know you of the earl de la Marche?" questioned Matilda. "Methinks he must have torn away the thraldom,

thraldom, and rallied from the snare, with a light heart and a grateful mind; for too sure, had he wedded her, his honour and his peace had been as nought in her keeping."

"I have heard my father say," replied Millicent, "the earl de la Marche too, fondly loved the ungrateful Isabel. Perhaps 'tis a hard task to shake off love: certain it is, he shrunk away from the world; and when next he appeared among men, it was in open rebellion against the perfidious John; for he leagued with the nobles of Normandy, and siding with Philip Augustus, strove hard to expel the English from France."

"And in that effort," said Matilda, mournfully, "he has fallen into the power of the tyrant. Holy Heaven! what save murder can ensue, when we dwell on the murders of the past? prince Arthur—Peter of Pomfret—the wife and the children of William de Brause!"

"And a hundred others," exclaimed

Millicent, "did we know how to note them."

"And can he be happy," sighed Matilda, "with such a world of lead upon his conscience?—can he rest in peace, with such a sea of blood before his eyes?"

"Perchance," remarked Millicent, "surrounded, as he is, by flatterers and sycophants, he thinks the recognisance of kings, not as the recognisance of other men. Blind and dead to his own enormities, he may view every evil deed through the cheating medium of necessity and ensample."

"It may be so," said Matilda. "But when the subtle tissue of sophistry shall fade away, when unvarnished truth shall break forth from the haze, dreadful will be his awakening. Ah! blessed, thrice blessed, be the torn gabardine of the unoffending beggar, to his cloak of ermine, to his crown of gold! But I would question further of the perjured Isabel.

Think

Think you, she bears sunshine in her bosom?"

"No—no—only on her brow," returned Millicent: "for the very hand which raised her to the throne wields the scourging-rod. I have heard my brother George say, the king is madly jealous; and that, God-wot! is ill enough, to dash gall even in the cup of the most happy. Perchance, he weighs by his own measure, and judges by his own deeds."

"Well does she merit the sting," said Matilda, earnestly, "for she has dealt out the poison: yet could I wish it counter; for that fatal jealousy may mar the desire of reparation."

"Not if she possess a conscience—not if she possess a heart," answered Millicent. "However ambition may have dazzled and misled, she knows herself the injurer—she knows the earl de la Marche is a prisoner in Corfe Castle. Would I could breathe into her my spirit!

were I the crowned queen of England," and every feature beamed the fervour within, "I would save the earl de la Marche at the risk of life—I would unbar the bolts of his dungeon, though in so doing I forged bolts and manacles for myself."

"You, dearest Millicent! ah! you could not have renounced the man to whom you had yielded favour."

"No, not if I loved him," exclaimed Millicent.

"And if you did not love him," quick rejoined Matilda, "never would you have cozened him with hope."

"True: but I was brought up in a convent; the beautiful Isabel was brought up in a court—I was taught to consider this world the mere pass to a better; she was taught to consider this world the gay theatre of all her hopes. Perchance, she would not have changed the earl de la Marche for any breathing earl in Christendom: but to be crowned queen—

queen—to sit upon the throne of England—to be gifted with power, with splendour, with all that the proud heart covets! Think of the gilded bait to a worldly mind! Her father, too, bribed to his own dishonour; abetting, spurring to the sacrifice; her own feelings at war; her own passions biassed. No, no, she dreamt not—she could not dream, the thorns lurking beneath the roses: and now that she is goaded with the thorns, fain would I urge some palliative, to assuage the throes of wounded conscience.”

“ You, dearest Millicent! sure you do but banter.”

“ No, on my life,” replied the heroic girl. “ The scheme is already floating: marvel not, at the return of my liege the king, if I join the court-revel myself. Mark me, Matilda”—for wonder lived in the dark eye of her companion —“ my errand is to aid the unfortunate, not to flutter in the butterfly-swarm  
who

who ever tend on royalty. Yet in the world, I will be as the world—I will sacrifice feeling to policy ; and if I can curry favour at the hand of my sovereign lady—if I can but win the grant of her interest—be my toil, the liberty of the noble prisoner now in Corfe Castle.”

“ Heaven’s grace light on the enterprise !” exclaimed Matilda. “ Oh ! that I too could wade through fire for such an end ! But my lord the baron : think you, will he risk the hazard ?”

“ My father lives the friend of the oppressed !” gratefully pronounced Millicent ; “ and my brother George, too, spurns at tyranny. Returning with the forces of the king, he will lend us all his aid. Well I know his heart ; well I know the gentle bias of his nature : he will labour out the rescue of the earl de la Marche. And his friend too——”

She ceased—she trembled—she clung to the arm of Matilda ; for at the instant, a few low notes, struck with an unsteady

dy

dy hand, broke upon the stillness : it sounded from the park below ; it floated on the night-breeze.

Matilda looked up, and she beheld Millicent, as white as the kerchief on her bosom. “ What bodes it ? ” she questioned ; but Millicent could not speak ; she could only press tighter the arm of her friend, and drawing her close to the casement, stood eager and watchful.

The night, as I have before described it, was “ such as the day is when the sun is hid ; ” so still, so clear so beamy ! The moon rode high in the heavens, and not a cloud obscured her lustre : broad and bright, she shone upon the emerald face of nature ; and mellowing all within the magic of her silver tissue, she seemed to steal the heart from passion, and the mind from care. Yet was it a night to graft romance upon the slightest seeming ; a night, to give to casual incident the colour of adventure : and  
when



when the wild sweet prelude yielded to the deeper, fuller cadence of the human voice, marvel not, that excitement chained a greedy ear, and surprise a wakeful interest.

“ When in yon starry sky, evening’s light closes,  
And nature, far and nigh, softly reposes ;  
When scarce a breeze is felt o’er the lake sighing,  
And all of busy life sinking and dying ;  
When o’er the dappled earth dew-drops are streaming,  
And the still moonshine is partially gleaming ;  
Then does the lover steal from his lone bower,  
Hailing the night-shade, and blessing the hour.

“ Then is the time, that the heart’s wild emotion,  
Buoyant and light as the surf of the ocean,  
Pierces the dark’ning boughs, o’er the head twining,  
Vivid and bright as a summer-sun shining ;  
Chases the gloom, and the tokens of sadness,  
And bosoms the thrill of forthcoming gladness ;  
For the lover steals forth from his dark bower,  
And joys in the gloom of night’s fav’ring hour.

“ Whence comes the ray, that the aching heart lighteth ?  
Whence comes the hope, that the lover delighteth ?  
Whence comes the magic, so soft and so stealing ;  
The joy that’s so bright, the promise so healing ?  
It comes not of earth—for earth is but sorrow :  
It comes not to cheer the pang of the morrow :

No ;

No; it comes in the haze of twilight's dim hour,  
When the lover deserts his deep shady bower.

“Come then, and smile, like the planet high shining;  
Come then, and chase e'en the thought of repining;  
Come in thy beauty, so vivid and glowing!  
Come in thy blushes, such transport bestowing!  
Come in night's cloud, like the spirit of even;  
Come, and bestow e'en the foretaste of heaven!  
For now is the calm, and the peace-yielding hour,  
When thy lover deserts his sheltering bower.”

The voice ceased, but Millicent continued silent; a wild tremour pervaded her whole frame, and when she encountered the fixed glance of Matilda, the rose usurped the lily-hue of her cheek.

“The lord Eudo de la Zouch,” whispered Matilda, recalling to mind the light banter of Adam Morley.

Millicent started, and again the rose vanished.

“The hero of the tournament,” pursued Matilda, striving at cheerfulness: “he who bore away the crimson scarf at Rockingham Castle.”

“The same! the same!” faltered Millicent;

licent; then raising her face, beautiful in bashfulness, and casting her arms around the neck of her friend—"He, who has lived in my thoughts," she continued, "since that hour;—and he, who will live in my thoughts, until death expunge life and thought together."

"And your father," asked Matilda, "yields he his blessing?"

The voice, at that instant, rose from the park, and the last stanza was repeated.

"Anon, I will tell you further," whispered Millicent: "now, I must bear the token to my true knight, that he may part in peace." And she unclosed the lattice-window as she spoke, and waved to-and-fro her kerchief; then returning, and seating herself beside Matilda—"I pray you, do not chide me," she pursued. "God-wot! love is a strange wild impulse, driving whither one list not, and warring against peace, and perchance against duty: for my dear father  
favours

favours sir Henry de Braibrooke, and my thoughts and my hopes light on sir Eudo de la Zouch. Nay, look not so grave. I well know the worth of sir Henry de Braibrooke: as children we have often played whole days together; for Braibrooke Castle, nigh at hand, darkens the banks of our own Welland: but though I would make him my friend, I cannot make him my husband: alack! I should as soon think of wedding my brother George."

"Why not acquaint the baron? why not unfold your whole heart, and yield him your entire confidence?" urged Matilda. "Mystery, dearest Millicent, is often the grave of peace."

"My father knows that I cannot love sir Henry de Braibrooke," quick rejoined Millicent; "he knows too, that—that——" She hesitated; she bowed her blushing face upon her bosom.

"Does he suspect the advances of sir  
Eudo

Eudo de la Zouch?" questioned Matilda. "Does he approve his suit?"

"My father was at Rockingham Castle, when skill and bravery won the crimson scarf:—my father saw me place it across the shoulders of the victor knight, and he joined in the loud acclaim which noted his preeminence; and he—he——" Again she ceased.

"But he yields not consent to your union," concluded Matilda, pitying her agitation.

"I did not say so—no, no, I cannot say so. Dearest Matilda, I have not craved consent—I cannot, crave consent. Often has the confession rose to my lips, but his known prejudices have frightened it back into my heart."

"His prejudices! You speak in riddles. What prejudices can warrant reserve to such a parent?"

Millicent struggled for a moment, then rallying courage and resolution—  
"List to me, Matilda, and forthwith  
yield

yield me counsel. My father strives to think well of the king, because he would fain think the king what a king ought to be : but De la Zouch sees the king as he is—weak, fickle, tryannical ; and he despises him : and in the last feud, he leagued himself with the hostile nobles ; and in the next feud—should Heaven so will it—he may dare again the brunt of hazard.”

“ And yet,” doubtfully remarked Matilda, “ the lord Eudo de la Zouch joined the forces, and bore arms with king John in France.”

“ True : and he would fight to the death, for the prosperity and the honour of England,” quick replied Millicent ; “ to wrest back her rich possessions, to file away the rust shed upon her glory : but not to uphold the tyrant, who wantonly, wickedly tramples on her rights ; not here, at home, to support the stretch of arbitrary coercion.”

“ Strange !” mused Matilda, gazing on  
the

the dappled features of the animated girl. "So young, so gentle, yet so daring!" She forgot, that Love, makes bold the coward, and makes dull the hero; that delighting in inconsistency and opposition, oft, in mere mockery, does he spur to the overthrow of every former bias! "And yourself?" she asked, still attentively regarding her.

"I cannot love him less," fervently exclaimed Millicent, "though I knew him weaving the woof of universal overthrow. Think," after the pause of a moment, "of half the dark tales which go abroad, and marvel not, though I judge my dear father prejudiced."

"It may be so," said Matilda, earnestly; "yet would I not for worlds uphold in opposition. Dearest Millicent, if you value the peace of hereafter life, cast off disguise. Say to your father—"

Millicent threw herself upon the bosom of her young adviser.—"Should my  
my

my father drive him hence ; should he bid me cease to love him ; should—should——” and the shudder which crept over her, at once betrayed the iron bonds which held her.

“ Should your father yield consent—should your father accord the blessing,” urged Matilda. “ Think of the light, light heart, which will joy in the track of duty.”

Millicent looked up, and every vestige of care vanished : it was young hope, which glowed on her cheek, and lived in her eye.—“ Already do I feel it lighter,” she pronounced : “ my father loves me ; my father labours for the happiness of my life : yes, to-morrow will I bare my heart to my kind good father, and pour out all its wishes, all its weaknesses.”

But though Millicent slept sounder ; though her dreams and her fancies were tranced in blessedness ; though, like the rosy clouds of morning, infant passion tinged



tinged all that it looked upon, and difficulties, and distresses, and obstacles, vanished, as mountain mists before a summer sun; still, that morrow brought with it trepidation and fear, and new doubts and new anxieties gathered. It is ever thus with the children of prosperity: the slightest breath of opposition is magnified into tempest; the faintest check to inclination metamorphosed into trial! She met her father, and her courage failed; she sought the presence of Matilda, and she yielded to a burst of tears.

“Would you, that I should speak to the baron?” asked Matilda, pitying her emotion.

“What, and turn coward in the first adventure in my life? Alack! how can I hope to aid the poor prisoner in Corfe Castle, if I suffer my spirit to flag here at home? No, no! I am a silly weak fool, forsooth! but I will not tax others to spare myself.”

She

She arose as she spoke, and her tears and her weakness vanished; and shaking back her long flaxen ringlets, she smiled, and she looked as a heroine, firm and collected, and prepared for every vicissitude.—“ I will seek my father, now, on the instant,” she pursued, moving towards the door. “ I will tell him——”

A sudden and clamorous peal from the warden's tower tokened an arrival. Millicent, with one bound, sprung to the casement, and mounting on a settle, looked down upon the court below.—  
—“ A goodly train! a gay assemblage; esquires and pages!” she exclaimed in a breath; then, with a tremulous heaving of the bosom, and a cheek varying from white to red, she drew back. “ 'Tis the lord Eudo de la Zouch!” she whispered; and then again, with a movement, soundless as the blind mole, she bent forward. “ My father meets him! my father welcomes him! He alights—he yields his  
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gay charger to the groom—he comes into the castle! Ah! what may all this mean?” And springing from the settle, and beamy in soft emotion, she threw her arms around the neck of Matilda.

The next instant, and a messenger from the baron, summoned below: but ere Millicent braved the presence she in one dreaded and coveted, with the latent vanity admissible in early thralldom, she sought her mirror, and arranging her long and beautiful hair, and placing in her bosom, a sprig of jessamine, scarce rivalling that bosom's whiteness, she craved the presence of Matilda, and descended to the hall.

Far be it from us to steal the heart through the medium of the senses, else, might we say, never did two fairer blossoms meet in brighter sweeter contrast! Millicent, light, gentle, almost sylph-like; with eyes, blue as the dome above, peering midst the golden clusters which  
well-

wellnigh shadowed them; and features, tinted in hues, as varying and as lovely, as rosy clouds in evening sunset! And Matilda, no less gentle, no less lovely, but more, far more subduing; with hair of the raven's wing; with eyes, eloquent, and dark, and full, and mild, as the gazelle's; with a smile, tempered with sadness, yet harmonizing each perfect feature; with a voice, and form, and movement, as though fresh from Paphos, and zoned in the immortal cestus of ocean-born Venus!

The eye, the index and herald of the heart and of the passions, beamed admiration, as the baron met them at the door of entrance.—“ Sir Eudo de la Zouch bears greeting from our dear George,” he exclaimed. “ Direct from Rochelle, he confirms the rumoured truce, and gives hope of the speedy return of the king and his followers.”

Millicent murmured something of welcome; and although her voice was

low and broken, and her very temples suffused with the deepest tints of palpable confusion, still, the baron, intent upon the information he had gained, noted not a trepidation, which else had resolved the secret of many a sigh, and many a past cloud of sadness.

The day fled away, and many a succeeding day, alike brief and swift, was borne on the fairy pinions of love and hope: for whether the baron had undergone a revolution of ideas; or whether the present fealty of the lord Eudo de la Zouch, in attending the summons, and following the king beyond sea, had absolved him of the tax of former non-conformity—certain it is, he ever hailed him with gladness, and noted not, or seemed not to note, the visible pleasure which lived in the smile of the happy Millicent. Nought of dissenting opinion, of clamorous opposition, clouded the calm spreading over Heringworth. It was a calm, almost too bland for  
earth:

earth : at least, so felt the lovers : for never did the sun shine so bright, never did the flowers bloom so gay, never did the birds sing so sweet, as throughout the whole of that bliss-fraught summer ! compared to the former summers of life, it was as a fertile spot set in the midst of a desert—as the transition of ease from racking pain—as prosperity closing the visitation of affliction !

Strongly tinctured with the romantic spirit of the age, warm, and wild, and imaginative, Millicent bosomed the brightest flights, and the gayest day-dreams. Sir Eudo was the hero of every enthusiastic wish ; was, as the boast of knighthood, as the flower of chivalry : wrapt in the ether of illusion, and tinged by the rosy finger of Love himself, if in the chase he ambled at her side, it was with a grace, inimitable and perfect ;—if he spoke, it sunk from her ear into her heart ;—if he sung, that “ song, came with its music, to melt and please her  
H 3 soul ;

soul; like soft mist, that rising from a lake, pours on the silent vale." And Matilda, too, was gradually, insensibly weaned from the constant indulgence of thought and sadder fancies: for kindness and attention will ever steal upon the feelings, unless, habitually callous, or utterly withered by the blasts of affliction; will awaken the native germ of gratitude, unless nipped and frozen by dull and stagnant misanthropy!

The baron de Cantilupe, the good and pitying Samaritan, zealous to assuage, and to pour unction into the bleeding wounds of the heart, had dispatched a messenger into Normandy; and her fears and her hopes, consigned to the keeping of her gallant captor, now hung upon the moment of his return—hung, with an anxiety so intense, as to beggar the force of language. Sometimes, forgetful of herself, she would smile upon the happy prospect of her happy friend, as though smiles were habitual; but quick  
again

again would the sigh arise, and as dark clouds drifting athwart the glories of a summer sky, would the shades of grief and doubt settle on her brow—for hers was a destiny, fitful and joyless—yet often, with feelings bordering on self-reproach, would she recall the words of the poor sister Clarisse, and fervently bless Heaven for that chance of felicity which remained to her. The husband of the hapless nun, from the altar had been consigned to the tomb: her husband, her father, were, as she sanguinely believed, inhabitants of earth: and though severed by the breath of accident, and the scourge of misfortune, the wonder-working finger of Providence, might still miraculously direct to her retreat. Every sigh might be hushed—every tear might be chased away—she might be happy! Alas! poor Matilda! had she sojourned among men—had she trodden the dark and winding paths of the world—she had learned, that in all



the busy and the eager crowds, scattered over the wide face of this earth—few—very few, discover the path to true happiness !

## CHAPTER VI.

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“ Wist thee I shrink because my powers are weak ?  
There lurks a potent spell in virtue,  
And he who wills to do, gains from high Heav'n  
The strength !”

**THE** history of nations, is as the nomenclature of the vices, the follies, the headlong passions of men : for crime in every age is the poisoned source of universal distemperature ; and however the pen of the chronicler distort or dignify human action ; however he soften knavery into state policy, and flagitious cruelty into the exploits of the conqueror and the hero, the universal history of mankind

kind is still one universal tragedy, besmeared, blotted, replete with the obduracy of guilt, with the quickening seeds of passion; fermenting into violence, and ripening into crime!

At a period, and in an age, when acts of heroism and personal valour were considered the main accomplishment, the conduct of king John, at all periods, and in all ages, disgraceful and unworthy, excited detestation and contempt. The nobles, brave, and bold, and chivalrous, knowing themselves harassed by arbitrary imposition, and baffled and defeated in every enterprise, writhed beneath the chains with which he galled them; or, perhaps, influenced by that innate germ of freedom, so peculiarly the growth of British soil, and so plentifully planted and so firmly established by their hereafter exertions:—for every Englishman, reaping the mighty benison, turns, gratefully turns, from the blessed effect, to the primal source:—

be that as it may, good did arise out of evil; and the very scourge which he so witlessly wielded, applied to the raw and bleeding wounds, of bold, and proud, and adventurous spirits, spurred to the manumission, which stamps RUNNEMEDE, as the birthplace—and the reign of king John, as the epoch of English liberty!

In the elaborate pages of our early historians, we further elicit, that the feudal law, infringing the ancient privileges of the Anglo-Saxons, and introduced by William the Norman, had reduced the people to a state of perfect vassalage;—that the barons themselves submitted to a more severe and arbitrary prerogative than generally exists in feudal governments;—that the power of the crown had grown to a huge and monstrous pitch;—and that the charter of Henry the First, renewed by Stephen, and confirmed by Henry the Second, had, in the hands of their successors, continued  
null

null and void. 'Tis true, the privilege of arms had not been wrested from the barons and the people: but aggression and tyranny, those master-springs to resolution and hardihood, had aroused that lurking spirit of discontent, which lacked but the degenerate and base conduct of the reigning prince—and who so degenerate, and who so debased, as king John?—to serve as a quickening match to the long and spreading train, blowing into defiance, and blazoning into open revolt.

The church, too, in those days of darkness and mental prostration, influencing and cramping the judgments of men, swayed by temporal interest, had lent their spiritual aid to the great and gathering confederacy: for Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, who, but the year before, in the chapter-house at Winchester, first administering to king John, the solemn oath, by which he bound himself to abolish the wicked

and reestablish the good laws of his predecessors, had yielded to his prayers, his tears, and his seeming humility, the grace of absolution—now, inspired by the philanthropy of his own nature, and by his zeal for the public good:—for doubtless, his embryo plan of reformation gained birth in great and generous principles:—secretly maintained, and vigorously instigated the nobles, to the open vindication of their liberties, and the firm demand of their just rights.

Several meetings had already strengthened the infant bond of confederation: and when, on the nineteenth of October, 1214, king John—through the procurement of the earl of Chester, and the mediation of the pope's legate, having finally completed a truce with Philip Augustus, to last for five entire years, from the Thursday in September after the exaltation of the holy cross—returned with all his followers into England; that succeeding first of November, was appointed,

appointed, under colour of a pious pilgrimage to the monastery of St. Edmund's-bury, for the further meeting of the primate and the chief nobles of the kingdom.

But note we the disembarkation of king John and his beauteous Isabel; or rather, upon the borders of the Welland, amid the bowers of Heringworth, tend we the bustle of preparation, which soon put to flight all the vivid dreams of love and blessedness which youth and illusive fancy had devised. The arrival of the lord George de Cantilupe dissipated the long blank of inaction: the king had established his court in his palace at Westminster; and perhaps it was the romantic calling, aiming at the preservation of the captive earl de la Marche, which banished care from the brow of Millicent, even on the eve of separation from her lover: certain it was, she hailed with sportiveness her coming visit to the court; spoke of the new call up-  
on

on her fealty with pleasantry and humour; and when alone with Matilda, bantered her growing fears, with the firm hope of a prosperous issue, to this her first act of policy.

“ You must bear me fellowship,” she exclaimed, tenderly regarding her; “ you must lie with me to London, and in the revel forget this listless sorrow.”

Matilda started; her glowing cheek tokened emotion; her eyes beamed reproach.—“ Not for the universe!” she emphatically pronounced. “ No, never will I voluntarily seek the presence of king John.”

“ Not in the cause of humanity?” asked Millicent—“ not to aid the noble prisoner in Corfe Castle?”

Matilda hesitated for a moment, then yielding to all her native energy—“ Ay, to rescue the earl de la Marche,” she replied, “ willingly would I martyr every feeling of self: but how effect so great deliverance?—how, for an unknown  
nameless

nameless being, like me, to forward an adventure so fate-fraught?"

"Know you not," said Millicent, eagerly, "that the rock which breasts the flood, may be sapped and undermined by the mere drippings of the land-spring?—that the citadel, braving the havock of a siege, may surrender to the skill of persevering policy? Tarry until I gain the ear of the royal Isabel; and perish all of woman's ingenuity, if I win her not to our party."

"And when of our party," returned Matilda, "think you, the relentless John will forego the pleasure of revenge? I have heard he never pardons those he has injured: how then, can the affianced husband of the faithless Isabel hope for pardon at his hands?"

"The king loves the smiling lure to all the mischief," rejoined Millicent; "and man's love, alike in the prince and the beggar, subjects him to woman's humour. Once alive to the cause of humanity



manity and honour, who shall place bounds to female influence? I tell you, dear Matilda, and I found my creed upon human nature; if the royal Isabel vouchsafe her interest, the chains of the earl de la Marche, be they of iron or steel, will snap their rivets! And she must vouchsafe her interest—and she will vouchsafe her interest; for conscience will deal forth wounds; and the mind will revert to the past, and the heart will bleed, where nought but wrong and injustice savour the actions. Belike she may wear smiles upon the throne; but in the solitude of the closet, who can probe the *gangrene*?"

Matilda shuddered. It was a picture of desolateness which stripped prosperity of every blossom; and her "mind's eye" traced in the young and lovely Isabel, the withering victim of remorse and care. She saw her listless in the midst of pomp and adulation; she saw the "worm which dieth not," coiling around the seat of  
life

life and promise, spite of the incitements which man calls pleasure; she saw her blighted amid the seeming joys of fortune; she saw her inert and spiritless, amid the omnipotence of rule!

“ I would not exchange hearts,” pursued Millicent, heedless of the emotion of her friend, “ not for the royal purple—not though the life of the queen of England, were spun to twice the allotment of man.”

“ Neither would I for the rule of the whole world,” fervently exclaimed Matilda: “ rather would I wane my summer midst the privations of the cloister, and sink into an unmarked grave, than live the slave of lawless, soulless passion.”

“ And yet there are thousands,” remarked Millicent, “ who borne by the tide of ambition, and dazzled by the rainbow-tints of splendour, would yield the substance for the shadow; would, like the royal Isabel, forego content, for the

the meteor-blaze of preeminence. Alack! it is a strange world; a world, made up of all that is inconsistent and incongruous. The lady mother of St. Mary de la Pree, likens it to figures on the sand, which the rising tide, or the sweeping blast, effaces and destroys. Ay, and there are seasons, when such is its fallacy, that even I can read its emptiness and despise its glittering tinsel; even I, can weigh its profitless pleasures, and marvel at the mere thistle-down, which in man's estimation tells so heavy. I wonder—I have often wondered, how, to a reflecting mind, any thing short of eternity can rivet the heart and the wishes; how the every-day gusts of sense and feeling, can veer the hopes, and colour the destiny; how the light casualties of time can destroy even the interest; how the——”

She ceased, for the lord Eudo de la Zouch, unobserved, had stolen to her side: and as she read reproach in his eye,

eye, wild and contradictory emotion flushed o'er her features. He smiled, and she recovered all her self-possession.

"Methinks," he whispered, "your system is better in the figure than the practice. Dearest lady, would you trample upon hearts?—would you annihilate all of feeling?—would you subvert nature, and bind all her ordinances, in the dull, cold shackles of philosophy? Ah, surely," and he spoke with tender energy, "there are ties, there are attractions, there are imperative calls, even in this barren waste life, which would cost much in the renunciation!"

"Belike," said Millicent, timidly, "I did not analyze all my blessings." And then she bent her blue eyes on the earth, for gratitude lived in the glance of her lover. "Yet, surely," and she rallied back all her sportiveness, "'tis a philosophy fitly fashioned to a court; for the language of the heart is least understood where policy sways the actions."

"Then

“Then why brave an atmosphere so ungenial?” asked De la Zouch—“why thread the intricacies of such a labyrinth? I fear me, lovely Millicent, the adventure will reap ought save recompence.”

“I fear nought save my own ability,” quick rejoined Millicent. “Accompanied by my friend, and protected by my father and brother——”

“Your brother,” interrupted sir Eudo, “on the festival of All-saints, joins pilgrimage to St. Edmund’s-bury.”

“Well then, beneath the fostering wing of my natural guardian,” concluded Millicent, “I shall be safe, as though at Heringworth.”

De la Zouch thought counter; or perhaps it was the jealousy of love which quickened suspicion; for—

“Ne’er did Grecian chisel trace,  
A nymph, a naad, or a grace,  
Of fairer form, or lovelier face !”

and the gallantries of king John, from  
the

the palace to the cottage, were proverbial, spite of the hold which his wedded Isabel held upon his affections. He feared to resolve the shudder which crept over him at the remembered degradation of many a noble family; and more he feared to give speech to thought, for his feelings told him, death must ride upon the blast of such a mildew.

“And when this pilgrimage shall end,” asked Millicent, wondering at the sudden gloom which lowered on his brow; “when dismissed with the blessing of the pious Langton—will not you—will not my brother, seek us in the court revel?”

“Perchance,” and De la Zouch strove at cheerfulness, “the like fairy spell may bind us;” and as he spoke he glanced at the silent, pensive Matilda: but she had no ear, no heart for pleasantries: her mind was complicated; her thoughts dwelt on the strange destiny which felt to impel her to the court of king John.

“Then

“ Then we may tarry your presence,” replied Millicent, “ and count on your fealty.”

“ *Your presence,*” and sir Eudo spoke emphatically, “ will ever be my heart’s sole rallying point.”

Millicent blushed and smiled, and she turned to her friend; but Matilda was still lost in her own sad fancies.—“ I would we could pour life and joy into yon fair statue!” she resumed, after the pause of a moment. “ What wage you, my lord, that the shifting scenes of busy life prove not the ablest antidote?”

“ Will she join in the buzzing throng gathering around the flame of royalty?” questioned De la Zouch. “ Will she voluntarily mingle in the soulless crowd of speculating courtiers?”

“ I do trust so—I do hope so!” But Millicent uttered her hopes rather than her belief; for she met the dark eyes of Matilda; and she read in those eyes, and  
in

in those speaking features, the futility of trust and hope.

“ I will to London,” firmly pronounced Matilda—“ I will abide with you in the purlieus of the court: but never, save upon life or death, will I into the presence of king John. Bear with me, dearest Millicent. My better feelings, my sense of duty, all bid me shun the known enemy of my race.”

“ I take you at your word,” said Millicent, good-humouredly. “ Hie with me to London, and be all other to chance and circumstances.”

The grand epoch of introduction in the life of a young and noble female, then, as now, called for thought and preparation. Heretofore, Millicent had known no world beyond the convent of St. Mary de la Pree and Heringworth: like the lark, she had carolled in glad sportiveness: caprice and inclination, her bias and her guide: now, she was to seek new associates, to mingle in new scenes:



scenes: impulse was to be exchanged for policy, and art was to supersede nature: she was to bow at the footstool of majesty, and crave, at the hands of her liege lady, the meed of commendation. From the cradle, alike the creature of propelling feeling and the idol of a dotting father, her wishes and her fancies had been studied and approved: she had been the modeller of more than her own actions; and now, that inclination willed to the court, as heretofore, the baron de Cantilupe strove to pile up the full measure of her wishes. The suburbs of London was to be her abiding-place; and the baroness of Montfitchett, the noble dame, to bear her through the ordeal of presentation.

“ I must think alone of the captive in Corfe Castle,” said Millicent, when transported to the green and fertile banks of the Thames, she stood, with Matilda, facing the evening breeze, and listening  
to

to the ripple of a high tide. "To-morrow, when I gaze upon the royal Isabel, not all the blaze of her splendour, must shut out the wan and wasted image of the earl de la Marche."

"To-morrow!" repeated Matilda. "Surely, you will not adventure to-morrow."

"No—no—only into the presence," returned Millicent. "I must take time, and watch for opportunity."

"'Tis a wild project!" thoughtfully remarked Matilda; "and much I fear the effort will prove vain."

Millicent looked more than usually grave; she paused for many moments; then suddenly—"To-night," she said, "I feel like one venturing upon ice: be-like, to-morrow, I may awaken with a new heart. Sure, Heaven will vouchsafe strength, where the motive is sheer pity. I never beheld this Hugh le Brun: but were he old and ugly, still would I dare the venture."

“It matters not the outward seeming,” observed Matilda: “oppression calls for reprobation and redress.”

“My dear father,” quick resumed Millicent, “thinks I come here for lack of other pastime: but, on my life, I come to play the heroine! Breathe it not to the winds,” lowering her voice to a whisper—“I will labour hard for the smile of the royal Isabel: and when I have reaped that smile, and won the indulgence of her ear, at her bidding, will I ford a river, or scale a prison.”

“You!” exclaimed the amazed Matilda—“Ah, surely, you rate your powers too highly.”

“I, in my representative; in sir Eudo de la Zouch, or my brother George.”

“Alas!” and Matilda gazed on the glowing cheeks of the heroic girl, should the enterprise fail; should disappointment mar the hopes, and discovery drag down ruin; should——”

Millicent clung to her arm: those  
glowing

glowing cheeks faded to clay, and every limb trembled. It was the first time such a possibility had crossed her; and the fear of endangering the safety of those she loved, of involving the liberty, perhaps, the lives of her kindred, rose in such hydra array, that all of heroism vanished. "I am a very woman," she faltered, "spite of my vain boasting. Dear Matilda, you have made a coward of me—I could dare overthrow in any other shape."

"'Tis fitting we compute all of possible contingency," said Matilda. "In a generous cause, I would not scare your ardour; but I would awaken caution, and rein in impulse. I would implore you, in this new world in which you are about to mingle, to mistrust others, to close lock the secrets of your own breast."

"It is indeed a new world," sighed Millicent, glancing o'er the turreted walls of many a fair domain, enriched

with glowing sunset, and spreading to the water's edge:—for beside Bath-house, Durham-house, the Savoy, the Temple, and the house of the Carmelites, many a castle, and stately edifice, belonging to the temporal and spiritual nobility, dotting the 'Thames' banks, lay betwixt London and Westminster. "A world," she pursued, "so full of change and subtilty, that much I marvel at my own hardihood. Yet methinks, with caution, and foresight, and due policy, with God's good grace, I may launch upon the ocean of adventure, and steer safe through the shallows, without involving the honour and safety of my family."

"Can you," eagerly demanded Matilda, "submit yourself to the check-rein of caution?—can you lay violence on your own feelings, and curb the ebullitions of o'erflowing sensibility?"

"I do think I can—I do believe I can," answered Millicent, "where more than life hangs pendent. Come another sunset,

sunset, and I shall feel the foundation-stone of my hopes; for in the eyes, the looks, the manners of the royal Isabel, I shall read the doom of the earl de la Marche."

Matilda shook her head.—"To-morrow, I grant you," she remarked, "you will behold the royal Isabel in all the splendour of her regal state; to-morrow, you will see the queen, not the woman. 'Tis in retirement, 'tis in the circle of familiar friends, 'tis when despoiled of purple and fine linen, that the heart, the genuine nature stands revealed."

"True," said Matilda—"I have heard that the court changes the manners and the feelings, that it stagnates the impulses, and sheds ice upon the heart; yet I cannot withhold reliance on to-morrow's introduction. Oh, no! I shall go to the court, prepared and wary—I shall think of nought save the earl de la Marche—I shall see nought save his once-affianced Isabel. Her self-posses-

sion will not cozen me into the belief of her happiness; neither will her smile give token of content."

"And what would the certainty of her misery yield?" questioned Matilda — "what would the knowledge of her remorse achieve?"

"Much — much," eagerly resumed Millicent: "it would speak her penitent for the past; it would tacitly shew the life of the man she had injured worthy the venture of preservation. If I should trace one sigh—if I should decipher one indication of mental ailment, I shall pray for her, and pity her, and, perchance, urge her to the only restitution which remains: for come what may, I will court her gracious notice; and winding myself into her coveted favour, tarry, with due patience, the season fitted for enterprise."

"It is a vain, a futile reliance," thought Matilda; but she uttered not her thoughts; for she read enthusiasm in the glowing features

features of her friend, and she feared to dissolve the buoyant dream of her ardent fancy: she read, too, satisfaction and delight in the anticipated liberation of a stranger, of a man, whose wrongs and endurance had awakened such active sympathy; and she respected the motive, and she venerated the principle, although, as her eye measured the slight and sylph-like form beside her, she could but marvel at the solitary instance of disinterested magnanimity.

The terrace upon which they were walking, bold, and broad, o'ertopped the Thames: richly varied were

“The tints of the earth, and the hues of the sky;”

for though the sun had sunk in a flood of golden fire, light and flaky clouds still bore the rich burnish of his glory: the full tide rippled beneath the evening breeze; and on the opposite banks, dappled with the searing influence of autumn,



“ Shade above shade, a woody theatre  
Of stateliest view,”

closed in the outline.

Matilda sighed as she scanned “ the beautiful, the wild :” thought exchanged the picture, and the Gartampe, in all its wilder solitude, revived : she saw her own rose-enclustered home ; she saw her father, she saw the palmer, steering through every threat of peril !—Milli-cent, too, had shut out surrounding things ; had surmounted every obstacle—had filed away the bars—had given light and freedom to the captive !

Suddenly, as though from the depths below, a strain of magic harmony snatched them back to the Thames’ side. It was a strain, soft, and low, and full of sweetness ; a strain, to

“ Take the prison’d soul, and lap it in Elysium ;”

and it swelled, and it vibrated, and it died, and it melted away, like the softest breeze of summer even ! Arm in arm they pressed to the edge of the terrace ;

race; they bent over the low parapet, at the instant that a gilded barge glided down the stream. It tokened of splendour and of pleasure; for many a silken pennon floated in the light wind, and tints of rainbow brightness mingled in gay assemblage. As the barge neared the spot on which they stood, timid and bashful they shrunk back; for a stranger knight, habited in the splendid vestments of nobility, with jewelled cap and waving plume, sprung erect, and pressing to the stern of the boat, as if to cling upon the last look, bent eagerly and wistfully towards them. Millicent conjured recognition and transport—Matilda, without knowing why, felt a death-chill at her heart. The next instant, and the sound of merriment tokened of banter;—the next, and the music struck up a lively measure:—the next, and the next, and the barge, lessening in distance, looked as a darkened speck in the stream.

CHAPTER VII.  
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“Bright, as a meteor in the sky,
She shines within her circle.
Loveliest, fairest, gentlest, best—
A sun amid the stars!”

ALAS! how wayward, how dissatisfied is human nature! Unskilled in the art of extracting happiness from surrounding objects, diligently do we toil to convert them into misery!

Scarce had the lady Millicent descended to the summons of the baroness of Montfitchett—scarce had the “God speed thee!” parted from the lips of Matilda, when alone and lonely, she became the victim of new fears and new anxieties. Self-blame tortured in the dreaded incantation of Millicent: she knew the ardour of her nature, and she trembled
lest

lest impulse should hurry into snare. Wofully did she reproach her own inertness; for though she had never urged to the romantic expedient, still had she become the implied auxiliary, in withholding all knowledge from the baron de Cantilupe. All that rumour had ever bruited of the queen, spoke her selfish and heartless; the slave of mad ambition, and the creature of computing interest. Might she not then abuse the confidence of a too trusting nature?—might she not turn the ebullitions of generous feeling, against the philanthropic bosom which had given them harbour? Yes, she might tangle in a snare, too specious for youthful foresight; she might play upon the easy heart, and hug into toil:—like the dexterous spider, watchful of the foredoomed fly, she might trap in the silken mesh of her own weaving; she might cast around her artless, her unsuspecting victim, threads, so subtle, and so twisted, that to snap the

rivet, would be to cozen fate. She pictured, in the possible discovery of king John, in the burst of his jealous fury, and in the ready abnegation of the once perfidious Isabel, ruin to her friend—ruin, inevitable ruin, to all of the race of De Cantilupe. She thought of the murdered family of the baron de Brause, and her dread soon gathered to agony.

Each moment did the danger seem to thicken, and each moment did the fortitude and the nerves of Matilda relax; she felt sensations, unaccountable and new; she felt, as though misfortune was about to fall and crush her: and when Millicent, with a light heel, and lighter heart, tripped gaily into the apartment; when returning from the court revel, she bore back nought save smiles and joy—those smiles, and that joy, faded in the dire contrast which met her greeting. More than the dream of jaundiced fancy spoke in the fixed pale features of her friend:
she

she read a tale of woe-fraught meaning; and eagerly did she question, and fearfully did she listen. A burst of tears, and Matilda tried to smile at her own conjured catalogue of ills; a glowing blush strengthened the acknowledgment of her weakness, and Millicent again recovered all her sportiveness.

“Grant me time, and grant me patience,” she exclaimed, in reply to the inquiries of Matilda, “and like a true chronicler, from the moment I parted from your side, will I recount even looks and gestures. Yet I cry pardon; not looks, either; for never can I do justice to the looks of the queen of England! Fancy a creature, more beautiful than aught of breathing earth! fancy the smile of an angel! fancy a mien, so courteous, and so gracious, that it disseminates the benignity within! fancy all that the wildest fancy can encompass; and on my life, then, even then, will you fall short of the outward seeming of
this

this rare Isabel! Never again will I join in the general censure—No, no, she could not nip the hopes of love; she could not be the voluntary alien to duty: she must have been forced, or cozened into foul play; for her eye, the herald of the heart, is all sensibility and innocence!”

“Doubtless, the earl de la Marche thought her so,” observed Matilda. “The firmer the reliance, the keener the perfidy.”

“I cannot couple perfidy with the royal Isabel,” quick rejoined Millicent. “You must see her yourself, Matilda, and you too will acquit of sinister design.”

“Not so,” said Matilda, earnestly: “the wife of king John, as the court of king John, are alike barred to my approach.”

“True; but chance may effect what inclination wills not: like unto my own, your prejudices may fade, as mists in the sunshine.”

sunshine." Matilda only sighed. "But to unthread the court maze," pursued Millicent, after the pause of a moment. "When I joined the baroness of Montfitchett, my face and my bosom were of one livery; for the goblin Fear chased away the blood, and I felt as one on the eve of martyrdom. In vain the baroness strove to reassure; in vain she spoke of the graciousness of the queen, of the latitude of indulgence. As we neared the awful walls of Westminster, my very pulse grew audible, and I would have joyfully pledged my rich court suit to have been safe in the woods of Heringworth. God help me! I scarce know how I mounted the state staircase; and when the names of the baroness of Montfitchett and the lady Millicent de Cantilupe knolled like a church knell—when I crossed into the presence-chamber, even my Quixotic enterprise mingled in the general chaos. The first accent which brought warm life into the breathing

breathing statue, was the sarcasm of a stranger.—‘ Pretty coward, she looks fitter for the mort-cloth.’ I looked up, and met the keen eyes of an antiquated dowager. Pride and spirit wrestled ; my face lost its deathlike hue ; I smiled with something like assurance ; nay, I even dared a glance around : and when I saw many, as young in years, moving with ease and freedom, I blushed for my own rustic shame. The conflict of a moment was repaid with a rich harvest of self-possession. I could mark—I could almost analyze the feelings of the surrounding worldlings—I could peer into their very natures—I could see, how, like giddy moths, they hovered and fluttered within the bright circlet of regal splendour : yes, and home lessons on human degeneracy could I have elicited ; and a whole catalogue of moral aphorisms could I have strung, had not the silver accent of the royal Isabel, rivetted all my thoughts and all my interest.

The

The queen, more lovely than any queen since Helen tempted Troy's destruction! was habited in a velvet robe of purple, embroidered with golden berries; a zone of diamonds clasped her slender waist; and a fillet, sparkling with the like precious gems, partially confined the rich clusters of her beautiful hair! I bent my knee, and she extended a hand whiter than snow: and when I met her full-orbed eye, I traced such beamy softness, such scintillations of her inward spirit, that I felt every thought I had ever harboured to her prejudice, every random word I had ever incautiously uttered, a mortal offence against nature. Yes, dear Matilda, that one glance melted all the ice of policy: had I been unseen by prying eyes, again should I have cast myself at her feet, and besought her to act as she looked—all angel. Doubtless, she marked the fast glowing and fading of my cheek; for she smiled me to her side, and she uttered such sweet words

words of conciliation and favour, that I grew in boldness a very courtier. She asked of the length of my sojourn within the precincts of the palace: and when I measured it to the calls on my loyalty and service, she smiled anew, and all my agitation and all my bashfulness vanished. Well might the king marvel at her beauty; well might he gaze, and adore, and forswear all other; well might he——”

“And the earl de la Marche,” interrupted Matilda.

Millicent looked more than usually grave.—“On my life,” she resumed, “the queen is a victim rather than an auxiliary! Sometimes, like clouds in summer, I saw thought upon her brow: but she lives in the world—and the world spreads bright flowers over the deepest chasms.”

“It may be so,” returned Matilda: “but to smile and look gay, when a dungeon is the boundary, and straw the bed of her once-affianced bridegroom. No, no,

no, I cannot acquit of want of feeling, and want of faith."

"Bear in mind," implored Millicent, eager to exculpate her new idol, "that through life we are the slaves of circumstances; that in the world there is much of treachery and double-dealing; that the earl of Angoulesme sided with the king of England; that art, and persuasion, and perchance menace, severed the bond of early faith. Tarry until you have seen her; tarry until you have heard her, and then——"

"Perchance," again interrupted Matilda, "she may charm my senses also."

"Ay, and lure you to acquittal, whether you will or no," rejoined Millicent.

"Then must I keep clear of the magic circle, nor tempt the hazard, where I know the snare. But proceed, dear Millicent. A true chronicler notes more than the mere bait of perishable beauty."

"True, and I too would note all
which

which merits noting," said Millicent : " but the light nothings of conversation pall upon interest ; and what amid the motley group of the young, the gay, the thoughtless, and the idle, can furnish wheat to the gleaner ? The pressing throng of courtiers, emulous of notice, soon divorced me from the side of the charming queen of the revel ; and attending the baroness of Montfitchett, I returned hither, with no other point achieved, than the certain conviction, that the royal Isabel, needs but the favouring moment, to become, in one, the friend and the rescuer of the injured. And now, I pray you, let's to the terrace : methinks the breeze will blow away the court-haze, for I am sick and weary of form and folly. Heigh-ho ! I would we were both on the banks of the Welland, if only to seek pastime with Adam Morley and my dear nurse !"

As she spoke she rose from the settle ; but scarce had she reached the centre of
the

the chamber, when the chords of a harp sounded from the court-yard below.

“ Gramercy ! but we live in fairy land ! Last-night upon the river ; to-night——”

“ Whist ! whist !” said Matilda, and then she ceased, to listen.

“ Love is like the loveliest rose,
That in the morning sweetest blows ;
Light bending o'er its thorny stem,
And burnish'd with night's dewy gem.

“ And love is like the tallest tree,
That in the forest rises free ;—
For like the tallest tree, love spires,
And dares the blaze of heaven's fires.

“ Love too is like the lowliest flow'r,
That drinks the dew of April show'r ;—
For like the lowliest flower shed,
A smile, as sunshine, rears it head !”

Millicent threw aside the casement ; she looked upon the court-yard below : the still glories of the west were fast disappearing, yet did a ruddy ray seem to linger upon the picturesque figure which
met

met her eye. It was a tall bending form, wrapped in a torn gabardine; his head muffled in a serge cap, and his grizzled beard sweeping to his middle.

“A wandering minstrel,” said Millicent; and quick blowing a silver whistle—(for in those dark days, before the refinement of bells were known in England, the ladies possessed no other means of summoning their domestics)—she ordered him before them.—“I lack pastime,” she pursued; “and for a song, we will barter a dole and a night’s lodging. To the buttery first”—addressing the minstrel—“and then, old man, we crave the grace of a ballad.”

The stranger bowed his head.—“I have broken bread in the cottage, and slacked my thirst in the brook,” he said—“Lady, I await thy bidding.” But though his attention thus seemingly rested on Millicent, his eyes were fixed on the unconscious Matilda.

“Perchance, father”—and Matilda yielded

yielded to all her native sweetness—
 “ you have journeyed far, and need the
 comfort of repose.”

“ Mine has been a life of wandering,”
 feelingly replied the minstrel—“ *Here*,
 lady, my wanderings find rest.” And
 then again he turned towards Millicent,
 and silently bent over his harp.

“ A ballad—I pray you, a ballad, good
 father,” urged Millicent.

“ A ballad,” repeated the stranger,
 musing; “ a ballad, lady, about true
 love.”

“ No, no, about false love,” laughing
 —“ I would that false love be ever con-
 fined to song!”

“ It looks so fair;
 It blooms so brig' t:
 And when you think to gain it quere,
 It fades, and vanishes from sight”—

sung the minstrel.

“ Ay, but that is no ballad,” exclaim-
 ed Millicent. “ I pray you, good father,
 a ballad.”

“ A ballad,

“ A ballad, and upon false love,” again repeated the stranger. “ ’Tis an unfitly theme, fair lady ; yet——” and he struck a few low notes of his harp, and he sung :

“ The sky was dark, the bleak wind howled,
 Along the deary cheerless waste :
Murder beneath the dank cliffs scowled,
And famish’d wolves in anger growled,
 Speeding the wilder’d trav’ler’s haste.

“ Forests of pine in sombre hue,
 On either side their branches spread ;
Beneath whose gloom the darnel grew,
And nightshade steeped in evening dew,
 O’er the lone path their poison shed.

“ And deep and solemn was the sound,
 Of troubled waters dashing high ;—
Waters, whose force a passage found,
Then broke up’n the flinty ground,
 And toss’d their eddies to the sky.

“ Yet onward still poor Agnes press’d,
 And fearful cast her streaming eyes
Around, to seek some place of rest ;
Some cabin fair, in plenty dress’d,
 To hush to rest her troubled sighs.

“ But

“ But still no cot, no roof appear’d ;
 No spiring smoke, no beacon bright ;
 No cheating hope her footsteps steer’d,
 Nor o’er the fearful darkness glared,
 One cheering stream of borrow’d light.

“ Not e’en the starry gem so gay,
 The glow-worm, dappling oft the sod—
 Dispensing round its meteor-ray,
 Which fades before the coming day—
 Varied the path o’er which she trod.

“ Save boding sounds, save funeral yew,
 Nought else was heard—nought else was seen :
 The owlet, screaming as it flew,
 Full many a deathlike echo drew :
 The raven croaked along the green.

“ Poor Agnes wept, and pray’d, and sigh’d ;
 And dropt upon each bead a tear :
 And when, as phantom, swift, she hied,
 Her heart within her bosom died,
 And ev’ry limb was bleach’d with fear.

“ For ah ! a busy train of woes,
 Press’d sore upon her burning brain ;
 Fancy’s wild tumult quick arose,
 Midst which reproach full often grows,
 Mocking calm reason to restrain.

“ And as she eyed the crested moon—
 And as she paused beneath the shade—
 Her fancy peopled wide the gloom,
 With forms, as from the silent tomb,
 By superstition’s magic made.

“ Forms, which on aching mem’ry press’d;
 Forms, which e’en time had ne’er effac’d:
 The sword which pierc’d——”

“ Not of swords—not of murder,” interrupted Millicent. “ Marry! we shall dream of graves, and owls, and nightshade. I pray you, one distich of hope and joy, to savour the doleful ditty.”

“ False love ever doles sorrow and broken hearts,” observed the minstrel. “ ’Tis the last theme I should cull for fair maidens.”

“ Yet would I crave further of the poor Agnes;” and Matilda’s tender heart lived in her eyes.

“ Be it at sunrise then,” said Millicent, gaily, “ when ghosts troop back to churchyards.”

“ And why not now?” urged Matilda—

da—" why not of her sufferings?—why not of her fate? Methinks I could listen until midnight! The sword, good father—I pray you, whose bosom did it pierce?"

The smile and the rich glow upon the cheek of the minstrel, tokened exultation and transport; yet did he bend his eyes upon the ground to hide their fire, as softly he pronounced—" 'Tis fiction, lady; all fiction. Alack! the sword lives oftenest in ladies' eyes."

Millicent laughed outright.—" You are waggish, old gaffer, and deal forth the silken toils of flattery. God-wot, wrinkles and grey hairs suit ill the calling!"

" Not so, lady," eagerly and earnestly. " The dream of my age was the hope of my youth. Mine be the calling of love and chivalry: marvel not, though I burn with the fire I disseminate."

As he spoke, he bent over his harp, and Millicent, with a feeling very like

contrition, drew close beside him.—“ Perchance I tax you heavily,” she said. “ If so, good father, fain would I speed you to rest and peace.”

“ My rest be here, lady ; my peace, to do thy bidding.” And he swept the chords, and he glanced at Matilda, as feelingly he sang :

“ And why does Hope live in a lady’s eye ?
 And why does Joy live in a lady’s smile ?
 Because ’tis her eye gives to Hope its birth ;
 Because ’tis her smile makes the Joy of earth !”

“ Enough ! enough !” exclaimed Millicent. “ To-morrow for a ballad on true love : now, for the buttry and the pallet.”

The minstrel moved towards the door, yet he paused as he reached Matilda.—“ I would sing aught for thee, fair lady,” he said, “ save of false love. ’Tis the blight of the heart, and it bends to the dull cold charnel-house.”

“ Called you not it fable ?” asked Matilda, earnestly.

“ I call

“ I call aught fable save constancy,” replied the stranger—“ constancy,” and he spoke emphatically, “ is a jewel, befitting a monarch’s crown! Adieu, lady! sweet lady, adieu!” And bending with lowly reverence, and softly chanting:

“ Her eye gives to Hope its birth ;
Her smile makes the Joy of earth !”

he quitted the chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.



“ ———— Man—proud man !
 Where lies thy oft boasted supremacy ?
 Where thy famed preeminence ?
 From the monarch, clad in richest ermine,
 E’en to the beggar, clad in poorest rags ;
 Ay, warrior—stoic—sage—the proudest heart,
 Highest mind, and most enlightened genius,
 Woman by turns can sway !”

WITH a mind, pure,

“ ———— As is the early beam
 That lights the glad lark to his matin song,”

Matilda, with that “ early beam,” arose ;
 for the flaky clouds were but newly
 tinged with the saffron glow of morning,
 and many a wreathy vapour still clung
 to the wood-clad banks of the Thames.
 The incident of the preceding night—
 like many a passing incident through
 life—had yielded to weightier matter :
 the

the minstrel and his light song had been obscured by the dark shadows which fate had interwoven in her destiny : she had wept and prayed ; and if her tears had not washed out her sorrow, her prayers had tranquillized her spirit. Perhaps it was the vicissitudes of time and chance which had thus tempered the bitters in her own cup ; for she felt that life was the allotted season of trial, that however prosperous, however adverse, it was removed but a few paces from the tomb. " Grant me grace then," she would aspire, when piously invoking the Giver of all good, " to fulfil thy wise ordinations ! grant me patience in affliction ! grant me humility in joy !"

Often had she mused upon the brighter prospects of Millicent, but never had envy stolen upon her musings : oh no ! her heart was too pure for envy ; her heart, like unto the heart of a little child, knew nought of the guile and the taint of the world. Recollections of the

past, though faint and imperfect, like objects seen through a thick mist, brought with them nought of reproach. Her lips and her soul, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been trained to worship: almost on a mother's bier, had a father's sad ensample schooled to holiness; for midst the bitter starts of frenzy and despair, prayer had been the absolving dew to his sick soul—and now was it the strength and the bulwark of her own tried and chastened spirit. As the spring in the wilderness, however, it lay amid briars and thorns: still had she sought it, and found it, and slackening her thirst at its pure waters, had she arisen, purer, and better braced to vicissitude, and exercised in faith.

The meal of morning quick followed the thanksgiving for a new day: and the baron de Cantilupe, in his study, retired to the perusal of the ghostly fathers of the church; and Millicent and Matilda, in the common avocation of the
dames

dames and maidens of that age, sought a recipe from ennui and listlessness. Many a flower did taste and fancy scatter; and many a form, within the narrow compass of the tapestry-loom, did ingenuity trace: forms, resisting the dark mildew of time, and bearing to succeeding generations, the lasting record of perseverance and industry!

“ Now,” said Millicent, “ that the sun shines upon our labour, and that the song of the birds and the colour of the sky betokens mirth and joy, let us crave the promised ballad. False love first—and true love, to give it savour.” And as she spoke, she summoned a domestic, and ordered the attendance of the minstrel. “ Methinks,” she continued, laughing at her own conceits, “ the old gaffer knows well how to steal into lady’s favour. God-wot! but he flatters with courtly air; and he looks, forsooth, as though his flatteries must pass current!”

“ Perchance,” observed Matilda, “ he

has gleaned his faith among the light and the vain; for his wandering minstrelsy must ever find him favour."

"Marry! but he looked as though he would fain find favour in your eyes," rejoined Millicent. "But for grey hairs, and the load of half a century on his back, I should wage him some knight-errant, in search of his lady love."

"And I," feelingly remarked Matilda, "should wage him one, whose whole life had been as a dream; and who, even now, treading on the very remnant of life, still chases shadows, and clings to illusion."

"Belike," said Millicent, "his has been a youth of idleness and song; or, he may have smarted beneath the sting of false love: for said he not—it was *the blight of the heart*;—and called he not *constancy, a jewel, befitting a monarch's crown*? Now, I wage his hopes to have been nipped by the frost of unkindness, and the enemy who doomed his
his

mystery," said the wondering Millicent: then, as though struck by some sudden possibility, she rose hastily to seek him herself, but the baron stood in the doorway.

"Tarry, dearest," he said; "it is not worth the effort. If thy bounty could not stay the wanderer, let him go, and peace go with him!"

"But 'tis so strange, so very strange," pursued Millicent. "Yester-even, when we dismissed him hence, he promised to sing to us on the morrow. On my life, I can but think some mischief has befallen him! So old, so infirm, so ill fashioned for night-journeying, doubtless——"

"In the dusk of twilight I saw him myself cross the court-yard," interrupted the baron; "and he moved, with a step, lighter and firmer than my own."

"Dearest father!" and Millicent looked incredulously towards him.

"Ay, neither did I trace any limp in
his

his gait, or any single token of infirmity," resumed the baron: "and I saw him hasten through the back postern, leading to the banks of the river; and then——"

The servant returned.—"My lord," he said, "the minstrel fled away at the instant he quitted the hall. The porter watched him to the water's edge; he saw him joined by a tall youth, who took the harp upon his own shoulder, and who stepped after him into a boat, long hovering within hail."

"Then must he be a spy upon us," exclaimed Millicent; "and sure am I, he acted well the part of age and helplessness."

"A spy upon our domestic movements," said the baron, smiling incredulously. "But what augurs the fair Matilda?"

Matilda awoke as from profound thought.—"God alone readeth the heart of man," she observed; then, with forced pleasantry—

pleasantry—"Perchance, my lord, some light jest, fashioned in an idle hour. Should he come again——"

"Then will we sift whether it be jest or earnest," interrupted the baron, "for I too will listen to his minstrelsy."

But the day passed, and the night shades gathered, and no music broke upon the stillness. Millicent and Matilda paced the high terrace, until the moon, in full splendour, silvered all of earth: they marked many a boat gliding o'er the stream, and they heard the ripple of the tide, and the splash of oars, and the song of boatmen, yet did no single casualty arise to intimidate or perplex. The evening waned as do the evenings in every-day existence; for they met at the supper-board, and they joined in the nightly thanksgiving, and they sought, with gratitude to Heaven, their pillows of peace:—for however thought and youthful speculation might make their pillows sleepless, never had they been
strewed

strewed with the spirit-killing thorns of self-reproach.

The morrow brought with it change and fresh pursuits : for in this life of vicissitude, who can build upon the morrow ?—who can say, the morrow is my own, and I will parcel it out to my own seeming ? The sound of horse-hoofs echoed in the court-yard, and a gay courier from the palace at Westminster, bore greeting to the lady Millicent. It was a summons to the presence of the royal Isabel—and it was couched in terms of fairest show—and quick did it revive, within the feeling bosom of Millicent, all those warm and wild hopes, which had speeded her from Heringworth.

“ The sun of fortune smiles,” she whispered, clasping Matilda in adieu. “ Anon, may its bright beams, pierce within the gloom of Corfe Castle ! I go with rescue in my heart. Pray for me—pray for the earl de la Marche.”

If

If in the full blaze of majesty, hemmed in with all of pride, and state, and human grandeur, the youthful queen of England beamed so fair and peerless; descending from that state, despoiled of external colouring, and mingling in the lighter avocations of life, more fair, more peerless, did she break upon the enrapt senses of Millicent. She spoke, and her voice was sweet, as the Eolian harp, sighing midst the breeze of summer; she smiled, and she looked more of heaven than earth! Once she referred to her father, and to her father's court; and her smile vanished, and a half sigh heaved the snow of her bosom. She spoke of the hours of giddy youth, as of the season replete with all that is joyous; and she likened it to the seed-time in vegetation—"For then," she softly articulated, "in the wheat, or the tares, do we sow the weal or the woe of our future lives."

Millicent could scarcely breathe; her
eyes

eyes were fixed upon the beautiful features of the unconscious Isabel, and every pulse in her frame throbbed with irrepressible emotion. Now was the moment for adventure; yet as she glanced upon the attendant ladies, the effort rose and died upon her lips.

“Thinkest thou, lady Millicent,” asked the queen, rallying back her cheerfulness, “our good city of Westminster savours of more pleasantry than the woods of Heringworth? Marry, but I would fain charm thee into our fairy circle, and keep thee a willing homager!”

“My heart and my duty need no charm to bind me to thy service, gracious lady,” said Millicent.

“Yet could I wish a spell,” rejoined the queen. “Think well, maiden: lurks there no gallant knight to aid my purpose? Men call love, light as air, and subtle as fire. Beshrew me, but I would press his godship to bind thee to our service! Let’s see—let’s count”—and the royal

royal Isabel playfully numbered with her ivory fingers—"There is Aubery de Vere, earl of Oxford; and Hugh de Neville, chief warden of my lord the king's forests; and Saher de Quincy, earl of Winchester; and my lord chief justice, Geoffry Fitzpier; ay, and William de Brotham, warden of the cinque ports; and——"

"God-o-mercy!" interrupted Millicent, "but your grace lacks not auxiliaries. One, and please your majesty"—and her blush deepened at that remembered *one*—"is better fitting than a thousand."

"Then there is one," quick returned the queen. "Good betide us! but that telltale crimson tokens of enthrallment. Be brief, damsel; where bides the gallant?"

"Beseech you, gracious madam!" faltered Millicent; and deeper and deeper grew the roses of her cheek.

"Nay—nay, confess," urged the royal Isabel—

Isabel—"lurketh he in the bowers of Heringworth? or pays he present duty to my lord the king? By our Lady, and we will bear thee through the gale of sighs, and steer thee safe into the port of Hymen! Grant us confidence, and my liege and husband will do our bidding."

Millicent looked up, and she met the beamy eyes of the queen rivetted upon her.—"Think not we banter," pursued the beautiful Isabel. "On my life, be he right noble, or be he the lowliest knight that ever wielded sword, we will instal him next our person, and pour upon him the earnest of our grace."

She paused, but Millicent continued silent; her heart was full, and modesty and gratitude chained her tongue.

"Belike," resumed the queen, "love runs counter to the policy of greybeards. Alack! in the world 'tis often thus. Youth rears a paradise of its own; and age, with his cold, cold breath, blows down the structure."

"Not

“Not so! not so! my sovereign lady,” exclaimed Millicent.

“Then deal us forth the truth—the very truth,” urged the queen; “and before Halimass-eve, wage we that he join our revel.”

“Impossible!” artlessly pronounced Millicent. “This coming feast of All-saints, together with my brother George, he keepeth vigil in St. Edmund’s-bury church.”

The arch smile of the playful Isabel awakened her to her tacit acknowledgment, and bowing her head upon her bosom, she shook back her flaxen locks in very bashfulness.

“Heed not, maiden,” said the queen, pitying her confusion. God-wot, the virgin heart is ever chary of love’s secrets! Time has been”—and something like care stole as a cloud o’er her brow—“when I dealt in the like mystery, and bowed to the like ordinance; and time may be”—rallying back the lightning of her
her

her smile—"when, like unto my own, all thy mysteries may set in wedlock."

"I know nought of mystery—I disclaim all of mystery," eagerly rejoined Millicent. "Gracious lady, my father, my own father, sanctions the visits of the lord Eudo de la Zouch:—and beyond the lord Eudo de la Zouch, I know none whose presence yields me pastime."

"Enough—enough," said the queen, laughing. "Preserve thy secret, maiden: and when, in matronly mood, thou cravest grace at the hands of our liege the king, be it through my mediation."

"Secret!" faltered the confused Millicent—"indeed, and in very truth, I have no secret." Then suddenly awakening to the romantic calling which speeded her from Heringworth, and glowing with all her native energy—"I cry your mercy, royal lady: there is a secret—a secret, gendered in your grace's gentleness,

gentleness, and solely fitted to your gracious ear."

"A secret, and in the keeping of a woman!" gaily repeated the queen. "Gramercy! my lord and husband would ask how long it could remain one! But men, forsooth, are sorry railers, and prize not half our excellence! But now the secret"—and the queen drew close beside her.

Millicent felt her very heart tremble.—"Alack! 'tis no jest," she murmured. "Much—much hangs on the issue."

"Speak it then," urged the royal Isabel, marvelling at an emotion which each moment gathered stronger.—"Tush!" after the pause of a moment, "thou art a poor petitioner. Thinkest thou, I lack the power, or the will?"

"God grant me eloquence!" aspirated the trembling Millicent: then turning to the queen, and lowering her voice to a whisper—"Good, your grace!" she faltered out—"The poor captive, whose
heavy

heavy burden I would fain cast at your royal feet—the suffering prisoner, now gasping out youth and strength in the dark dungeons of——”

At that instant the door flew open, and unannounced, the king strode into the apartment. His step was perturbed, his visage inflamed, and a hundred deaths seemed to ride upon the thunder of his brow. The queen uttered a fearful cry. “Alas! what ails my lord?”

“‘Treason—treachery in the state!’ exclaimed the enraged John. “Le Brun, my hated, my detested foe, has escaped my vengeance: e’en when the block was chiselled, and the axe sharpened, he is gone—he is fled!”

“Fled!” echoed the queen, and her look betokened aught save sorrow.

Millicent uttered no sound, but she pressed tight upon her heart, to keep down its rapturous throbbings.

“Fled from Corfe Castle,” pursued the king—“fled from that hold of strength—

strength—fled away from my power! But woe betide the governor! woe betide the garrison!” and his look was fiend-like, and his voice as the melancholy death-knell.

“What means my lord and husband?” asked the queen, quailing in very terror.

“Mean,” thundered the king—“by heaven—by hell, I mean to raise such a pile to vengeance, as shall make Corfe Castle dreadful to look upon! I mean to empale the governor, to empale the whole garrison—to immolate a thousand lives in the stead of Hugh le Brun.”

“Mighty God!” ejaculated the queen, and her limbs trembled, and her cheeks faded to marble.

“I mean,” continued the incensed John, heedless of her agony, “to hold up a terror to the world—to shew, that it were safer to bay the galled lion, than to trifle with the thunderbolt of power.”

The queen sprung forward—she cast herself

herself at his feet—she wildly clasped his knees.—“ Forbear—forebear, my honoured lord,” she implored. “ Let mercy savour justice. Build up a monument, to honour, not to execrate.”

“ Isabel,” exclaimed the king, “ why do I see you thus? Rise; I command you, rise.”

“ Not until thou art quite thyself again,” quick rejoined the queen, striving to lure him into gentleness. “ Good, my liege, but thou hast wellnigh scared me out of dear life.”

“ Rise, my Isabel.” And spite of every discordant feeling, he stooped to caress her.

“ No — no; not until thou grantest grace to the poor worms thou threatenest to annihilate; not until thou hast beamed forth the sunshine of thy favour upon the governor and the garrison of Corfe Castle. Promise me, my most dear lord; promise——”

“ Never!” interrupting, and scowling

on her a glance of suspicion and alarm. "On thy soul, be wary, if thou wishest well to thyself. Stir not the hell within me," and he gnawed his lip, and he stood sullenly silent.

"How, my lord, wouldst thou shed a sea of blood for the trespass of a single one? the innocent for the guilty—the unoffending for the daring?" and she looked imploringly in his face.

"Ay, by God's head!" (the king's usual oath) "a charnel-house would I make of all England."

"What if thou couldst pounce upon the aggressor," eagerly questioned the shuddering Isabel, "wouldst thou redeem a host?"

"Body-o'-me, but thou art strangely urgent!" said the king, steadfastly regarding her; then, with a sarcastic sneer—"Bear to me the rebel, and the thousand lives be thine."

"Swear it to me," exclaimed the queen; and enthusiasm kindled such a
fire

fire in her eyes, and shed such a vivid bloom o'er her features, that she looked more spiritual than earthly.

“ I swear it by thy own heavenly beauty—by the love I bear thee!” pronounced the royal John, charmed even in a moment like the present, and forcibly lifting her to his bosom.

“ Nay, dear, my lord, this posture best becomes me,” and struggling for freedom, the queen slid back upon her knees, and again cast around him her white and polished arms. “ Promise me—swear to me, that all, that every one shall escape; and I—even I, will yield up the culprit.”

The king looked incredulous. “ Pshaw, Isabel! thou knowest thy power, or thou wouldst not thus trifle with my patience. I'the name of thrift be brief, for I like not such mummery!”

“ On my hopes of heaven,” said the queen, solemnly, “ I guarantee nought save what I can fulfil!”

The king started back.—“Speak—I command you, speak.”

“First the pledge—the royal gage of indemnity to the governor and the garrison of Corfe Castle,” urged the heroic Isabel. “Then—then, my lord,” and she bowed her beautiful head, “may God help the aggressor!”

“Name him—yield him to my vengeance,” vociferated the enraged John, “that I may mount him high as was the gallows of Haman! Ay, though he be my own blood;” and his thoughts glanced on his half-brother, William earl of Salisbury.

“First,* the indemnity,” demanded the queen. “Swear pardon, full and entire pardon, to the governor and to the garrison of Corfe Castle; swear too, my most dread lord, never, in aftertime, to pour on them the vial of bosomed wrath.”

“I do—I do,” impatiently pronounced king John. “By our halidom—by
the

the blood of the martyrs, I swear to spare all other—to glut all my vengeance upon the one daring rebel! Name him—name him!”

The queen spoke not, but from her knees she cast herself prostrate at his feet; her lovely face was deluged in tears; and she lay, low, and still, and humble, as a penitent before the host.

“Name him! name him!” urged the king, regardless of her emotion, and thirsting for revenge.

“The rebel lies before ye,” faltered out Isabel; then, half raising her face, and glancing through her dark locks—
“’Twas I who filed the chains—’twas I who opened the prison-doors—’twas I who gave life and freedom to Hugh le Brun.”

Deep as is the still calm which succeeds the roar of the tempest, was the pause which ensued; yet was it the pause of a moment.—“Traitor, thou liest!” thundered the king—“How, here at

Westminster, could thy power reach Corfe Castle? Think not to stay my fury: tenfold shall it fall, e'en to the annihilation of a kingdom."

Roused by an accusation so opprobrious, the queen looked boldly up, her transcendent beauty heightening in the fire which sparkled in her eyes.—“Beware, my lord,” she adjured, “how you punish faithful subjects, for an act I alone have committed. Behold in me the rebel to your will. Enabled by the royal signet, 'twas I who gave liberty to Hugh le Brun;—for even in your grace's arms the blood of Hugh le Brun had been as an accusing phantom, rising to the judgment-seat. I laboured for his rescue—I removed him from the vengeance—not in defiance to your high authority, but to spare myself the hereafter pang of conscience.”

“False! false as hell!” muttered the king. “Conscience be the ready cloak to muffle love;” and his cheek grew
ghastly

ghastly pale, and his limbs shook with rage and inward jealousy.

“ Oh, say not so! say not so, good, my lord!” implored the politic Isabel, striving to regain that ascendancy her matchless beauty had acquired. “ What can the *chosen* husband fear in the *rejected* lover! Think of my father’s court—think of the past—think of the bright days which gave me to your notice! No—no! had I loved this Hugh le Brun, never had I been the happy mother of our darling Harry!—had I loved this Hugh le Brun,” and she raised her melting eyes in soft appeal, “ who had snapped the rivet forged in infancy? God-wot! I love the father of my boy! woe is me! I love one who loved me once; now—now——” She bent her face upon her bosom of snow, and tears, pendent upon her silken lashes, like dew upon the rose-bud, chased slowly down her glowing cheeks.

Not in the season of virgin bashful-

ness, not when hemmed round by the lawful claims of another, not when baited with novelty—that genuine spur to human passion—had she looked more captivating, had she been a prize more to be coveted. The king gazed upon her until every discordant feeling softened within him, until his heart yearned to give her solace, to kiss away those tears, to lure her to its shelter: for cold as he was, and dead as he was to generous feeling, he loved her with a fervour worthy a nobler mind; loved her as needful to his own happiness, prized her as a dearer part of himself. Scarce conscious of the action, he stretched forth his arms—“Woman—woman!” he murmured, “thou most seductive poison; sweet and baleful from the first!” Yet did he clasp with passion his own Eve, whilst glancing at man’s original fall.

The queen felt her power; now was the moment to essay all her witchery, for she read almost idolatry in the glance
of

of her yielding lord.—“ And wilt thou quite forgive me, love? and wilt thou never more scare me with such naughty words?” and she looked, and she spoke, with almost infantine simplicity.

“ Forgive thee! enchantress! angel!” and again he snatched her to his breast.

“ But the treason,” urged the beautiful Isabel, returning his caresses, and fondling him into smiles—“ wilt thou forgive the treason?—and wilt thou, my most dear lord, grant grace to the poor traitor?”

“ Ay, to the one half of my kingdom,” answered the doting John.

“ No, no, nought of thy kingdom,” quick rejoined Isabel: “ my guerdon be thy whole and undivided heart.”

“ ’Tis thy lawful heritage,” replied the king; then stroking back her dark ringlets, and fondly perusing her ivory brow, “ God’s truth! thou wert a bold traitor, dear one! In any other form the trespass had been death.”

“Marry!” said the queen, gaily, “I did but rend away the only ill which could reach me in thy arms. I scorned, forsooth, that the prattling world should bandy thy great name; that it should dare say in cold blood thou didst murder the once-betrothed husband: and so—and so——” and steadfastly she watched him as she spoke—“I grew bold in thy love, and I stole away thy royal signet, and peradventure, now does the prisoner believe he owes life to thy generous forbearance.”

“Thinks he not—dreams he not, that thou wert the medium?” eagerly interrogated the king.

“Oh no! how should he, my own dear lord, when he knows me the blessed mother of England’s heir? He believes, in very truth, that thou art right noble—too noble to crush a fallen foe: and he fled away from Corse Castle, and he quitted the isle of Purbeck, lauding, in thy

thy name, a great and magnanimous victor!"

"And thy emissary?" questioned John, willing to sift all of the adventure.

The queen raised her dewy eyes to his face.—"Sure thou wilt not play me false," she said.

"No, on my soul!" exclaimed the king. "Come, unravel the mystery to the end."

Isabel mused for a moment, then, with trusting confidence—"Call to mind, my liege," she resumed, "the pretty boy, who used to bear love-tokens from thy dear hand; he, who speeding on Cupid's errantry, beguiled absence with rare and cunning devices; he, who——"

"What, Julian? thy pretty page Julian, my own Isabel?"

"The same, good my lord! the little Julian, who bore us fellowship to England."

"And didst thou corrupt his fealty? and didst thou teach him to play with

fire, heedless of the tax?" and the king tried to look reproach—"didst thou——"

Isabel placed her soft white hand upon his lips. — "Tarry," she implored, "and thou shalt hear how I cheated him too into service. On my life, Julian believed himself thy messenger!"

"How! hast thou made me the hero of all thy strange wild plots?"

"The hero to the furtherance of thy own renown and honour!" replied the queen. "Presuming on thy especial love and favour," and sweetly she smiled as she spoke, "on the wings of the wind, I dispatched Julian into Dorsetshire. Once within the walls of Corfe Castle, thy purloined signet hushed to sleep the suspicion of the governor:—it opened the door of the keep:—and when yesternight, with spirit-like swiftness, Julian again appeared before me, I felt grateful and thankful; for in the known safety of the earl de la Marche,

no hereafter remorse could cloud my happy prosperous destiny."

"Remorse!" echoed the king: "how, in the fall of a rebellious foe, could remorse attain thy innocence?"

"I feared it—I felt it," sighed Isabel. "Belike I am very weak, but well I knew myself the cause of mutual enmity. Alack! his death, at thy hands, my most dear lord, had been my scourge for life: nought had chased the appalling fear of his accusing spirit; no, no, not even thy caresses had stayed the canker within. I had drooped away—I had died away: like the rose in autumn, I had withered even in thy dear arms."

The king shuddered at the mere sketch of such a picture: the young and blooming Isabel was as the sun of his life: and the transit of that sun, had made his life rayless.

"Now," continued the queen, deciphering all which passed within, and rallying

rallying the light smile of playful mirth ; for smiles, like the fresh flowers scattered o'er the dead, full oft belie the corruption within—" now, come what may, I care not. In God's good time—on land—or sea—let him die ! My conscience is light, and my heart happy !"

During this painful and agitating explanation, Millicent had shrunk away to the far-end of the apartment : she feared to betray the joy at her heart ; for joy had stilled the storm within her ; joy had chased the fast-scudding clouds of doubt and dread. In the preservation of the earl de la Marche, a weight of lead was removed from her spirits ; in the rescue of the earl de la Marche, respect, admiration, almost enthusiastic homage, lighted on his rescuer ! Often, amid the clash of words and the thunder of altercation, did she raise her pale face and trembling hands to heaven ; often, did she inwardly invoke the divine Appeaser of the wind and of the waves,
alike

alike miraculously to appease the wind and the waves of an obdurate heart, to soften nature, to yield compassion in the stead of harshness! In the omnipotence of love she had seen the change she prayed; for the gall of hate softened to honey, the declamations of revenge transformed to gentleness, almost to commendation! She had seen the royal Isabel, from the lowest prostration, elevated to the bosom of her lord, submission accepted, fears stilled, griefs changed to exultation; she had seen content and harmony re-dawn, confidence and trust reestablished: and when the queen motioned her forward; when the king courteously greeted her advance; when, in ready obedience, she half bent her knee to offer homage, she shrunk not from the gallantry which stayed her, from the lips which called the blood back into her cheeks:—for in the plausible manners, in the graceful person, in the comely countenance of the monarch, she traced

traced nought to identify him with the cruel, calculating, systematic tyrant, rumour had steeped in a die of ink. She read nought of murder on his brow, nought of crime in his visage; his smile was the smile of graciousness, his look of conciliation. She forgot, that the snare, deepest hid, tends to the surest destruction; that the chasm, o'errun with flowers, veils but the pass to death!

CHAPTER IX.

“Life, as a waveless calm, glides smoothly on with many. Many, tossed amid the breakers of chequered destiny, own scarce a respite from storm. So striking is the dissimilarity of human fate; so vast the inequality of human trial!”

“SURE,” mused Matilda, as she listened to the strange recital of Millicent, “the hand of Heaven speaks in this deliverance!”

ance! The earl de la Marche, rescued from the power of his relentless foe, and rescued too by her who blighted all the hopes of love and youth—her, who, for a higher, richer suitor, broke her promise, and forswore her faith. Strange world! strange inconsistency! strange paradox in human nature! perchance the murderer may close his eyes to the blood which stains his victim.”

“’Tis never too late to repent—never too late to offer reparation,” said Millicent, deciphering the current of her thoughts. “The royal Isabel felt herself the aggressor, and she laboured to redress, even to the peril of life.”

“God be praised!” ejaculated Matilda, and then she closely questioned; but Millicent could narrate nought, save that the captive had quitted Corfe Castle, and fled in safety from England.—“Oh that I had the wings of a dove,” sighed Matilda, after a deep pause, “that I could flee away to France, and unreach
the

the mystery which involves me and mine !”

“ Think you,” asked Millicent, “ the earl de la Marche could throw light on the mystery ?”

“ Alack ! I know not what to think ; and yet I can do nought save think,” replied Matilda. “ The signet-ring, the gift of the unknown palmer,” and she sighed heavily as she spoke, “ could open a pass to all and each of the confederate nobles : he himself moved in the train of the earl de la Marche ; and he bade my dear father to the camp at Loches ; and he said—for deeply is each word engraven here,” pressing her hand upon her heart—“ that they should meet in the camp at Loches, and that in the camp at Loches, they should know each other better. Sure, then, ’tis no marvel that I associate my dear father with the earl de la Marche.”

“ ’Tis an association, possible, but not positive,” observed Millicent : “ yet, dearest

dearest Matilda, thought is a foe to peace, and where thought lightens not one jot the burden, 'tis vain and witless to woo it."

"Thine be the language of the happy," said Matilda. "Ah, woe is me! the sad heart is ill fashioned to the guise of cheerfulness."

"The language of interest, the language of friendship," quick rejoined Millicent; "friendship, which would fain rally smiles until they grew habitual. How know we but the storm has spent itself! how know we, but our messenger to the white monks of Cisteaux, may prove the precursor of joy!"

"The bow has indeed appeared in the heavens in thy sympathy!" exclaimed the grateful Matilda. "But for——"

"Ay," interrupted Millicent, "and the sun will yet buffet all the congregated clouds, and the future will dawn brighter and fairer in the contrast. Be of good faith—be of good cheer—I augur

gur a rare gleaning of embryo blessings! Marry, and a cheerful spirit to boot!" and playfully she kissed the cheek of the mourner.

Matilda tried to smile, but it was a wretched counterfeit, for the pang at her heart felt to reproach the effort.—“ In God’s good time,” she murmured. “ His unerring wisdom worketh all things according to his will !”

“ And now,” said Millicent, anxious to lure from the dismal monotony of home-trouble, “ we may hie back to Herringworth : our mission accomplished, every court-charm fadeth. I long to hail that dear little nook of earth, to revisit its green bowers, to return to its happy serenity. I have loved it from my cradle—I shall love it to my grave.”

“ Think you the queen will absolve from further attendance?” asked Matilda.

“ I think,” quick replied Millicent, “ that I shall not be missed, among the
swarm

swarm of ephemera buzzing around the flame of royalty. I think, that I may shrink back into obscurity, as though I had never emerged from shade."

"Then you judge light of the heart of this rare Isabel."

"I judge her heart, good and pure, as flattery and parasitical praise will let it; but I judge her like unto all elevated to a height so dazzling: I judge her shut away from truth, and living in the haze of illusion and error."

"Yet has she fortitude; yet has she evinced feeling," said Matilda.

"I bless God," energetically pronounced Millicent, "the earl de la Marche lives to prove it! But for the world: the world, says the sisters of St. Mary de la Pree, is as a fiery ordeal, and prosperity, the fiercest, keenest furnace. They compare to a tumultuous sea, the snares and dangers which beset us here: they say, that the grandeur and delights of this life, are but as rocks, threatening
wide

abjured the restraints and laws of cold ceremony; though, in her heart, she shrunk away from the outward forms of tyrant etiquette; though her thoughts and her wishes turned to Heringworth, and her fancy pictured the fields and the bowers of Heringworth greener and brighter than other fields and other bowers—still, engagement claimed her attention, and novelty lured her acquiescence. Then, as now, inventive genius laboured for pleasurable pastimes; then, as now, was the richest gift of God to man, frittered with thoughtless criminal prodigality: for alas! in all ages, “Time, the moveable image of immoveable eternity,” holds fearful record of our ways: dipped in a die, lasting as the base of earth, he parcels forth each hour lost; and though small be the charge of positive crime, woful be the list of negative insufficiency! Then, as now, did the great and the prosperous, the statesman and the warrior, descend to light and care-killing

killing diversion: for however forms may vary, substance remains the same; and the joust and the carousal, the tilt-yard, the sports of the ring, masking and mumming, did but precede the far less varied and more despotic calls of modern fashion!

But vain was the carousal and the tilt; vain the masking and mumming: Matilda, absorbed in her own peculiar cares, and nursing "sad fancies," even to the detriment of peace and health, resisted all importunity to emerge from seclusion. Though in the environs of the great metropolis of England, save upon devotional calls, she quitted not that home retirement, which, in all situations; and in all seasons, inclination may command. A recluse, almost in the purlieus of the court, the romantic woods embosoming the baron de Cantilupe's temporary dwelling, was as a boundary even to fancy; for never did fancy follow the gay votaries of pleasure, or
light

light within the haunts of the thoughtless and the happy : alas, no ! her fancy was steeped in a dye ill suited to her age : scarce in the full bloom of her summer, her fancy hung around her the sable colourings of bereavement and woe : the blood which had been shed—the battles which had been fought, crowding upon her sick brain, felt to yield dire solution to the silence of husband and father. If for a moment hope brightened in the anticipated return of the messenger from the white monks of Cisteaux, it brightened, as does the sickly flame of the nearly-spent taper, to flash one yellow faint deceptive colouring, and then to fall and die. The messenger did return ; but he bore not healing on his wing ; he stayed not the gnawing vulture of suspense : a written document from the abbot of St. Mary's monastery witnessed the due performance of his mission ; but that document shed no light on the fearful blank of the present.

present. It spoke interest and feeling ; it spoke a heart alive to the sorrows and vicissitudes of those still toiling amid the fierce and counter-currents of the world ; it spoke the necessity of resignation, the blessing of true piety ; it spoke too of the return of Walter to his own dwelling, his anguish at the loss of her he sought, his speedy departure to rejoin the forces of Philip Augustus, and his consignment of her—should Heaven will her return to the haunts of her infancy—to the proffered protection and guardianship of the duchess Constantia.

“ But,” wrote the holy man, “ circumstances absolve even from the fulfilment of a father’s wish. The duchess Constantia owns no safety for herself: buffeted and blown by court storms, the victim of policy and state-trick, like the patriarch’s dove, she wanders o’er the wide deluge which has swallowed up her hopes, nor finds one resting-spot of earth. Tarry then, my daughter, beneath

neath the fostering care of those Christian friends whom God has vouchsafed to thy helplessness; tarry, and pray for thy father, pray for the disasters of mankind: for war is as a scourge upon the earth, turning all its teeming harvests into bitterness; war, like unto the serpent-rod of Moses, lets loose upon the wilful and the disobedient the full measure of divine wrath. I too will pray, and fast, and mortify the outward flesh; for wofully does the inward spirit bleed at the mighty inundation of crime and sorrow—I will pray too for thee, my poor daughter; for here, in life, never is our sky free from clouds; and thy sky, amid the world, must full often be visited with tempests. Alas! the world is a great theatre, replete with treachery and deception: at a distance, dazzling with false light, it looks as a garden of gay flowers; near, it proves a brake of thorns. Use it with discretion and moderation; use it to thy present renown

and thy hereafter glory, and thy pass through it will be crowned with blessedness! Live with heaven in thy eyes—live, dear child, as one who liveth but to die—who dieth to live in a joyful eternity! May the God of compassion vouchsafe to thee his divine spirit! may he mercifully visit thee with his grace, and preserve thee in his holy keeping! Adieu! greeting thee with apostolic benediction, this twenty-sixth of October, 1214.

“ MARK FITZ-ACORY,
“ Abbot of the white monks of Cisteraux.”

“ Alas!” mused Matilda, “ my sky is indeed replete with clouds and tempest.” For bitterly, in this written scroll, did she mourn the dire failure of her hopes: perhaps her hopes had been erected upon sand; certain, they had cozened her into the possibility of coming happiness, and their seeming wreck, felt as a blow,
heavy

heavy and almost irremediable. Her father had sought her once—the palmer, never: weeks, months, had flown away, and the dreadful conviction teemed with death.

“ Virgin Mother, support me—preserve me !” she aspirated, as her thoughts flew back to the parting promises of her bridegroom, to the fond clasp of his adieu, to his oft-breathed assurances of return: tears deluged her cheeks; sobs swelled her bosom; the world was indeed a brake of thorns, for in the whole world, she saw nought, save the graves of those she loved. “ Yes, for both—for both will I pray; for father, for husband—I will pray too for myself; pray, to support, with Christian resignation, the wretchedness of my destiny.”

It was the fast of St. Simon and St. Jude, and close wrapped in a deep veil, and entering a closed litter, Matilda repaired to the cathedral of St. Paul. She wished to prostrate herself in meek

and sorrowing humility, to offer up the free-will sacrifice of a bruised and bleeding spirit, to pour out her whole soul at the footstool of the Eternal, and to deprecate the weighty judgment, which her own impatience, under trial, had she feared called down.

A brilliant sun, fast dipping beneath a glorious canopy of gold and purple, reflected his dying beams upon the stained panes of the cathedral, as she descended from the litter. Her heart, her mind, was full, and clinging to the arm of an attendant damsel, heedless of surrounding objects, she hastened forward. As she entered the aisle, and advanced amidst the sacred and awful gloom, the deep full swell of the organ rose on the air; quick followed the psalmody of the choristers; and soon, listening to the holy chant, was every sensation lost in the rhapsody of devotion.

The vesper-service closed, and the monks, one by one, departed from the church.

church. Still Matilda knelt upon the cold pavement; her hands clasped; her head resting on the light tracery of a shrine; her spirit divorced from earth: her veil had fallen back, and her lovely features, fixed in melancholy absorption, and seen through the imperfect haze of twilight, looked as the chiselled effigy of the mouldering dust below! She noted not the slow departure of the congregation; she noted not the fear-bleached countenance of the maiden who bore her fellowship: every feeling, every perception, was converged in one; if in life, it was for the preservation—if in death, it was for the souls of her father, of her husband, for which she prayed.

Deeper and deeper grew the shadows, but the sepulchral gloom around possessed no terrors save to the happy. Matilda dreamt not of the beings of another world; dreamt not of the freed spirits, said to hover in mid air and haunt the

M 4 darkness:

darkness : it was her own blighted hopes which lived in imagination ; it was the peculiar colour of her own sorrows, which banished even the inroads of superstition. She knelt, until a sigh, deep and fluttering, arose, as from the shrine ; until a wild cry broke from the lips of her trembling attendant ; she looked up—she traced the dark outline of a human form resting against the butment of an arch immediately before her. It seemed close wrapped in a long cloak, and the head and face were muffled, as though in a cowl.

“ Fear not,” she whispered, upholding the terrified Beatrice. “ ’Tis some wounded spirit, like unto my own, seeking solace in self-commune and in prayer.” She ceased, and a second sigh, heavier and more broken than the former, rose in the stillness : again Beatrice shrieked, but the figure moved not.

“ Let us away—let us away,” implored

ed the terrified girl. "Holy Jesu! in such a spot—at such an hour!" and she clung to the arm of Matilda, and buried her face in her cloak.

"Perchance," said Matilda, anxious to reassure, "'tis some mourner keeping vigil near the rest of the honoured dead. Take heart, good Beatrice: 'tis for the guilty to scare with conjured phantoms; the innocent wear a shield in the justness of their intentions. Here, in this house of God; here——"

"Matilda!" pronounced a voice.

It was a voice which thrilled through every nerve, and scarcely conscious of the movement, Matilda sprung forward; but when she had gained the spot which the figure had occupied the moment before, the spot was deserted; she glanced around, but she saw it not; she listened, but she heard it not: "like a spirit of heaven, that descends from the skirt of winds," it had vanished amid surrounding gloom. A universal trembling

seized her—her heart quickened—her very temples throbbed, as she clung to the butment against which the figure had rested; yet was it the indecision of a moment: the hysteric cry of Beatrice aroused her to fortitude and to action, and wrestling down the numbing influence of superstition, she soon regained that self-possession which “goodness bosoms ever.”

Long was it ere the oft-urged assurances of support and safety could rouse the terrified Beatrice; she feared to move, yet more she feared to stay; the visitant of another world resolved the seeming horror, and every single sighing of the night-wind, sweeping through the long dark arches, peopled them anew with strange unearthly images.

Almost lifting her from the ground, spite of her wild start and wilder cry, Matilda hurried forward, and nearly had they gained the entrance gate, when the same dun form, glided down a side aisle,
and

and disappeared through a low doorway. The movement was soundless; the figure tall and spectral; but the reclosing door brought life and strength back to the sinking heart of Matilda.

“A sinner, like unto ourselves!” she exclaimed. “Look up, poor trembler: the door had not opened for shadow—the door had not closed upon shadow. Perchance, some father of the church, some penitent——”

“The name—the name,” faltered Beatrice. “Oh, lady! said he not *Matilda*? Blessed Mary! I shall remember it to my dying hour.”

Matilda shuddered; wistfully did she look towards the door through which the figure had departed: he had indeed called upon her name, and it seemed as though some strange concatenation linked their destinies. Could it be her father?—could it be her husband? The thought, the possibility, shot like electric fire through her brain; panting for

solution, she darted from the side of Beatrice, and the next instant burst open the door. But alas! the heavens, and the earth, and the surrounding dwellings of religion, alone met her gaze: all was still, as the burial-ground into which the door opened; and the burial-ground, in itself, at such an hour, and in such a season, was ample field for melancholy musing:—for who can behold the rest of all flesh, and not feel our slender hold upon life and all its vain and perishable possessions?—who can gaze upon the monumental tablet, on the tufted hillock, alike noting the rest of departed man, and not exclaim, in the sublime language of scripture—“In the midst of life we are in death?”

Disappointed and heart-struck, Matilda drew back into the church, her mind a prey to perplexity and horror, and ill fashioned to comfort and to reassure; yet did she strive to still the terrors of Beatrice, and to reason
down

down the wild absurdities of her fancy: again and again did she urge the opening and reclosing door as an incontrovertible proof of mortal agency. Beatrice lived in the thirteenth century; and Beatrice, bosoming all the blind superstition of that priest-ridden period, quitted the cathedral, in the firm persuasion, that a messenger from the world of spirits had knolled out weal or woe to the being upon whom he had so mysteriously called. Ay—and I write it without fear of impeaching the reason and the understanding of my heroine; for with due submission, I bid my reader turn to the record of the times, in the swollen and verbose pages of the fathers of the church—Matilda herself, long after she had retired to the solitude of her own chamber, felt strange and wild doubts arising out of thought; doubts, inimical to peace, and thickening the murky haze which already enveloped

veloped her destiny : and when she dropped to sleep, it was to dream of churches, and sepulchres, and marble images ; and when she awoke, it was to shudder with wild affright at the heart-chilling presentiment of evil.

She arose, and she joined the breakfast-board with pale cheeks and tremulous nerves, for she knew not how to methodise her own suspicions ; and when she thought of the figure—and how could she think of aught save the figure?—her lifeblood felt to curdle at the appalling phantasy. Had she visited the cathedral alone, she might have ascribed the strange casualty to the coinage of her own sickly fancy ; but Beatrice had seen the figure—Beatrice had heard the figure—and the deeper the reflection, the deeper grew the horror. Not even the light playfulness of the gay and the happy Millicent could chase away the gloom of dire presentiment ; she smiled on the studied efforts to amuse and to cheer,

cheer, for she felt that the kindness of friendship merited the recompense of self-exertion, and she strove to shew that within her bankrupt heart the spring of gratitude was yet unfrozen.

Sometimes, on the Thames, borne in the gilded pleasure-barge, and fanned by the fairy breath of sweetest minstrelsy ; sometimes, to witness the whoop of the falcon ; sometimes, to join the limited circle at the castle of the baroness of Montfitchett, did she, in compliance with the whims and the wishes of others, forego her own ascetic taste ; yet ever did she carry with her a troubled and a joyless spirit ; for hers were not the cares to yield to the incitements of festive mirth, hers were not the regrets to expire at the first beck of delusive pleasure. No ; her cares and her regrets, arising in the desolateness of her fortune, were commingled in the vitality of her being : for her splendour held forth no lure ; for her ambition possessed no charm : the
brilliant

brilliant sun, the cloudless firmament, the rich profusions of art, the picturesque varieties of nature, extracted not one thorn from memory ; for alas ! the human heart, absorbed in its own peculiar sorrows, lingering o'er the hoarded catalogue of its own individual griefs, feels cold to external claims, and dead to external allurements ! Awed and excited, on or off the pillow, her imagination was filled with wonder and conjecture : the fast of St. Simon and St. Jude was as an epoch of fate-fraught import : events, beyond the stretch of common surmise, threatened to arise out of her vigil in the cathedral of St. Paul ; and though her mental powers were sufficiently strong to buffet the mere goblins of superstition, such was the romance and prevalence of habit, that no natural explanation could resolve the seeming mystery.

A messenger from the court was the first stimulus which aroused Matilda
from

from the morbid and enervating dream of the past; but though it rallied from the mystic voice, it rallied but to plunge into new trial. A mandate from the royal Isabel summoned to the palace at Westminster; not couched in terms of courtly greeting, but authoritative and unanswerable; citing the lady Millicent, on her faith and her allegiance, to bear with her the fair foreigner sojourning beneath her roof. "It is our royal pleasure," ran the scroll, "to give goodly specimen of our gracious favour, that the beautiful Matilda bear back into France, just impress of English hospitality."

Heavy, wellnigh overwhelming, was this proffered *gracious favour*: like a mound of cold lead it lay at the heart of Matilda, sharpening every past pang, and awakening a thousand contending feelings.

In vain she appealed to the baron de Cantilupe; in vain she urged broken spirits

spirits and drooping health: the mandate was peremptory; it admitted not of denial, lest the prevailing disaffection which raged throughout the realm, should confound non-compliance with disloyalty. Full well did the baron know, the dire revenge, which, like astounding thunder, ever rode upon the lightning blast of king John's wrath; and he dreaded to awaken that baleful wrath; he dreaded to turn it upon himself, upon his family: he knew that that capricious wrath had annihilated liberty, prosperity, and life; that it had delved the graves of many, that it had blasted the hopes of more; and swayed by policy, rather than inclination, he steadily combated every reluctance, and firmly resisted every importunity.

“It is but the sacrifice of a few hours,” he observed; “a little effort, a little resolution, and the task will be accomplished.”

“Alack, 'tis no common task!” sighed
ed

ed Matilda, her spirit quailing under the dreaded ill. "To a mind, sick as mine, the court revel offers nought save deadly poison."

"Perchance," and the baron strove to reassure, "good may be elicited. Bear in mind, my gentle friend, on earth we are but sojourners: were our track always smooth and flowery, soon should we be tempted to renounce our guide, and forget the purposes of our journey. Difficulty and opposition gendereth faith; and faith, tendeth to a harbour, free from shoal and quicksand."

"Would I had gained that harbour, that blessed haven to the weary and the sore-laden!" exclaimed Matilda; then deciphering wonder in the glance of the baron—"Solitude, my lord," she concluded, "behoves me more than mirth, and sorrow more than gaiety."

"Solitude may be courted, sorrow nourished, to the detriment of the body's health," rejoined the baron. "Dear child;

child ; dear daughter—for fain would I couple thee with my own Millicent—murmur not too heavily at the stripes Heaven vouchsafeth in wisdom.”

Matilda only sighed. This was a stripe which man imposed, and it was a stripe, pungent, even to writhing : to mingle with the great and the gay, to join the court-circle of her father’s, of her husband’s deadly foe—for well did she remember the anathema pronounced alike by each on the memorable night in which they had first met and last parted—was an effort almost too heavy for human strength ; to smile on the being who had relentlessly heaped on their heads the red-hot fire of persecution—who had hunted her father, from home, from name, from inheritance—who had reduced him to all the vicissitudes of indigence and labour—who had goaded him to rebellion and open defiance.—“ Virgin Mother !” she ejaculated, shuddering

dering in the pang within, "can this be required at my hands?"

The baron started—he looked up, and he saw her, pale as marble, her limbs trembling, her hands clasped in utter dismay.—“Lady,” he said, unwilling to chide, yet more unwilling to humour, “one would judge it other than the call of pleasure. On my soul, my liege the queen, designeth neither wrong nor violence!”

“Would she could guess, the wrong, the violence to my feelings!” faltered Matilda; then struggling down her sobs—“Beseech you, my lord, judge not harshly: ’tis other than caprice; ’tis mortal fear, ’tis natural repugnance, which bars me the presence of king John—’tis—’tis——” She ceased, for she met the steadfast gaze of the baron, as though to read her inward soul; and quick did her cheeks glow, with a tint, bright as evening sunset.

Was it modesty? or was it art?—was
it

it terror of recognition? or was it the dread of persevering passion, which kindled this emotion? The baron felt yet feared the query, for the dazzling beauty of Matilda, the notorious gallantry of king John, offered thorough solution; and in an accent, almost as tremulous as her own, he said—"You know—you have seen the king."

"Never," emphatically pronounced Matilda; "and with your good aid, my lord, still would I shun the evil. Alas!" and she spoke with sorrowful earnestness, "king John, as the whirlwind, has rooted up the vineyard, and laid waste all the blossoms of promise;—king John has made me what I am, an alien, a wanderer—perchance, an orphan. Oh! marvel not," and she struggled down her suffocating sobs, "that my spirit likens the trial unto death."

The baron mused long and deeply; his heart and feelings sided with Matilda, but his judgment and his foresight
magnified

magnified existing peril : he feared, lest denial should be tortured into disrespect ; lest plausible excuse should be perverted into disloyalty : he feared to tread upon the deaf adder, lest the venom, infusing itself into the wholesome channel of his blood, should blast all of health, in the prosperity of his children. The entrance of the lady Millicent gave turn to his reflections ; she had but newly parted from the baroness of Montfitchett, and her countenance tokened conjecture and surprise.—“ I can but marvel,” she exclaimed, “ how rumour bandies human action. Guess you, dearest Matilda, the meddling body, who has reported you to the queen ? Certain it is”—for Matilda spoke not—“ more than common casualty shapes your summons to Westminster. The queen paints you in colours, glowing as a lover’s fancy ; and she vows me special mischief, for shutting you from her favour.”

“ Some misconception—some misrepresentation,”

presentation," faltered Matilda. "Alack! I know nought of courts, or courtly form: a stranger, a sojourner, like me, is ill fashioned to such a calling."

"I fear me," said Millicent, earnestly, "the plea will not pass current. The royal Isabel is a very child in all her fancies. Think well, Matilda; should we parry the seeming grace, great may be the mishap."

"It may involve us all—it may ruin us all," said the baron—"it may last longer, far longer, than the simple effort at compliance."

"Think," urged Millicent, catching terror at the import of her father's words, and trembling in wild dismay—"think of the poor baroness de Brause; think of the mighty ruin, which the random irony of one ill-judged sentence, dragged down upon her and hers. Her husband driven into exile; herself, her hapless children, starved to death, in the castle at Windsor. Blessed saints! expose

pose us not to the rancour of such a heart. The king, once offended—and he dotes to madness on the queen, and he will avenge aught of slight to the queen, more fiercely than to himself. Dear, dearest Matilda, think, once offended, once incensed—Ah!” and she burst into a passion of tears, “how have we called such recompense at your hands?”

Matilda wept with her. Here indeed was an appeal to her gratitude, her humanity, her principles; to injure those, at whose hands she had received favour, to return evil for benefit, was outrage to her nature: she looked up; she rallied into firmness; every selfish feeling yielded to the enthusiasm of the moment; she cast herself upon the neck of her friend, and kissing her tear-bedewed cheek—“I will to the call of the queen of England,” she murmured: “doubt me not—fear me not. I have strength—I have courage: yes, Millicent, I will

bear you fellowship to Westminster—I will endure even the presence of king John. Painful as is the task, the pain of endangering those I love is greater. My own father, be he of earth or heaven, would approve my conduct.”

But though Matilda thus fashioned her mind to her fortune; though she knew that vicissitudes of good and evil, of trial and consolation, fill up the pilgrimage of life, her spirit sickened as the season for exertion drew near, and she marked the day dawn with feelings ill suited to the calling; for surely merriment and gay seeming, when the breast is cankered with inward ailment, is a misery, not of the minor stamp. Counter indeed was her heart to the hearts of the youthful and the prosperous, to the light bevy, anticipating pleasure as the balm of life, and royal favour as the ripening sun to honour; to the favoured few, who bidden to the revel, measured the intervening hours with listless impatience:

tience: and she acquiesced in the necessary arrangements, and she suffered, rather than aided, in the duties of the toilet;—and when, with the lady Millicent, she stepped into the gilded barge which was to bear her to the pageant, her cheeks were as tintless as her snow-white robe.

Though almost obscured by the rust of time be the lighter pastimes of that distant period, still, at Limisso, at the marriage of our first Richard with the princess Berengaria, we read of rare sports, of masking and mumming;—surely then, in the palace at Westminster, we may step from the tilt-yard, and conjure the masking and the mumming, to aid our own especial purpose, without incurring the charge of grafting modern habits on “the deeds of the days of other years.”

Borne on the glassy bosom of the Thames, fanned with spicy breezes, and cheered with cloudless sunshine, like unto Abudah, in the palace of pleasure,

Matilda soon awakened to a new world: but unlike Abudah, she was cold and dead to all around; for though the scene was splendid, wellnigh to dazzling, not in the days of brightest happiness, had her heart and fancy sought in such an assembly the perfect talisman of Oromanes;—no, *her* heart and fancy told her that *content* was the talisman of Oromanes, and content abideth alone in moderation and humbleness of mind. Perhaps, could she have divested her thoughts from the proximity of the enemy of her race, the novelty of the scene had been a temporary cessation from care: for the tilt-yard was crowded with the great and the gay; the tilters bedight in their richest seeming; silken pennons waved in the sunbeams, and dazzling gems, and fantastic plumes, crested many a burnished casque.

Seated at the side of the lady Millicent, Matilda beheld unmoved the manual stress for mastery: her heart sided not in the mimic warfare; for she felt, as

said the chevalier Chiaoux—*If it be in earnest, it is too little; if in jest, too much*: and not until she saw a cavalier, cased in polished steel, and mounted on a snow-white charger, gallop into the lists—not until she heard the name of the lady Matilda pronounced as the nonpareil of grace and beauty—not until she saw him rein in his prancing steed, and bow in lowly homage, as he paused before her, did she recognise herself as the lady Matilda so famed. Every eye was turned upon the spot she occupied, and shrinking away from the notice she elicited, her heart wildly fluttered, and “ten thousand blushing apparitions” rose in her cheek. Vague and vain were her thoughts and her fancies; she measured the towering form before her, but the vizor was closed, and no recognisance lived in the glance. The cavalier passed on, and soon did the trumpet of defiance sound, and soon did a warrior foe dare his prowess. The stress was long and vigorous; shouts and ac-

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claims

claims rent the air, for the stranger-champion of Matilda unhorsed three successive opponents; triumph and victory rode upon his lance, and proudly he strode the field, the mighty victor of the mimic fray.

The warrior-games of the morning yielded to the mask and the revel.—Matilda marked the beautiful Isabel, floating, like a stream of light, through every intricate winding; her smile, beamy and bright, as heaven's sunshine, descending upon all; her voice of playful melody, inviting to the mazy dance, and beckoning on to gladness: like Flora, in the Vale of Tempe, scattering the rays of Iris; for the air was balmy with sweetest odours, and Art, imitative of Nature, rivalled her in a thousand variegated blossoms. Richness and splendour lived throughout the pageant, and even the ice-chill of antipathy yielded to glad amaze, as the eye of Matilda marked the courtly presence of king John:—for prone are we to associate deformity of
person

person to deformity of mind; and the countenance and the person of king John, lighted by conviviality and graciousness, bore no affinity to the dark and rankling passions within.

The king was conversing with a mask in minstrel-guise; and anon, with features lighted by smiles, did he link his arm within the arm of the minstrel, and lead to the spot, where stood the lady Millicent and Matilda. He spoke of the prowess of the morning, and he besought the boon of grace on the hero of the morning. Millicent laughed sportively—Matilda only bowed—the minstrel placed his hand on his breast, and in the action, identified himself as the hero of the morning.

“Gratitude to thy gallant champion, fair lady,” said the king. “God’s truth! he wrestled manfully; and more would he gage, for the vantage of a smile.”

“Ay, life, my liege,” rejoined the minstrel, emphatically.

“Beshrew me,” pursued the royal John, “but thou didst not fable! Not a fairer, not a rarer blossom, in this gay garden!” and his licensed gaze rallied the sensitive blood, to the cheeks, to the very temples of Matilda; yet when he took her hand, strange, and almost overpowering emotion, chased that sensitive blood back into her heart; a sickening horror stole over her; she trembled back, and her cheek faded to almost stony wanness. The king read timidity in that rapid fluctuation: she was young; she was unversed in courts and courtly habits, and he felt compassion for the lovely novice; yet as he passed onwards, he whispered something of the peril of her eye.

The next instant, and Matilda breathed freer; she looked up—she could even smile on the gentle solicitude of her friend.—“Would we were at Heringworth!” she softly pronounced. “Alack!

if

if this be pleasure, nought do I feel save the thorns."

Millicent raised her finger to her lip; she marked the minstrel hovering around, and she feared espial.—“ Be wary;” and then she ceased, for the minstrel struck the strings of his lyre, and fixing his eyes on Matilda, playfully, yet tenderly, sung:—

“ Lady, thou art the fairest she,
Who ever 'twixt my peace and me
Provoked the war!
Thou hast the softest, sweetest look,
That pen could ever write in book,
Or pencil draw!

“ Turn, lady, then, thy face so bright,
Thy radiant eye of dewy light,
I pray, on me.
And I will ever grateful prove;
Will ever be the slave of love,
To pleasure thee.

“ Lady, I swear it by thine eye—
I swear it too by yon bright sky,
And by my love!
Pledge me the boon that nought shall sever,
And I will be, in all and ever,
True as the dove!”

The like start, the like wild emotion, shot from bosom to bosom—Millicent and Matilda gazed on each other: save the tremour of affected age, it was the voice of the grey-headed limping minstrel, who had stolen so strongly on their compassion—who had fled so strangely from their hospitality.

“The same! on my life, the same!” exclaimed Millicent, regardless of observation, and catching at the arm of her friend.

“What then?” asked the minstrel, abruptly pausing at her side.

“Gramercy!” said Millicent, “I would venture much to peep behind that mask of thine. Sure, thou art a second Proteus, to shift so nimbly.”

“Yet am I ever the same,” replied the minstrel, fervently: “true, lady, as the polar needle!” And as he spoke, his eyes still rested on the painfully perplexed Matilda: then drawing sweetest music from his lyre—

“ I’ve ranged the world, to cull the rose,
Of joy, and hope, and bliss.
But ah! no rose, that blooms and glows,
Is half so fair as this !”

And as he ceased, he bent his knee, and placed his lyre at the feet of Matilda.

Abashed, trembling, blushing, covered with torturing confusion, she would have shrunk away, she would have craved obscurity as the dearest prize in nature, but the mingled voices of numbers rooted her to the spot. “ Grace! grace, lady! grace on your troubadour! His lyre be the world’s loss!”

“ Grace! grace! I pray you, grace!” It was the beautiful queen Isabel herself who spoke, as she broke smiling from the throng.

“ Grace! grace!” petitioned the still kneeling minstrel.

Matilda’s heart, Matilda’s tumultuous feelings, grew wilder every moment; she saw each eye turned upon her; she heard—she felt—she shuddered at the

pause which seemed to await her action: alternately did her cheek vary from crimson to snow; now bleached with the ague of dread; now scorched with the fever of trepidation. Millicent was beside her; but Millicent could not aid in the trial: she stood suspended, labouring almost for breath and life.

“Restore the lyre,” whispered the royal Isabel, pitying her fearful agitation.

Millicent caught the words of the queen; impulsively she stooped; she snatched up the lyre, and thrust it into the hand of the minstrel: but impatiently he put it back.—“Not so, lady,” he exclaimed—“It lives, or it dies, at the bidding of her, on whom I have anchored my hopes;” and again the lyre lay at the feet of Matilda.

A confused murmur ran through the gay multitude: pleasure itself seemed suspended: some mingled compassion with censure; but “monstrous affectation,” rose paramount in the buzz.

Alas!

Alas! it was not affectation; it was agitation, growing into agony; not a nerve was still; a thick haze fast gathered before her eyes; and the party, and the world itself, seemed receding from before her.

“Collect yourself,” said the queen, pressing to her side. “’Tis but banter: ascribe it not to sober earnest. A mask, maiden; nought, save a mask: anon, and illusion will vanish.”

Matilda strove to smile; she felt gratitude to the charming queen, and struggling down a sob, with one desperate effort, the lyre was in her hand:—but unlike the romantic custom of the age, she neither entwined it with laurel, or hung around it the costly offering of gold or gems:—she turned away her face, and bending her dark eyes on the ground, dropped it silently into the hand of the minstrel.

He took it—he pressed it to his lips. “From earth to heaven!” he murmured,

ed, and the beamy brightness of her cheek repaid him for the rhapsody. Tenderly, softly, he swept the strings, and still kneeling, with point and pathos, sung :

“ Sweet as is the tented hay ;
Sweet as is the clust’ring may ;
Sweet as is the dew-steeped flower,
Expanding in the sunny hour ;
Or thyme-sod, washed in April-shower,
’Neath morning’s ray !

“ Gentle e’en as pity’s tear ;
Gentle as the voice of fear ;
Gentle as the still deep stream,
Reflecting, rich, in heaven’s beam ;
Or, as the silent evening gleam,
In ether clear !

“ Is thy bright look—is thy dark eye !
And oh ! to win thy bosom’s sigh,
Lady, ’twould be too cheap to die !”

Long after the fairy-sounds had ceased, did the minstrel continue kneeling, apparently insensible to the bursts of commendation and rapture ; tranced in the delirium of his own fancy, and wildly coveting the spray of orange-blossom,

blossom, blooming in the whiter bosom of Matilda. She read the glances of his bold eye, and indignation deepened her blushes. Impulse and action were one: she feared, lest persuasion, or terror, or overpowering bashfulness, should cede the flower; and snatching it from its coveted haven, with the quickness of thought, crushed the blossoms, and scattered them on the floor.

The minstrel arose, and placing his hand upon his breast, bowed in humble acknowledgment of presumption: yet though he saw her turn away from his notice; though he saw the fear, the confusion, the almost hate, which marked her appreciation of his wild compliments; though he saw her shrink, as does the modest sensitive-plant, from obvious devotion—he shadowed her footsteps, and to the close of the revel, like an evil genii, marred the light pleasantries of the scene. In vain, the mass of heterogeneous character, the mad pranks

pranks of inconsistency and humour, the light shafts of wit, aimed and rebutted, and rich in all the genuine savour of jest and fun; his glance, and his sigh, and his whispered passion, fell, as cold mildew, on her feelings: and she bore back into her chamber, a mind, cruelly harassed, and a spirit, perplexed, and humbled, and tortured, wellnigh to weeping. The harmony of sweet sounds, and the fantastic tissue of show and decoration, pursued her even to the "land of dreams." Again, as at Westminster, did her eyes light upon the vain distinctions of man, upon the gewgaws of splendour and prodigality, upon the purple glories noting the state of princes: but inconsistency and confusion mingled her visions. Sometimes, sparkling in clustering gems, herself the brightest gem, did the royal Isabel, "like some gay creature of the element," pilot through the glowing Arcadia; then, suddenly would she vanish away, and yield

yield her office to the intrusive minstrel : quick would follow the effort and the inability at escape, until the shackles of sleep would yield to the mighty stress, and Matilda would awaken, grateful for the consciousness of safety.

The morning dawned, and she arose, fevered and ill refreshed, for the visions of the night dissipated not the misgivings of her fancy : more than temporary inconvenience felt to tend on the stranger-minstrel ; she dreaded him without knowing why, for she feared him gifted with the will and the power to persecute. Doubtless, at his bidding, had she been summoned to the court : yet how to have excited his attention ?—how to have aroused his interest ? Perplexity involved each surmise, and ever tangled in the bewildering maze of conjecture, would she ascribe to his machinations, the last bitter tax upon her feelings, and leave off, more indignant, and more doubtful than before.

A pang

A pang of the heart, rather than of the head, might have coloured the excuse of non-attendance at the castle of the baroness of Montfitchett; for Matilda felt unequal to the social call, and she witnessed the departure of the baron and the lady Millicent, with that sensation, which feels to woo quiet as a sovereign balm.

“ Thank Heaven, there is neither call on my duty or my acquiescence, now !” she murmured ; and she shrunk away from the casement, as though tenacious of the privilege of self-commune, pining, alone and unmarked, to retrace the mazes of her destiny, and to weep and to linger over the points of acutest sorrow. It was a privilege denied by friendship ; for there are hearts—and feeling hearts too—who mistakenly prohibit the recapitulation of grief, forgetful that the pent-up woe is ever the keenest.

For a long time all her thoughts rested on her father ; her ignorance of
his

his fate—her dread of eternal separation ! but though her tears were bitter, not until she recalled the image of him to whom her vows were plighted, did her bitterest tears flow : then, her face was deluged, for then did she feel the total bereavement of her fortune ; then, did the long years of her future life appear rayless, and the world itself, cheerless and gloomy as the grave. Alas ! it was captivity, or woful calamity, or premature death, which resolved his fearful silence : each moment did the desolation appear the more apparent, and each moment did her own misery become the more complete : widowed, almost before wedded, the axe was laid at the root of her hopes, and every sunny picture of felicity was crumbled into barrenness.

As she stood, fostering the heart-pangs of memory, and recalling, again and again, the form, the features, the deep blue eyes of him she loved ; dwelling on the accent of his voice, and conjuring

juring the mingled expression of fondness and torture with which he first and last held her to his breast—with which he snatched the hallowed kiss, called her his own, and parted in the promise of reunion—a low tap at the door of her chamber, roused her to the necessity of bridling her feelings. She opened it, and Beatrice stood before her.—“Lady,” said the damsel, “I come at the bidding of a stranger-messenger. A very boy, now in the hall, craveth the privilege of your ear.”

“Perchance a lackey from the baroness of Montfitchett,” observed Matilda. “Bears he aught from the lady Millicent?”

“I know not, lady. I questioned close, but all he prays, is the grace of a moment’s interview.”

“I come,” said Matilda; and chasing away her tears, and wooing back the covert of a smile, she descended to the hall.

A stripling

A stripling youth stood in the midst ; his cap was in his hand ; he bowed lowly, but he spoke not.

“ What would you of me ? ” asked Matilda.

The youth glanced at Beatrice—“ Your secret ear, lady,” he said, in a voice, almost sunk to a whisper.

“ Speak,” urged Matilda, “ I know no concealments.” But still the youth stood with his eyes fixed on Beatrice. “ Leave us,” said Matilda ; and when the door closed upon the damsel, the youth moved cautiously to her side.

“ Are we quite alone, lady ? ” he asked—“ are we beyond the reach of ears ? ”

Matilda started ; doubt and apprehension grew out of the query : there was that in the look and manner of the boy, which seemed to bode of ill to come. “ Be brief,” she said ; “ your errand ? ”

“ Life and death,” whispered the youth. “ I bear token of one from beyond

yond sea—one, late sojourning with the white monks of Cisteaux. Lady, at war with England, guess you the peril?" And again he glanced around the hall, as though the very walls had ears.

Matilda snatched at his arm; she wished to question, but sound and power were fled; her mind, her feelings, were all tumult; her heart throbbed almost audibly, and vivid was the fire which lighted her eye. Was it joy? or was it delirium, which gave to her cheek that bright red, to her eye that bright fire? If joy, it vanished like the lightning's flash; for when the boy pronounced—"Suspicion, once awakened, life becomes the forfeit"—that cheek, and that eye, lost all their transient glow. New pangs arose; new terrors checked almost the powers of respiration: she saw danger and ruin on every side—she saw the block and the paraphernalia of death and torture, and she almost shrieked at the dire phantasy.

“ Spare

“ Spare yourself, lady,” urged the boy: “ with caution and prudence all may be well.”

“ Tell me further,” implored Matilda; “ in mercy, tell me all you know?”

“ My knowledge is bounded,” replied the youth; “ my mission, to pilot to my employer. Lady, there is one, who watcheth and counteth the minutes of delay. One, who in the cathedral of St. Paul, would have spoken, had——”

“ One—one,” repeated Matilda—“ Ah, that one!” and her brain grew dizzy with expectation and hope.

“ One who dares not brave open day,” resumed the boy; “ one, whom necessity holds in durance; one, who would have revealed himself then, but for your attendant. Will ye, lady, that I speed ye to him?”

Matilda stretched forth her hand— “ My father—my——” The sound died upon her lips, and her limbs trembled so violently, that she could not move. .

“ Not

“Not so, lady,” quick rejoined the messenger: “policy must be our guide. This agitation, this cloakless flight, would betray all. We must move away, unmarked and unsuspected; we must return also, without giving room for guessing.”

Matilda raised her eyes to the face of the speaker—“Whither would you bear me?” she demanded.

“Anon to the nigh hamlet of St. Giles: no further. Lady, we are watched for, in wellnigh prison-solitude.”

“Why not on the instant?” urged Matilda, panting, to hail in life, one, so near and so dear; for none other than father or husband, could her heart identify, as a sojourner with the white monks of Cisteaux.

“Alack! lady, your own pale cheeks and trembling limbs, be the best resolver. We lack fortitude and strength, else——” He ceased, as though fearful to wound.

Matilda

Matilda struggled hard for that fortitude, for that strength; she felt buoyant and eager; yet her pulses throbbed wildly, and her very thoughts were confused and unsettled.

“In another hour,” pursued the youth, “when the haze of twilight shall have gathered. Perchance, lady, you may descend to the terrace alone.”

That *alone* awakened the first pang of distrust, and Matilda again fixed her searching eyes on the face of the speaker—“And my friends, the baron, the lady Millicent?” she asked.

“They must not guess our movements,” eagerly resumed the youth. “The baron de Cantilupe is the loyal subject of king John: him I serve—Lady”—and his voice sunk to a whisper—“see you not, that life hangs upon secrecy?”

A deathlike shudder iced the blood of Matilda, yet did her faith in the integrity of the baron remain unshaken.

“ He would befriend—he would aid us,” she faltered out: “ honour, and life, and all of this world’s good, would I trust in his keeping.”

“ *Him I serve,*” rejoined the boy, “ bid me be wary, of every eye, of every ear:—*him I serve,* lady, warned me against hasty confidence.”

“ And he bid you tell me that he late parted from the white monks of Cisteaux;” and Matilda’s heart thrilled as she spoke.

“ Yea, lady, such were my instructions. He bid me speak of the white monks of Cisteaux, as an indemnity for my trust.”

Matilda stood for many moments, with her hand pressed to her forehead, seeming to think, yet incapable of thought, for all within was tumult, was wild fear, and wilder hope. Was she indeed awake? or was the promised good, mere mockery? If other than illusion, irresolution was an insult to affection, delay
an

an outrage to feeling. To know herself so near to explanation and to happiness. If the palmer, perchance to hear of her father; if her father, perchance to hear of the palmer! Ah! bliss indeed was at hand, yet did she squander the moments in senseless prodigality.—“Let us away,” she exclaimed, starting into decision: “now, this very instant, speed me to the village of St. Giles.” As she spoke, she sprung to the side of the messenger, and grasping his arm, hurried towards the door.

The boy struggled.—“Lady, this rash haste will mar all. I pray you, be secret, be patient. Alack! you know not the peril. Tarry until sunset, and then we may adventure.”

“And when the sun shall have set,” said Matilda, her spirit sinking at the seeming check, “what then?”

“Then, lady,” quick replied the youth, “at the foot of the steps, leading from the terrace to the water, will I await

your coming. The boat which speeded me hither, will quick speed us whither we list."

"Should we be seen—should we be suspected—should my absence even be guessed at," said Matilda, doubtfully.

"Fear not, lady; all will be as the shifting phantasy of a dream: at sunset, away; ere night-fall, secure in your own chamber."

"Belike, absolved from the pang of further concealment!" exclaimed Matilda, and joy lived in the anticipation.

"It may chance so, lady. This one effort, and all will be well; this one effort, and——"

"At sunset, I come," interrupted Matilda: and scarce had she uttered the words, when the boy fled, and till sunset, she was left to her own reflections.

END OF VOL. II.

