Title: The Shakespeare Story-Book

Author: Mary Macleod
Author: William Shakespeare
Author of introduction, etc.: Sir Sidney Lee
Illustrator: Gordon Browne

Release date: June 6, 2015 [EBook #49146]

Language: English

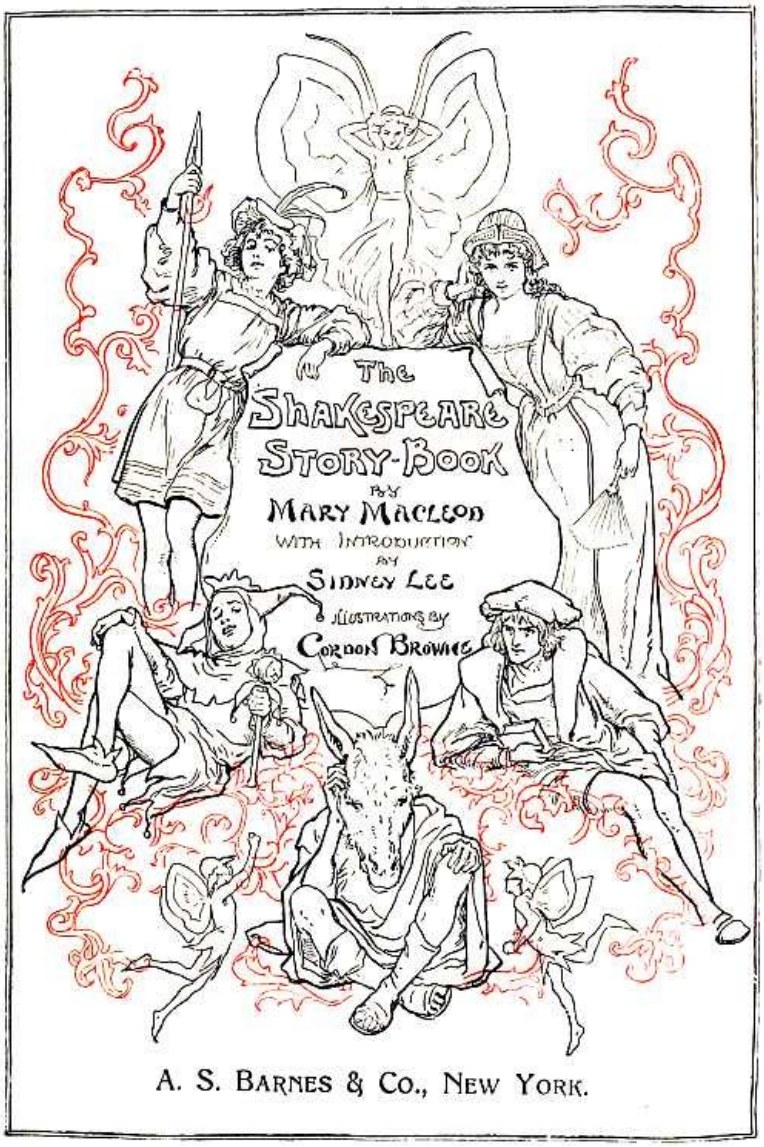
Credits: Produced by David Edwards, Paul Marshall and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)

[Pg iii]
[Pg iv]

The Shakespeare Story-Book

Page 242.

"Eyes, look your last! Arms, take your last embrace!"



Literary critics have many times during the past two thousand years waged battle with one another over the question whether drama owes its excellence chiefly to plot or chiefly to character. Is it the business of the dramatist, critics ask successively through the ages, to inspire the playgoer with a deeper interest in the external circumstances which mould the fortunes of his heroes and heroines than in their individual temperaments and the inner workings of their minds and hearts? But critics commonly “count it a bondage to fix a belief,” and after clothing their question in the complexity of disquisition, they rarely “stay” for a clear and decisive answer. The glimmering light of dialectics usually involves in shadow one or

other commanding phase of the problem. To the plain observer it would seem that both plot and character are essential constituents of perfect drama; that the strength of the one depends on the strength of the other; and that, except to the questioning critic, it is a matter of small practical consequence to which the greater importance be attached by the refinements of theory. In the best plays of Shakespeare the interest evoked respectively by plot and character is so evenly balanced that he must be exceptionally short-sighted who would set the value of the one above the value of the other. The external circumstances that mould the fortunes of Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, rivet the playgoer's and the reader's attention in no less a degree than the individual temperaments of these great dramatic personages or the inner workings of their minds and hearts. It is the perfectly harmonious co-operation of plot and character that is responsible for Shakespeare's noblest triumphs.

Close and constant study of the great plays of Shakespeare must ultimately rouse in the student a more absorbing interest in their characters than in their plots. That is the final effect of supreme dramatic genius. But the full appreciation of Shakespeare's sure and illimitable insight into character can never be reached until we have made ourselves thoroughly familiar with the plot in which the character has its substantive being. It follows, therefore, that if one would realise completely in due time the whole eminence of Shakespeare's dramatic achievement, one should be encouraged at the outset to study closely the stories of the plays rather than the characters apart from their settings. When the youthful mind has grasped the manner and matter of the plots, it will in adult age be in a far better position than it could be otherwise to [Pg ix] comprehend all the excellences, all the subtleties of the characters. Only when plot and character have received equally full attention will Shakespeare stand revealed to the mature student in his manifold glory.

It was this point of view that led Charles Lamb and his sister Mary to prepare their "Tales from Shakespeare, designed for the use of young persons." Their volume was first published in 1807. The two writers narrated, in simple language for the most part, the plots of twenty of Shakespeare's plays, fourteen comedies and six tragedies. None of the historical dramas, whether English or Roman, were included, nor was a place found for the comedies of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, nor for the tragedies of *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Titus Andronicus*. The greater part of the volume was the work of Mary Lamb. Although Charles Lamb's name alone appeared upon the title-page, he was responsible for no more than six of the tales—those of the six tragedies.

Mary Lamb had little of her brother's literary power. She was in sympathy with his literary tastes, she had something of his shrewdness of judgment, but she had none of his wealth of fancy, his pliancy of style, his humorous insight, or his learning. Although Mary Lamb's renderings of the plots of the comedies have the charm of matter-of-fact simplicity, they cannot be held on a close scrutiny to satisfy all the needs of the situation. They often trace the course of the stories too faintly and imperfectly to recall Shakespeare's own image. Frequently in Mary Lamb's work pertinent intricacies of plot are blurred by a silent omission of details, knowledge of [Pg x] which is essential to a complete understanding of the Shakespearean theme. For example, the story of the caskets is excluded altogether from Mary Lamb's version of the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*. Of Bottom and his allies in *Midsummer Night's Dream* she has nothing to tell; Titania falls in love with a nameless sleeping "clown who had lost his way in the wood." And when (in Mary Lamb's version) the ass's head which Puck sets on the clown's neck is removed, he is "left to finish his nap with his own fool's head upon his shoulders." Nothing more is vouchsafed about the "rude mechanicals" of Theseus's Athens. Mary Lamb's rendering of *As You Like It* admits no mention of the melancholy Jaques, of the shrewdly witty Touchstone, or of the rustic Audrey. The ludicrously self-centred Malvolio and his comically tragic self-deception disappear from her version of *Twelfth Night*. Elsewhere in the comedies, and even in Charles Lamb's own work on the tragedies, Shakespeare's text is at times misinterpreted. Consequently, however fascinating in themselves the narratives of the Lambs may prove to young readers, Lamb's Tales offer them a very fragmentary knowledge of the scope of Shakespeare's plots. An endeavour to supply young readers with a fuller and more accurate account of them is therefore well justified, and this endeavour is made in the present volume.

In studying the stories on which Shakespeare based his plays, it is always worth bearing in mind that he cannot be credited with the whole invention of any of them, except in the case of one play—the comedy of *Love's Labour's Lost*. In accordance with the custom of all dramatists of [Pg xi] the day, it was his practice to seek the main lines of his plots in prose-fictions, or in historical chronicles by other hands.

Romantic fiction was born for modern Europe on Italian soil. Boccaccio of fourteenth-century Florence and Boccaccio's long line of disciples—Bandello of Milan, Giraldi Cinthio of Ferrara, and many writers of less familiar name of the sixteenth century—had for generations before Shakespeare's epoch furnished not only Italy, but all the Western countries of Europe with their chief recreative literature in prose. The Italian novels were through the second half of the sixteenth century constantly translated into English and French, and it was to those English or French translations of the Italian romances that Shakespeare owed the main suggestion for all the plots of his comedies (save *Love's Labour's Lost*) and for many of those of his tragedies. Belleforest's "Histoires Tragiques," a collection of French versions of the Italian stories of Bandello, was very often in his hands. Novels by Bandello are the ultimate sources of the stories of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Much Ado about Nothing*, and of *Twelfth Night*. *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Cymbeline* largely rest on foundations laid by Boccaccio. The tales of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure* are traceable to Giraldi Cinthio.

But although Shakespeare's borrowings from the frank and vivacious fiction of sunny Italy were large and open-handed, his debt was greater in appearance than it was in reality. He freely altered and adapted the borrowed stories in accordance with his sense of dramatic and artistic fitness, so that the finished plays present them in shapes which bear little relation to their original forms. At times he intertwined one borrowed story with a second, and his marvellous [Pg xii] ingenuity completely changed the aspect of both; each assumed new and unexpected point and consistency. With such effect did he combine in *The Merchant of Venice* the story of the caskets with the story of Shylock's bond with Antonio. His capacity of assimilating all that he read was as omnipotent as his power of assimilating all that passed in life within range of his eye or ear. The stories that he drew from books on which to found his plays can only be likened to base ore, which the magic of his genius had the faculty of transmuting into gold.

But for young readers, who approach Shakespeare's work for the first time through the present narration of the stories of his plays, it is not necessary to learn whence Shakespeare derived their bare lineaments, or how he breathed into them the glowing spirit of life. It is essential that young readers should find delight and recreation in the tales as he finally presented them in his plays. Such delight and recreation I believe the contents of this volume is fitted to afford them.

It only remains to express the wish that the knowledge here conveyed to young readers of Shakespeare's plots may lead them to become in future years loving students of the text of his plays. The words employed by Charles Lamb in a like connection when he first sent into the world his and his sister's "Tales from Shakespeare" may fitly be echoed here. Young men and women cannot learn too early, in life how the study of Shakespeare's work may, in a far higher degree than the study of other literature, enrich their fancy, strengthen them in virtue, withdraw them [Pg xiii] from selfish and mercenary thoughts. Life will bring them no better instructor in the doing of sweet and honourable action, no better teacher of courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity; for of both stories and characters proffering the counsel to seek what is good and true and to shun what is bad and false Shakespeare's pages are full.

SIDNEY LEE.

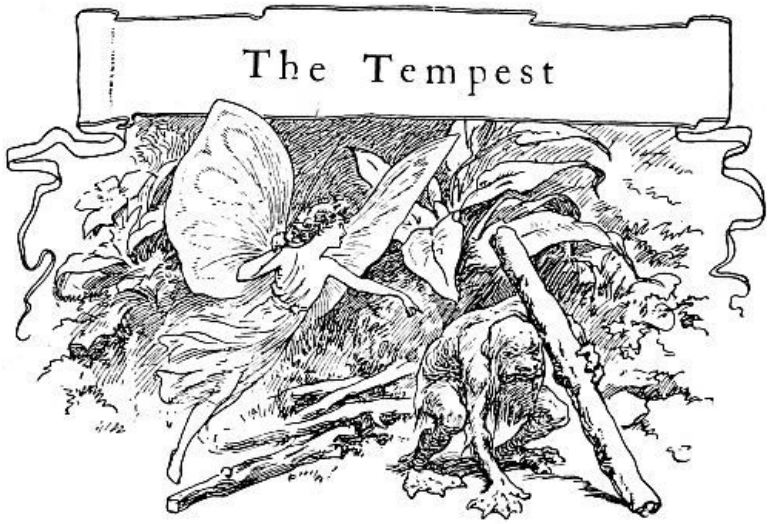
"Some have greatness thrust upon them."

[Pg xiv]
[Pg xv]

[Pg xvii]

[Pg xviii]

[Pg 1]



The Magician’s Isle

here was once a lonely island far away in the midst of a wide sea. Only four beings lived on this island: an elderly man called Prospero, noble, grave and learned; his daughter Miranda; and two attendants. One of these attendants was a beautiful and dainty spirit called Ariel, the other a sullen monster called Caliban. For Prospero had more than worldly learning; he knew the art of magic, and by his mighty spells he could control not only the spirits of light and darkness, but also the forces of Nature.

No travellers ever came to the island, and since the day when Miranda had been brought thither, a little baby girl, she had never seen the face of any man except her father. Peacefully the years slipped by, and Miranda had grown into a beautiful young maiden, when one day a terrible storm of thunder and lightning burst over the island. In the midst of the tempest a noble vessel seemed to be sinking, and Miranda ran to entreat her father that, if by his magic arts he had put the waves into such an uproar, he would now allay them.

[Pg 2]

“Be comforted, dear child; there is no harm done,” said her father. “What I have done is only in care for you, and I have so safely ordered this wreck that not a hair of anyone on board shall suffer hurt. Until now we have lived peacefully in this little spot, and you know nothing of what you are, nor that I am anything more than Prospero, the master of a poor enough cell, and your father.”

“It never entered into my thoughts to inquire further,” said Miranda.

“The time has come when you must know everything,” said Prospero; and laying aside his magic mantle, he bade his daughter sit down beside him, and then he told her the story of their life.

“Can you remember a time before we came to this island?” he began. “I do not think you can, for you were then only a few years old.”

“Certainly I can,” replied Miranda. “It is far off, and more like a dream than a remembrance. Had I not four or five women once that waited on me?”

“You had, Miranda, and more. Twelve years ago your father was the Duke of Milan, and a Prince of power.”

“Oh, heaven! what foul play had we that we came from thence? Or was it a blessing that we

did?” [Pg 3]

“Both, both, my girl. By foul play, as you say, were we driven from Milan, but blessedly helped thither. In those days Milan was the first State in Italy, and everywhere renowned for its splendour. I had so great a love for art and learning that I devoted much of my time to study, and left the government of the State to my brother Antonio, whom I loved best in the world and trusted beyond measure. But he was false to the confidence reposed in him, and soon began to think that he was Duke in reality. He therefore entered into a plot with an inveterate enemy of mine, Alonso, King of Naples, and by promise of a large bribe obtained his assistance. A treacherous army was levied, and one midnight Antonio opened the gates of Milan to the King of Naples. In the dead of darkness you and I were seized and hurried away. So great was the love borne me by my people that the traitors dared not kill us, but we were cast adrift in a rotten boat, without sail, mast, or tackle. By the kindness of a noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo, rich stuffs, foods, and necessaries, had been placed in the boat, together with many valuable books from my library, which I prize more than my dukedom. The waves bore us to this island, and here we have lived ever since, and I have given such care to your teaching that you know more than many other Princesses with more leisure time and less careful tutors.”

“Heaven thank you for it, dear father!” said Miranda. “And now, I pray you, tell me your reason for raising this storm.”

By his magic art, Prospero replied, he knew that by chance his enemies had come near the island, and unless he seized this happy moment his fortunes would droop, never to recover. [Pg 4]

“But ask no more questions, Miranda,” he ended. “You are weary; rest here and sleep a little.”

As soon as Miranda was asleep, Prospero summoned his dainty and nimble little sprite, Ariel, and asked whether he had performed his bidding.

“In every particular,” replied Ariel; and he told his master how, in the guise of a flame, he had danced all over the storm-driven ship till the whole vessel seemed on fire, and every one on board except the mariners had plunged affrighted into the sea.

“But are they safe, Ariel?”

“Not a hair perished, not a thread of their garments hurt. I have scattered them in troops about the island, as you bade me. The King of Naples’ son, Ferdinand, I have landed by himself, and now he is sitting and sighing alone in an odd corner of the isle.”

“And the King’s ship?”

“Safely in harbour, hidden in a deep nook. The mariners, already weary with their labour, I have charmed away to sleep. The rest of the fleet which I scattered have now all met again, and are in the Mediterranean, bound sadly home for Naples. They believe that they have seen the King’s ship wrecked, and that all on board have perished.”

Prospero was much pleased with the way Ariel had performed his charge, but he said there was still some further work to do. He promised that if all went well Ariel in two days should be set free from service, and henceforward should be his own master. He bade Ariel now take a new [Pg 5] shape—that of a nymph of the sea, invisible to all but his own master. In this guise Ariel approached the young Prince of Naples, and began to sing in the sweetest fashion:

“Full fathom five thy father lies;
  Of his bones a’e coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
  Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Hark! now I hear them, ding-dong, bell.”

Lured by the sound of this sweet singing, which came he knew not whence, Ferdinand followed the unseen Ariel into the presence of Prospero and Miranda.

Now, excepting her father, Miranda had never seen a man, and at first she did not know what Ferdinand was.

“Is it a spirit, father?” she asked.

“No, child; it eats and sleeps, and has the same senses that we have. This gallant whom you see was in the wreck, and except that his handsome face is somewhat worn with grief and trouble, you might call him a goodly person. He has lost his companions, and wanders about to find them.”

“I might call him a thing divine,” replied Miranda warmly, “for I never saw anything so noble.”

Ferdinand, in his turn, was equally enchanted with the sight of Miranda, and declared on the spot that, if there were no one else whom she already loved, he would make her Queen of Naples.

Prospero was delighted with the way matters were going, for it was his desire that the young people should love each other; but fearing that a prize so easily won would be held too light, he [Pg 6] began to throw some difficulties in the way. He pretended to believe that Ferdinand was not really a King’s son, and had come to the island as a spy. He declared he would put him into fetters, and give him only the coarsest food to eat. In vain Miranda implored her father to treat the young Prince less harshly. Prospero told her to be silent, and roughly bade Ferdinand to

follow him.

The Prince was naturally indignant at such uncourteous treatment, and hastily drew his sword in defiance. But Prospero threw a sudden spell over the young man, and he stood motionless, unable to stir.

“What? Put thy sword up, traitor!” commanded Prospero sternly.

And Ferdinand, feeling himself powerless to resist, and happy that in his prison he should at least have the pleasure of beholding the beautiful maiden who had so kindly pleaded for him, followed obediently when the magician again summoned him.

The Shipwrecked Wanderers

Meanwhile the rest of the royal party who had plunged into the sea from the King’s ship were wandering in another part of the island. Among them were Alonso, King of Naples, and his brother Sebastian; Antonio, the usurping Duke of Milan; Gonzalo, an honest old counsellor of the King of Naples, with Adrian and Francisco, two of his lords. [Pg 7]

“What? Put thy sword up, traitor.”

Exhausted with the labour they had undergone, the whole party, with the exception of [Pg 8] Sebastian and Antonio, presently fell asleep. Antonio, not content with having driven his own [Pg 9] brother from the dukedom of Milan, now began to suggest treachery to Sebastian, the brother of the King of Naples. Ferdinand, the son of the King of Naples, he said, must certainly have been drowned, his only daughter, Claribel, was married, and far away in Africa—in fact, they were at this moment on their way home from her wedding festivities—there was therefore no near heir to the throne of Naples. Antonio suggested that Sebastian should seize the kingdom of Naples, as he himself had usurped that of Milan. He pointed out how easy it would be to slay King Alonso as he lay there asleep; in fact, he offered to do the deed himself, while Sebastian at the same moment was to put an end to the faithful Gonzalo. The other lords would offer no resistance, but would willingly agree to any suggestions made to them.

Sebastian was only too ready to fall in with this wicked scheme, but in the meanwhile, invisible to them, Ariel came near, and at the very moment when the traitors had drawn their swords and were about to kill Alonso and Gonzalo he sang in the ear of the latter and awakened him.

“Good angels save the King!” cried Gonzalo; and Alonso started awake at the shout.

“Why! how now? Ho, awake!” cried the King. “Why are your swords drawn? Why do you look so ghastly?”

“What’s the matter?” added Gonzalo, still dazed with sleep. [Pg 10]

“While we stood here guarding your repose just now,” said Sebastian, with a ready lie, “we heard a hollow burst of bellowing like bulls, or, rather, lions. Did it not wake you? It struck my ear most terribly.”

“I heard nothing,” said the King.

“Oh, it was din enough to frighten a monster—to make an earthquake!” said Antonio. “Surely it was the roar of a whole herd of lions.”

“Did you hear this, Gonzalo?” asked the King.

“Upon mine honour, sir, I heard a humming, and that a strange one, too, which wakened me. I shook you, sir, and cried out. As my eyes opened I saw their weapons. There certainly was a noise. We had better stand on guard, or leave this place. Let us draw our weapons.”

“Lead away from here,” commanded the King. “Let us make further search for my poor son.”

“Heaven keep him from these beasts!” said Gonzalo. “For he is surely in the island.”

“Lead away,” repeated Alonso.

“Prospero shall know what I have done,” said Ariel, as Alonso and his companions started again on their wanderings. “Go, King—go safely on to seek thy son.”

The King’s Son

Prospero, in order to carry out his plans, pretended to be very harsh and severe with the young Prince of Naples, and he set him a heavy task—to remove and pile up some thousands of logs. For the sake of the love he already bore to Miranda, Ferdinand obeyed patiently, and it sweetened and refreshed his labour to see how distressed the gentle maiden was at the sight of his toil. [Pg 11]

“Alas! I pray you, do not work so hard,” entreated Miranda, as she met him bearing a log. “I would the lightning had burnt up all these logs! Pray set that down and rest you. My father is hard at study: pray, now, rest yourself; he is safe for the next three hours.”

“Oh, most dear lady!” said Ferdinand, “the sun will set before I can finish what I must strive to do.”

“If you will sit down,” said Miranda, “I will carry your logs the while. Pray give me that; I will carry it to the pile.”

“No, dear lady, I had rather crack my sinews, break my back, than that you should undergo such dishonour while I sit lazy by.”

“It would become me as well as it does you,” said Miranda, “and I would do it the more easily, because I want to do it and you do not. You look weary.”

“No, noble lady; when you are near me the night becomes fresh morning,” said Ferdinand. “I do beseech you—chiefly that I may set it in my prayers—what is your name?”

“Miranda.”

“Admired Miranda! Dearest name in the world!” cried Ferdinand. “Many gentle ladies I have been pleased to see and to talk with, and I have liked different women for different virtues; but never until now have I found one without some defect. But you—oh, you, so perfect and so peerless!—are created the best of every creature!”

“I do not know any other woman,” said Miranda simply. “I remember no woman’s face save, from my glass, mine own. Nor have I seen others that I may call men, except you, good friend, and my dear father. I do not know what they may be like, but, in simple truth, I would not wish any companion in the world but you, nor can I imagine anyone whose look I would like better. But I prattle too wildly, and in that forget my father’s precepts.” [Pg 12]

“I love and honour you beyond all limit.”

“In rank I am a Prince, Miranda,” said Ferdinand, “I think a King: would it were not so!” For he thought his father had perished with the ship. “I would not for one moment endure this slavery if it were not for you. The very instant I saw you my heart flew to your service, and for your sake I carry these logs patiently.” [Pg 13]

“Do you love me?”

“By heaven and earth, I love, prize, and honour you beyond all limit of everything else in the world!”

Miranda’s eyes filled with tears of joy.

“I am foolish to weep for what I am glad of,” she whispered.

“Why do you weep?” said Ferdinand.

“Because I am unworthy to offer the love I desire to give,” said Miranda, “much less to take what I shall die for if I do not have. I am your wife if you will marry me; if not, I’ll die a maid. You may refuse to have me as your companion, but I’ll be your servant, whether you will or no.”

“My Queen, dearest, and I thus humble ever,” said Ferdinand, kneeling before her.

“My husband, then?”

“Ay, with a heart as willing as freedom after bondage: here’s my hand.”

“And mine, with my heart in it. And now, till half an hour hence, farewell!”

“A thousand thousand!” cried Ferdinand; and so they parted.

Unseen by the young lovers, Prospero, in his cell, had listened to all that passed, and his rejoicing was scarcely less than theirs to find that his schemes were working so well. But he had still much to do before supper-time, and he now returned to his books. [Pg 14]

Mysterious Music

While Antonio and Sebastian were discussing their scheme to murder the King of Naples, another band of wretched creatures was plotting mischief against the lord of the island. When Prospero had first come to this island, he found it inhabited by a hideous young monster called Caliban, the son of a wicked witch who had been banished there from her own country. This witch—Sycorax—had for servant the dainty sprite Ariel, and because Ariel refused to obey her evil commands she imprisoned him as a punishment in the trunk of a cloven pine-tree. Here Ariel abode in torment and misery for twelve years, during which time Sycorax died, and left her son Caliban as the only inhabitant of the island.

Prospero, on his arrival, set Ariel free, and took him into his own service, and, pitying the young Caliban, he at first tried by kindness to tame his savage nature. But all his efforts were useless. Caliban hated everything good, and repaid Prospero’s kindness with malice and evil doing. Prospero found that gentle means were of no avail, and that the only way in which to keep Caliban in order was to treat him with stern severity. For this Caliban hated his master, and was always longing to be revenged on him.

Among those saved from the King’s ship were two worthless scamps—Trinculo, a jester, and Stephano, a drunken butler. Caliban, meeting them by chance, immediately begged to become their servant, hoping by this means to escape from Prospero. He further offered to lead them to [Pg 15] where Prospero lay asleep, so that they might kill the magician. It was agreed that Stephano was then to marry Miranda, and become the lord of the island, and Caliban was to be his servant.

While they were talking, Ariel entered, invisible. He listened to their plots, and amused himself by speaking a few words every now and then, which soon set the conspirators quarrelling, for they none of them knew where the voice came from, and thought it was one of themselves mocking the others. Finally Ariel began to play mysterious music on a pipe and tabor. Stephano and Trinculo were greatly alarmed, but Caliban soothed them, saying that the island was full of noises and sweet sounds which gave delight and did no hurt.

“Sometimes a thousand instruments will hum about mine ears,” he said, “and sometimes voices, which, if I awake after a long sleep, will make me sleep again. Then in dreams the clouds seem to open and show riches ready to drop on me, so that when I awake I cry to dream again.”

“This will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I shall have my music for nothing,” said Stephano.

“When Prospero is destroyed,” put in Caliban.

“That shall be at once,” replied Stephano.

“The sound is going away; let us follow it, and do our work afterwards,” said Trinculo.

“Go on, monster; we will follow,” said Stephano to Caliban. “I would I could see this taborer; he plays bravely.”

So with his mysterious music Ariel lured the three villains away. He led them a pretty dance, through briars, sharp furze, prickly gorse, and thorns, which ran into their poor shins; and finally [Pg 16] he left them in the filthy water of a stagnant pool, not far from Prospero’s cell.

In the meanwhile Alonso, King of Naples, and his party were still wandering about the island; but by-and-by they grew so weary that poor old Gonzalo declared he could go no further.

“I cannot blame you,” said King Alonso, “for I myself am dull with weariness. Sit down and rest. Now here I give up hope that I shall ever see my son again. He is drowned, and the sea mocks our useless search on land.”

The traitor Antonio was delighted to see that the King had lost all hope, and he begged Sebastian not to give up their wicked scheme because it had been once repulsed.

“The next advantage we will take thoroughly,” Sebastian whispered back to Antonio.

“Let it be to-night,” said Antonio, “for now they are so worn out with travel they will not and cannot use such vigilance as when they are fresh.”

“I say to-night,” agreed Sebastian. “No more.”

At that moment strange and solemn music was heard.

“What harmony is this?” said the King. “Hark, my good friends!”

“Marvellous sweet music!” said Gonzalo.

Unseen by them, Prospero entered, and by his magic art he caused a number of strange and grotesque figures to appear, who brought in a banquet. After dancing round it with gentle actions of greeting, and inviting the King and his companions to eat, they disappeared. [Pg 17]

“Give us kind keepers, heaven! What were these?” exclaimed the startled King.

“If I reported this in Naples, would they believe me?” said Gonzalo. “These must be islanders, and although they are of such strange shapes, yet note, their manners are more gentle and kind than many of our human race.”

“You speak well, honest lord,” said Prospero aside, “for some of you there are worse than devils.”

“They vanished strangely,” said Francisco.

“No matter, since they left their viands behind them,” said Sebastian. “Will it please your Majesty to taste of what is here?”

“Not I,” said Alonso.

“Faith, sir, you need not fear,” said Gonzalo.

“Well, I will eat, although it be my last meal,” said the King. “Brother, and you, my Lord Duke of Milan, do as we do.”

At that instant there was a peal of thunder and a flash of lightning. Ariel, in the form of a harpy, a hideous bird of prey, flew in and flapped his wings over the table, and immediately the banquet vanished.

“You are three men of sin, whom Destiny has cast upon this island because you are quite unfit to live among men,” he said, addressing Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio.

Enraged, they drew their swords, but Ariel only mocked at them.

“You fools! I and my fellows are ministers of Fate. Your swords might as well try to wound the winds or stab the water, as hurt one feather of my plumage. If you could hurt, your swords are now too heavy for your strength, and you cannot lift them. But remember—for this is my business [Pg 18] to you—that you three supplanted the good Duke Prospero from Milan, cast him and his innocent child adrift on the sea, which hath now revenged it. The heavenly powers have delayed punishment for this foul deed, but they have not forgotten it, and now they have incensed the sea and the shore and all creatures against you. They have bereft you, Alonso, of your son, and they pronounce by me that lingering perdition worse than any death shall fall in this desolate island on you and all your ways, unless you heartily repent and amend your life.”

Ariel vanished in thunder, and then to soft music entered the strange shapes again, and, with a mocking dance, carried out the table on which the banquet had been spread.

“Bravely done, my Ariel!” said Prospero aside, while the King of Naples and his companions stood mute with amazement. “My charms are working, and these my enemies are quite astounded. They are now in my power, and here I will leave them while I visit young Ferdinand—whom they think drowned—and his and my loved darling.”

“In the name of heaven, sir, why do you stand with that strange stare?” asked Gonzalo of the King.

“Oh, it is monstrous, monstrous!” cried the conscience-stricken Alonso. “I thought the billows spoke and told me of my wicked deed, the winds sang it to me, and the thunder pronounced the name of ‘Prospero.’ Therefore my son is drowned, and I will lie with him fathoms deep below the waves.” [Pg 19]

So saying, he hurried from the spot, followed at once by Sebastian and Antonio.

“All three of them are desperate,” said Gonzalo. “Their great guilt, like poison which takes a long time to work, now begins to bite their spirit. I do beseech you,” he added to the lords in waiting, “follow them swiftly, and hinder them from what this madness may provoke them to.”

“Though the Seas threaten, they are merciful”

The hard toil which Prospero had set the Prince of Naples did not last long, and when the magician saw that the young people loved each other sincerely he put an end to the trial, and bade them be happy together. To give them pleasure and show them some proof of his magic powers, he summoned a troop of beautiful spirits—Iris, Ceres, Juno, some water-nymphs, and various reapers, who sang sweet songs to them and danced graceful dances.

But the moment of Caliban’s plot was approaching. Prospero dismissed the spirits, and began to prepare for punishing the conspirators. Sending Ferdinand and Miranda to wait for him in his cell, he bade Ariel fetch some glistening apparel, and hang it up on a line near, in order to serve as a bait to catch the thieves.

His plan succeeded. Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo soon appeared, all wet from the stagnant pool into which they had been lured by Ariel’s music.

“Pray you, tread softly, that the blind mole may not hear a footfall; we are now near his cell,” said Caliban. [Pg 20]

“O King Stephano! O peer! O worthy Stephano! Look what a wardrobe is here for you!” cried Trinculo, catching hold of the garments hanging on the line.

“Let it alone, you fool; it is but trash!” said Caliban.

“Put off that gown, Trinculo,” said Stephano, equally greedy in his turn. “By this hand, I’ll have that gown!”

“Your grace shall have it,” said Trinculo submissively.

“Why do you waste time on this rubbish?” entreated Caliban. “Let us do the murder first. If Prospero awakens he will punish us cruelly for this.”

“You be quiet, monster,” said Stephano rudely; and he and Trinculo went on helping themselves to the fine clothes which Ariel had cunningly displayed. “Come, monster, take what we leave.”

“I will have none of them,” declared Caliban. “We shall lose our time, and if Prospero catches us, he will change us all into barnacles or apes.”

“Help us to carry these away, or I’ll turn you out of my kingdom. Go to, carry this!” commanded Stephano.

“And this,” added Trinculo; and they began to load poor Caliban with their spoils.

Suddenly a noise of hunters was heard, and a band of spirits in the shape of dogs swept along, and set upon the three guilty men, chasing them about, while Prospero and Ariel urged on the dogs.

“Hey, Mountain, hey!”

“Silver! There it goes, Silver!”

“Fury, Fury! There, Tyrant, there! Hark, hark!” [Pg 21]

When Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo had been driven away, Prospero spoke to Ariel.

“Let them be hunted soundly. Now all my enemies lie at my mercy. My labours will soon be ended, and then thou shalt be free as air. Follow me still for a little, and do me service. Now, tell me, how fares the King and his followers?”

“Just as you left them—all prisoners, sir, in the grove of trees which shelters your cell. They cannot stir until you release them. The King, his brother, and your brother are quite distracted, and their lords are mourning over them, and chiefly he whom you termed ‘the good old lord Gonzalo.’ Your charm affects them so strongly that if you beheld them now you would pity them.”

“Dost thou think so, spirit?”

“I would, sir, if I were human.”

“And I will,” said Prospero. “Now that they are penitent my purpose is accomplished. Go, release them, Ariel. I’ll break my charms. I’ll restore their senses, and they shall be themselves.”

“I’ll fetch them, sir,” said Ariel; and he gladly hastened away to do his master’s bidding.

Left alone, Prospero took a solemn farewell of all the powers of magic which he had practised for so long, and declared that, after one last charm which he was now going to work, he would break his wizard’s wand and drown his book.

When Ariel returned with Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio, and the lords in waiting, they all entered a charmed circle which Prospero had made, and stood there unable to move. [Pg 22]

“There stand, for you are spell-bound,” said Prospero. “O good Gonzalo, my true preserver, and loyal servant to your master, I will pay you both in word and deed. Alonso, most cruelly did you use me and my daughter; your brother helped you in the deed—he is punished for it now. You, brother mine, unnatural though you are—I forgive you.”

While Prospero was speaking, the King and his companions slowly began to recover their senses; but they did not yet recognise Prospero, for he was clad in his magic robes.

“Fetch me the hat and rapier in my cell, Ariel,” he said. “I will discard these garments, and show myself as when I was Duke of Milan. Quickly, spirit! Thou shalt be free ere long.”

Gladly Ariel set to work, singing a gay little song as he helped to attire his master:

> “Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
> In a cowslip’s bell I lie;
> There I couch when owls do cry.
> On the bat’s back I do fly
> After summer merrily.
> Merrily, merrily shall I live now
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

Then Prospero sent him to find the King’s ship, and to bring back the master and boatswain.

Poor old Gonzalo was greatly amazed and troubled at all the strange things that were happening.

“Some heavenly power guide us out of this fearful country!” he exclaimed.

“Behold, Sir King, the wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero,” said the magician to Alonso. “To give thee more assurance that a living Prince speaks to thee, I embrace thee, and bid a hearty welcome to thee and thy company.” [Pg 23]

“Whether thou be he or not, or some enchanted trifle to torment me, I do not know,” said the bewildered King. “Thy pulse beats like flesh and blood, and since I have seen thee my madness has abated. I resign thy dukedom, and entreat thy pardon for my wrong-doing. But how can Prospero be living and be here?”

“Welcome, my friends all!” said Prospero. “But you, my brace of lords,” he added, aside to Sebastian and Antonio, “if I were so minded, I could make his Highness frown on you and prove you traitors. At this time I will tell no tales.”

“The devil speaks in him,” muttered Sebastian, conscious of his guilt.

“No,” replied Prospero quietly. “For you, most wicked sir,” he said to his brother Antonio, “I forgive all your faults, and require my dukedom of thee, which perforce I know thou must restore.”

“If you are Prospero, tell us how you were saved, and how you have met us here,” said the King of Naples. “Three hours ago we were wrecked upon this shore—alas, where I have lost—how bitter is the remembrance!—my dear son Ferdinand.”

“I am sorry for it, sir,” said Prospero.

“The loss can never be made up, and is past the cure of patience.”

“I rather think you have not sought the help of patience,” said Prospero. “For the like loss I have its sovereign aid, and rest myself content.” [Pg 24]

“You the like loss?”

“As great to me; for I have lost my daughter.”

“A daughter?” cried Alonso. “Oh, would that they were both living in Naples as King and Queen! When did you lose your daughter?”

“In this last tempest,” said Prospero, smiling to himself. “But come, no more of this. Welcome, sir; this cell is my court. I have few attendants here, and no subjects abroad. Pray you, look in. Since you have given me back my dukedom, I will reward you with something equally good, or, at least, show you a wonder which will content you as much as my dukedom does me.”

And, drawing aside the curtain which veiled the entrance to his cell, Prospero disclosed to view Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess.

“Sweet lord, you play me false,” said Miranda.

“No, my dearest love, I would not for the world,” said Ferdinand.

“If this prove a vision of the island, I shall lose my dear son a second time,” murmured Alonso.

“A most high miracle!” exclaimed Sebastian.

“Though the seas threaten, they are merciful,” cried Ferdinand, springing from his seat at the sight of his father, and falling on his knees before him.

“Now all the blessings of a glad father compass thee about,” said Alonso, overcome with joy to see his dear son again.

Miranda in the meanwhile was gazing in wonder at all these strange visitors who had come to the island.

“Oh, brave new world that has such people in it!” she cried in delight. [Pg 25]

“Who is this maiden?” Alonso asked his son. “Is she some goddess?”

“Sir, she is mortal, and she is mine,” answered Ferdinand. “I chose her when I thought I had no father. She is daughter to the famous Duke of Milan, of whose renown I have so often heard.”

Then Alonso gave his blessing to the young couple, and the good Gonzalo breathed a hearty “Amen!”

At this moment Ariel appeared, followed by the astonished master of the King’s ship and the boatswain. They were overjoyed to see the King and his companions again, and brought word that the ship was as safe and bravely rigged as when they first put out to sea.

“Sir, all this service have I done since I left you,” whispered Ariel to Prospero. “Was it well done?”

“Bravely, good spirit,” said Prospero. “Thou shalt soon be free.”

Then he commanded him to go and take off the spell from Caliban and his companions, and after a few minutes’ absence Ariel returned driving in the three men, clad in their stolen apparel.

“Mark these men, my lords,” said Prospero. “These three have robbed me, and this witch’s son had plotted with the others to take my life. Two of these fellows you must know and own; this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.”

“Is not this Stephano, my drunken butler?” said the King of Naples.

“Why, how now, Stephano?” said Sebastian mockingly.

“You would be King of the isle, sirrah?” demanded Prospero. [Pg 26]

“I should have been a sore one, then,” groaned Stephano, for he and his worthless friends were still aching all over from the punishment inflicted on them.

“That is as strange a thing as ever I looked on,” said Alonso, pointing to Caliban.

“His manners are as ugly as his appearance,” answered Prospero. “Go, sirrah, to my cell. Take your companions with you, and if you hope to have my pardon, behave properly.”

“Ay, that I will,” said Caliban; “and I will be wise hereafter, and try to be better. What a thrice-double ass I was to take that drunkard for my master!”

And he departed with his companions, glad to have escaped so lightly.

Then Prospero invited the King and his other guests into his cell, where they were to rest for one night. The next morning they were all to set sail for Naples, where the marriage between Prince Ferdinand and Miranda was to take place, after which Prospero would retire to his own dukedom of Milan. Finally he gave his last charge to Ariel, and bade him see that the King’s ship should have calm seas and fair winds to waft it quickly on its way.

“My Ariel, chick, that is thy charge,” said Prospero. “Then be free as the elements, and fare thee well!”

[Pg 27]

“Now let us take our Leave”

here lived once in Verona two friends who loved each other dearly; their names were Valentine and Proteus. They were both young and gallant gentlemen, but they were very different in character, as you will presently see. Valentine was simple and honest, a loyal and devoted friend, and too candid and sincere himself to think of treachery in others. Proteus had warm affections, but he was fickle and changeable, carried away by impulse, and always so desperately eager for what he happened to want at the moment that he stopped at no means to gain his ends. [Pg 28]

Valentine and Proteus were very happy together as companions, but at last the time came when they were to part. Valentine was not content to settle down at Verona; he wanted to see something of the world and its wider life.

“Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits,” he said to Proteus, who was trying to persuade him to stay. “If it were not that you were chained here by your affections I would rather beg your company to see the wonders of the world abroad. But since you are in love, love still, and thrive in it, even as I would when I once begin to love.”

This he said because Proteus was deeply in love at that moment with a fair lady of Verona called Julia. And then Valentine went on to tease Proteus, pretending that all love was folly, and that only foolish people let themselves be deluded into it. He little knew how soon he was himself to be caught in the same folly, and how basely and treacherously his friend was going to act towards him.

However, at that moment Proteus had no thought for anyone but Julia, and would not have left Verona on any account. The two friends took an affectionate farewell of each other, and Valentine

went his way, to travel to the Court of Milan.

"He hunts after honour, I after love," thought Proteus, when his friend had left him. "He leaves his friends to bring more credit to them by improving himself. I leave myself, my friends, and all, for love. Thou, Julia, hast changed me, made me neglect my studies, lose my time, fight against [Pg 29] good counsel, set the world at naught, weaken my brains with dreaming, and make my heart sick with thought!"

While Proteus was indulging in this rhapsody, Speed, the clownish servant of Valentine, came hurrying up.

"Sir Proteus, save you!" he cried, in the greeting of those days. "Saw you my master?"

"He has just this minute gone to embark for Milan," replied Proteus. "Did you give my letter to the Lady Julia?"

"Ay, sir, and she gave me nothing for my labour," said Speed, who was out of temper at not having received the handsome fee he was hoping for.

"But what did she say?" asked Proteus eagerly.

"Oh—she nodded!"

"Come, come, what did she say?"

"If you will open your purse, sir...."

"Well, there is something for your trouble. Now, what did she say?"

"Truly, sir, I think you will hardly win her," said Speed with a sly look, pocketing the piece of money Proteus threw to him.

"Why? Could you perceive so much from her manner?"

"Sir, I could perceive nothing at all from her—no, not so much as a ducat for delivering your letter. And as she was so hard to me who was your messenger, I fear she will prove equally hard to you. Give her no present but a stone, for she is as hard as steel."

"What did she say? Nothing?" repeated poor Proteus. [Pg 30]

"No, not so much as 'Take that for your pains,'" said Speed, still harping on his own grievance. "I thank you for your bounty, sir. Henceforth carry your letters yourself. And so I will go seek my master."

"Go, go, to save your ship from wreck!" cried Proteus, incensed at the fellow's impertinence. "It cannot perish when you are aboard, for you are certainly destined for a drier death on shore!—I must find some better messenger to send," he added to himself, when the saucy serving-man had taken himself off. "I am afraid my Julia would not deign to accept my lines, receiving them from such a worthless envoy."

But, as it happened, the letter had so far not reached the hands of the lady for whom it was intended, for it was only her waiting-maid Lucetta whom Speed had seen, and to whom he had given the letter in mistake for Julia.

Lucetta went in search of her mistress, and found her in the garden, musing over many things, for by this time Julia really loved Proteus, although she would not acknowledge it even to herself. When Lucetta handed her the letter, saying she thought it had been sent by Proteus, Julia pretended to be angry, and scolded her maid for daring to receive it.

"There, take the paper again," she said, "and see that it is returned, or never again come into my presence."

"To plead for love deserves a better reward than to be scolded," muttered Lucetta.

From being so much with her young mistress, the maid was treated more as a companion than as a servant, and was accustomed to speak out her mind frankly on every occasion. [Pg 31]

"Go!" said Julia severely; but no sooner had Lucetta disappeared than she was seized with remorse.

"How churlishly I sent her away, when all the time I wanted her here!" she thought. "How angrily I tried to frown, when really my heart was smiling with secret joy! To punish myself I must call Lucetta back, and ask her pardon for my folly.... What ho, Lucetta!"

"What does you ladyship want?" asked Lucetta, reappearing.

But at the sight of her maid Julia suddenly became shy again.

"Is it near dinner-time?" she asked, with an air of pretended indifference.

"I would it were, madam, so that you might spend your anger on your meat, and not on your maid," replied Lucetta rather flippantly; and at that moment she let the letter fall, and picked it up ostentatiously.

"What is it you took up so gingerly?" inquired Julia.

"Nothing."

"Why did you stoop, then?"

"To pick up a paper I let fall."

“And is that paper nothing?”

“Nothing that concerns me.”

“Then let it lie there for whom it does concern.”

But Lucetta had no intention that the letter should lie unheeded on the ground, for her only purpose in dropping it was to bring it again to Julia’s notice. She little knew how her mistress longed at that moment to have it in her own possession, but was too proud to acknowledge it. [Pg 32] Lucetta could not refrain from some pert speeches, and her jesting words irritated Julia, especially when Lucetta declared she was taking the part of Proteus.

“I will have no more chatter about this,” said Julia; and she tore the letter and threw the pieces on the ground. “Go, get you gone, and let the papers lie!”

“Go, get you gone, and let the papers lie!”

“She pretends not to like it, but she would be very well pleased to be so angered with another letter,” said the shrewd maid, half aloud, as she walked away. [Pg 33]

“Nay, would I were so angered with the same!” cried Julia, eagerly seizing some of the fragments. “O hateful hands to tear such loving words! I’ll kiss each little piece of paper to make amends. Look! here is written ‘Kind Julia!’ *Unkind* Julia! Be calm, good wind; do not blow any of the words away until I have found every letter.”

And with a loving touch she began carefully to collect the torn scraps of paper.

“Madam,” said Lucetta, coming back, “dinner is ready, and your father waits.”

“Well, let us go,” said Julia.

“Are these papers to lie here like tell-tales, madam?”

“If you care about them, you had better pick them up.”

“They shall not stay here, for fear of catching cold,” said Lucetta, with a mischievous little smile to herself.

“I see you are very anxious to have them,” said Julia.

“Ay, madam, you may say what sights you see,” said the maid, quite unabashed. “I see things, too, although you judge my eyes are shut.”

“Come, come, let us go,” said Julia.

Proteus had refused to accompany his friend Valentine, but he soon found that he was not to be allowed to remain at Verona. In those days it was considered that no young man was well brought up unless he had had the advantage of foreign travel, and an uncle of his spoke very strongly on the subject.

“I wonder that his father lets him spend his youth at home,” he said, “while other men of much less repute send out their sons to seek preferment—some to the wars, to try their fortune there; [Pg 34] some to discover islands far away; some to study at the universities. For any or for all of these Proteus is fit. It will be a great disadvantage to him in after-years to have known no travel in his youth.”

To this Proteus’s father, Antonio, answered that he had already been thinking over the matter.

“I have reflected how he is wasting his time, and how he can never be a perfect man unless he goes out in the world to learn by experience,” he said.

And he came to the conclusion that he could not do better than send Proteus after Valentine, to the Court of the Duke of Milan. Proteus was ordered to hold himself in readiness to start the next day, and all appeals were useless. The only consolation he had in leaving Julia was that the lady now frankly admitted her love.

“Keep this remembrance for thy Julia’s sake,” she said, giving him a ring when the moment came to part.

“Why, then, we’ll make an exchange,” said Proteus. “Here, take you this. And here is my hand for my true constancy. If ever I do not remember you for a single hour, Julia, the next hour let some evil mischance torment me for my forgetfulness.”

And so, with many protestations of love and fidelity, Proteus started to rejoin his friend Valentine at Milan, and Julia was left behind at Verona.

“Who is Silvia?”

Valentine had spoken many wise words to Proteus on the folly of being in love, but he had not been long in Milan before he was in just the same sad plight that he had cautioned his friend [Pg 35] against. The Duke of Milan had a beautiful daughter called Silvia, and it was with her that Valentine fell deeply in love. She returned his affection, and they became secretly betrothed, but they dared not let this be known, for her father favoured another suitor, Sir Thurio, a rich and well-born gentleman, but foolish and extremely vain.

The Duke of Milan, as was the custom in those days, thought himself at perfect liberty to dispose of his daughter in marriage as best pleased himself, with but scant regard for her own feelings on the subject. He suspected there was some love between Silvia and Valentine, and saw many little things when they thought him blind. He often determined to forbid Valentine his Court and his daughter’s company, but, fearing that his jealousy might perhaps be leading him into error, and that he might bring disgrace unworthily upon Valentine, he resolved not to act rashly, but by gentle means to try to discover the truth. In the meanwhile he kept a strict watch over Silvia, and, fearing some attempt on the part of the young lovers to escape secretly, he gave directions that Silvia should be lodged in an upper tower, the key of which was brought every night to himself.

Matters were in this state when, to Valentine’s great joy, Proteus arrived at the Court of Milan. In the full warmth of his generous heart, Valentine lavished praises of his friend to the Duke of Milan and to Silvia, and for the sake of the love she bore to Valentine Silvia gave Proteus a hearty welcome.

But what a base return Proteus made for the kindness heaped on him! In spite of the devotion [Pg 36] which he had professed for Julia, in spite of his lifelong friendship with Valentine, Proteus no sooner beheld Silvia than he imagined himself desperately in love with her. All thought of loyalty and honour was recklessly flung aside. He knew he was behaving shamefully. He remembered his faithful lady in Verona; he called to mind the duty he owed his dear friend Valentine. But for the moment his weak and selfish nature carried him beyond control. He had no thought but to gratify his own desires, and he determined to throw over Julia, and to win Silvia for himself at whatever cost of treachery and dishonour.

The task did not seem an impossible one, for Valentine, in the full glow of his unsuspicious nature, was ready to place unbounded trust in his friend, and in this way he gave into his hands the means by which he was betrayed. He told Proteus that, unknown to the Duke, her father, Silvia and he were betrothed—nay, more, that the hour of their marriage and the method of their flight were already arranged. Silvia was locked into her tower every night, but Valentine was to come with a ladder of ropes, by which he could climb up and help her to descend. That very evening was fixed for the carrying out of their scheme, and Valentine was now on his way to procure the ladder of ropes by which the attempt was to be made.

Proteus listened to this plot, and then in the depths of his meanness he determined to give Silvia’s father notice of what was planned, for he thought it would turn out greatly to his own advantage to do so. Valentine would be banished, and the way would then be left open for himself to try to win Silvia. True, her father favoured another suitor, Sir Thurio, but Proteus had little [Pg 37] fear of that dull gentleman, and he thought it would be very easy to thwart his proceedings with some sly trick.

Proteus lost no time in carrying out his scheme, and it was immediately successful. With feigned reluctance, and under the hypocritical pretence that he was only acting from a sense of duty, Proteus repeated to the Duke of Milan what Valentine had told him. He made the Duke promise that he would not reveal his treachery, and pointed out how he could easily entrap Valentine as if the discovery had been made by himself. The Duke acted on this advice. He pretended to ask Valentine’s counsel as to the best way of winning a lady to be his wife, whose friends kept her securely shut up. Valentine at once suggested the method of escape which he was hoping to use in his own case.

“A ladder quaintly made of cords,” he said, “with hooks at the end, which you can throw up, and by which you can scale the tower.”

“But how shall I convey the ladder?” asked the Duke.

“It will be so light, my lord, that you can easily carry it under your cloak,” said Valentine.

“Will a cloak as long as yours serve the purpose?”

“Why, any cloak will serve, my lord.”

“How shall I wear it?” said the Duke. “Pray let me feel your cloak upon me.”

Valentine could scarcely refuse, and the next moment the Duke had drawn forth from the cloak not only a letter addressed to Silvia, saying that Valentine would set her free that night, but also the ladder of ropes that was to be used for that purpose.

Then the Duke’s anger blazed forth. [Pg 38]

“Go, base intruder! Overweening slave!” he exclaimed; and in words of the most contemptuous wrath he ordered Valentine to leave his Court and his territories, and never to be seen in them again on pain of death.

“Go, base intruder! Overweening slave!”

False to his Friend [Pg 39]

The Duke of Milan had scarcely left Valentine, and the latter was still dazed by the calamity which had befallen him, when Proteus brought him word that the proclamation for his banishment had been made public.

Silvia, however, was still true to him. With sobs and tears, she implored pardon for him on her knees, but her father was relentless. If Valentine were found again in his dominions he should be put to death. Moreover, he was so enraged at his daughter’s daring to plead for her young lover that he commanded she should be kept in close prison.

The crafty Proteus counselled Valentine to depart at once, bidding him not to lose hope, pretending the greatest sympathy with his love affairs, and promising that if he sent letters they should be safely conveyed to Silvia. Having thus hurried Valentine away with the utmost despatch, Proteus returned to the Duke of Milan, to let him know that his orders had been obeyed.

“My daughter is in great grief about his going,” said the Duke.

“A little time will kill that grief, my lord.”

“So I believe, but Sir Thurio here does not think so,” said the Duke, and he then went on to consult Proteus as to the best way of winning Silvia’s affections from the absent Valentine, in order that she might transfer them to Sir Thurio.

It was agreed among them that the best plan would be for Proteus to speak all he could in dispraise of Valentine, while at the same time he was to speak in praise of Sir Thurio. For this purpose Proteus was to be allowed free access to Silvia, who, for his friend’s sake, would be glad to see him. [Pg 40]

Proteus agreed to this, but said that Thurio himself must do something to win the lady’s favour.

He suggested that he should try to please her with poetry and music, and that he should bring musicians, and sing a serenade by night under her chamber window. Thurio said he would put the plan in practice that very night; he knew some gentlemen well skilled in music, and he had a song written that would be just suitable. As for the Duke, he was delighted with the suggestion, and bade them set to work at once to carry it into effect.

Meanwhile, in Verona, Julia was sorrowing for the absence of Proteus, and at last her longing to see him again grew so keen that she determined to follow him to Milan. Her waiting-maid, Lucetta, who had plenty of shrewd common-sense, tried to persuade her not to go, but Julia would listen to no reason.

“I feel as if I were dying with starvation until I see him again,” she said. “If you only knew what it is to love anyone, you would know how utterly useless it is to try to argue about it in words.”

As a young and beautiful lady travelling alone would be likely to attract a good deal of notice, for safety’s sake Julia decided to adopt the dress of a page, and she bade Lucetta procure for her all that was necessary to play the part properly. In vain Lucetta tried to warn her that perhaps Proteus would not be pleased to see her. Many men were fickle and changeable, she said; they [Pg 41] often pretended much more affection than they really felt.

Julia indignantly replied that some men might, but not her Proteus. Her trust in his fidelity was not to be shaken.

“His words are bonds, his oaths cannot be broken, his love is sincere, his thoughts are stainless, his tears are pure messengers straight from heaven, his heart is as free from fraud as heaven from earth!” she cried.

“Pray heaven he prove so when you come to him!” said the shrewd waiting-woman.

So the faithful, loving Julia set out on her journey to Milan. Alas, poor lady, she little knew what a sorry welcome was awaiting her!

“Alas, poor Lady, desolate and left!”

Proteus soon found that his scheme for winning Silvia met with small success. He had already been false to Valentine, and now he intended to be false to Sir Thurio; but his treachery was likely to be of little avail. Silvia was far too good and true to be corrupted by his worthless gifts. When he protested his loyalty to her, she twitted him with his falsehood to his absent friend; when he praised her beauty, she bade him remember how he had been forsworn in breaking faith with Julia, whom he loved. But, notwithstanding all her rebuffs and rebukes, the more she spurned Proteus the greater grew his admiration for her; and though he knew well how basely he [Pg 42] was acting both to Valentine and Julia, he had not enough strength of mind to turn aside from the temptation.

That night, in accordance with what they had arranged, Sir Thurio brought a band of musicians, and they sang a charming serenade outside the Duke of Milan’s palace, under Silvia’s chamber. This is the pretty song they sang:

“Who is Silvia? What is she,
  That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair and wise is she;
  The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admired be.

“Is she kind as she is fair?
  For beauty lives with kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
  To help him of his blindness.
And, being help’d, inhabits there.

“Then to Silvia let us sing,
  That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing
  Upon the dull earth dwelling:
To her, garlands let us bring.”

Unknown to Proteus, there was another listener, of whom he little recked.

Julia, on arriving at Milan, had made inquiries for her faithless lover, and the landlord of the house where she lodged had brought her to this spot to see the man for whom she had been inquiring. Now, in her page’s costume, she was a witness of her lover’s inconstancy. Proteus had sworn a thousand vows of love to her, and yet here he was plainly playing court to another lady! Poor Julia! Sweet as the music was, it had little charm for her; she heard only the jarring discord [Pg 43] of her lover’s false words.

“Doth this Sir Proteus that we speak of often come to visit this gentlewoman?” she asked her host.

“I tell you what Launce, his man, told me—he loves her beyond all measure,” replied the host.

“Peace, stand aside, they are going,” said Julia, stepping further back into the shadow; and she heard Proteus say:

“Sir Thurio, do not fear; I will plead your cause so well that you will own my cunning wit is matchless.”

“Where do we meet?” asked Sir Thurio, as he prepared to depart with the musicians.

“At St. Gregory’s Well.”

“Farewell!”

And Proteus was left alone as Silvia appeared on the balcony of her window above.

“Madam, good even to your ladyship,” said Proteus.

“I thank you for your music, gentlemen. Who was that who spoke?”

“One, lady, whom—if you knew his true heart—you would quickly learn to know by his voice.”

“Sir Proteus, as I take it.”

“Sir Proteus, gentle lady, and your servant.”

“What is your will?”

“That I may fulfil yours.”

“You have your wish. My will is this: that you immediately go home to bed, you subtle, perjured, false, disloyal man! Do you think I am so shallow, so witless, as to be won by your flattery—you, who have deceived so many with your vows! Return, return, and make amends to your own lady. [Pg 44] As for me, I swear by this moon that I am so far from granting your request that I despise you for your wrongful suit, and could chide myself even for the time I spend in talking to you.”

“I grant that I did love a lady,” said Proteus, “but she is dead.”

“Supposing that she is, yet Valentine, your friend, is alive, to whom you yourself are witness that I am betrothed. Are you not ashamed to wrong him with this persistency?”

“I hear likewise that Valentine is dead.”

“Imagine, then, that I am also dead; for, be assured, my love is buried in his grave.”

“Sweet lady, let me take it from the earth.”

“Go to your own lady’s grave, and call her love thence, or, at least, bury your own in hers.”

“Madam, if your heart is so pitiless, yet grant me your picture, for the sake of my love. For since you yourself are devoted elsewhere, I am but a shadow, and to your shadow will I give my love.”

“I am very loath to be your idol, sir, but since it suits your falsehood to admire shadows, send to me in the morning, and I will send the picture. And so, good rest!”

“As wretches have overnight who wait for execution in the morning,” said Proteus.

Poor Julia overheard all this conversation between her faithless suitor and the lady Silvia. It was impossible to doubt his falsehood any longer, yet so true and loving was her nature that she could not harden her heart to go away and never see him again. As it happened, Sir Proteus was staying at the very house in Milan where she had found a lodging. His thoughts just then were [Pg 45] entirely absorbed with his latest fancy, and it never occurred to him to connect the stranger lad, who called himself Sebastian, with his own lady Julia at Verona. But something about the pretty boy attracted his liking. Proteus’s servant Launce was a silly clown, whose half-witted blunders were always bringing his master into ridicule, and, judging from Sebastian’s face and bearing that he was well-born and trustworthy, Proteus took him into his service as page.

What befell in the Forest

Those were dark days for the lady Silvia: her lover Valentine banished, she herself kept in close imprisonment by her angry and tyrannical father, threatened with marriage to a suitor whom she hated and despised. What prospect of release could she look forward to?

But she was not without courage, and she was not without hope.

At the Court of Milan there was one friend on whom she could rely—the kind Sir Eglamour, a gentleman, valiant, wise, compassionate, well-accomplished; one who had himself known sorrow, for his lady and true love had died, and his heart still mourned her memory.

Silvia told this gentleman that she was anxious to go to Valentine—to Mantua—where she had heard he was staying, and because the ways were dangerous she begged him to accompany her, in whose faith and honour she trusted. Pitying her distress, and knowing that the Duke was acting cruelly in trying to force his daughter into an unworthy marriage, Sir Eglamour willingly agreed, and it was arranged they should start that evening. [Pg 46]

Sir Eglamour had scarcely left Silvia, when the messenger arrived from Proteus to claim the portrait which Silvia had promised. And who should Proteus have chosen for this errand but his new young page, Sebastian, whom he little thought was his own dear lady Julia in disguise. Not only this, but he also entrusted a ring to Sebastian to give to Silvia, and this ring was no other than the one which Julia had given to him when they parted, and which he had received with so many protestations of affection and vows of fidelity.

Julia, or Sebastian, as we ought now to call her, was nearly heart-broken at the task imposed on her, but she carried it through faithfully. And in one way she met with her reward. For the noble lady Silvia showed no pleasure at this proof of Proteus's affection, only scorn and indignation at his treachery to his own love. She gave her portrait, as she had promised it, but she tore up his letter in contempt, without even reading it; and as for the ring, she refused to accept it.

"Madam, he sends your ladyship this ring," said the pretty lad Sebastian.

"The more shame for him that he sends it me!" said Silvia warmly. "For I have heard him say a thousand times that Julia gave it him at his departure. Though his false finger have profaned the ring, mine shall never do his Julia so much wrong," she declared.

Julia was deeply touched and grateful at Silvia's generous sympathy, and still more so when the lady went on to question her about Julia, and to say how much she felt for her and pitied her.

"Alas, poor lady, desolate and left! I could weep for her," she said. "Here, youth, there is my purse. I give you this for your sweet mistress's sake, because you love her. Farewell!" [Pg 47]

"And she shall thank you for it if ever you know her," cried Julia, as Silvia retired with her attendants. "A virtuous gentlewoman, mild and beautiful! I hope my master's suit will be but cold, since she respects my mistress's love so much."

And somewhat comforted she returned to Proteus.

Silvia fled that night, as she had arranged with Sir Eglamour. The news soon reached her father's ears, and he immediately set out in pursuit of her, the party also including Sir Thurio, Proteus, and Sebastian. But in crossing a dangerous forest Sir Eglamour and Silvia had been seized by a band of outlaws. Sir Eglamour contrived to make his escape, but the outlaws were conveying Silvia to their chief, when Proteus came up with them and with some difficulty rescued their captive.

Now, the captain of these outlaws was no other than Valentine. On his way to Mantua he had been taken prisoner by the band, who, seeing that he was a brave and accomplished gentleman, had begged him to be their chief. Finding that they were not really bad men, but had been driven to this method of life by reckless behaviour in their youth, which had caused them to be banished from Milan, Valentine consented.

"I accept your offer, and will live with you," he said, "provided that you do no harm to women or poor travellers."

"No; we detest such vile practices," said one of the outlaws. "Come, go with us. We will take you to the rest of our crew, and show you all the treasure we have got, and everything shall be at your disposal." [Pg 48]

On the day when the adventure occurred to Sir Eglamour and Silvia, Valentine happened to be alone, when, unseen by them in the thickness of the forest, he saw Proteus approaching with Silvia and the little page Sebastian.

"Madam," he heard Proteus say, "I have done this service for you and risked my life, though you do not respect anything that your servant does. Grant me but a kind look for my reward. I cannot ask a smaller boon than that, and less than that I am sure you cannot give."

"This is like a dream!" thought Valentine, aghast at his friend's treachery. But he tried to wait patiently for a few minutes to see what would happen.

"Oh, miserable, unhappy that I am," sighed Silvia.

"And I too!" murmured the poor little page, apart.

"Had I been seized by a hungry lion, I would rather have been a breakfast to the beast than have false Proteus rescue me!" cried Silvia. "Oh, heaven, be judge how I love Valentine, whose life is as dear to me as my soul! And just as much—for it cannot be more—do I detest false, perjured Proteus! Therefore begone; entreat me no more."

Seeing there was no chance of winning Silvia by fair words, Proteus, in a rage, seized hold of her roughly, whereupon Valentine sprang forth and struck him back.

"Ruffian, let go that rude, uncivil touch! Thou evil-fashioned *friend*!"

"Valentine!" [Pg 49]

“Treacherous man! Thou hast beguiled my hopes.”

“You miserable *friend*, without faith or love!” continued Valentine, hurling his scorn on the convicted traitor. “Treacherous man! Thou hast beguiled my hopes! Nothing but my own eyes would have made me believe what I see. Now I dare not say I have one living friend,—whom could I trust, when the one nearest my heart is perjured? Proteus, I am sorry I must never trust thee more, but for thy sake count the whole world a stranger. Alas, that amongst all foes a *friend* should be the worst!” [Pg 50] [Pg 51]

Proteus’s easily-moved nature was struck to the heart by Valentine’s just reproaches. With deepest remorse, he implored Valentine’s pardon, and so noble and generous was Valentine that he forgave him on the spot. Nay, more, in the impulse of the moment he even offered to resign his own claim on Silvia. The thought that Proteus would now really be lost to her for ever, struck Julia like a blow, and she fell fainting to the ground.

“Look to the boy,” said Proteus.

“Why, boy, how now? What’s the matter? Look up! Speak!” said Valentine.

“Oh, good sir, my master charged me to deliver a ring to Madam Silvia, which because of my neglect was never done,” said Julia, in her guise of the little page.

“Where is that ring, boy?” asked Proteus.

“Here it is—this is it.”

“How? Let me see. Why, this is the ring I gave to Julia.”

“Oh, cry you mercy, sir, I have made a mistake,” said Julia, pretending to discover her error, and holding out another one. “*This* is the ring you sent to Silvia.” [Pg 52]

“But how did you come by this ring?” asked Proteus, looking at the first one. “When I left Verona I gave this to Julia.”

“And Julia herself gave it to me, and Julia herself has brought it here.”

“How? Julia!”

“Behold her to whom you swore so many vows, and who kept them tenderly in her heart! How often have you perjured yourself!” cried Julia, throwing off her disguise. “Oh, Proteus, let these clothes make you blush! Are you ashamed that I have put on the raiment of a boy? I tell you, it is less shameful for women to change their guise than men their minds!”

“Than men their minds!” echoed the conscience-stricken Proteus. “That is true.”

“Come, come, give me each your hand,” interposed Valentine. “Let me be blest in making a happy ending. It were pity that two such friends should be long foes.”

“Bear witness, Heaven, I have my wish for ever!” said Proteus solemnly.

“And I mine,” said Julia.

And it is to be hoped that this time the fickle gentleman kept faithful to his lady.

Matters had scarcely come to this happy conclusion, when the outlaws approached, bringing as captives the Duke of Milan and Sir Thurio.

“A prize! a prize! a prize!” shouted the outlaws.

“Forbear, forbear, I say! It is my lord, the Duke of Milan,” said Valentine. “Your Grace is welcome to a man disgraced,” he added courteously. [Pg 53]

“Sir Valentine!”

“Yonder is Silvia, and Silvia’s mine!” interrupted Sir Thurio, pressing rudely forward.

“Stand back!” commanded Valentine. “Come near, at your peril! Do not dare to call Silvia yours! Here she stands: I dare you to touch her, or even to come near.”

“Sir Valentine, I care not for her—I!” said Thurio, quite cowed. “I hold him but a fool who will endanger himself for a girl who does not love him. I claim her not, and therefore she is yours.”

“The more base of you to act as you have done, and then to leave her on such slight excuse!” said the Duke indignantly. “Now, by the honour of my ancestry, I applaud your spirit, Valentine; you are worthy of an Empress’s love. Know, then, I cancel here all that has passed, and summon you home again Sir Valentine, you are a gentleman. Take you your Silvia, for you have deserved her.”

“I thank your Grace; the gift has made me happy. I now beg you, for your daughter’s sake, to grant one boon that I shall ask of you.”

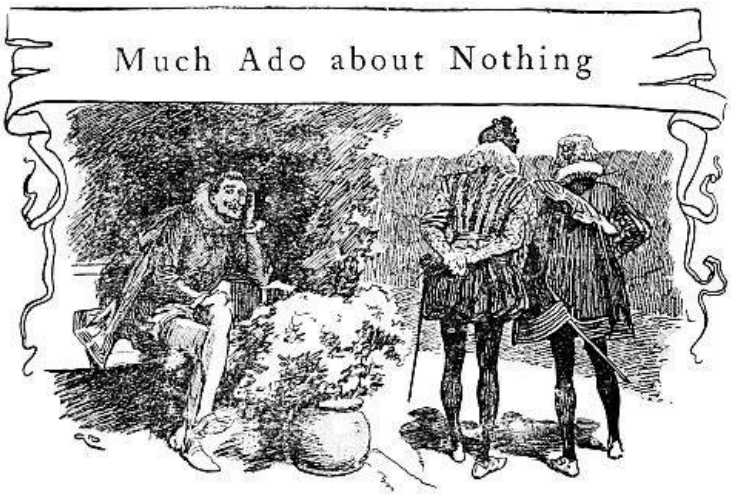
“I grant it you for your own, whatever it be,” said the Duke.

Then Valentine begged him to pardon the band of outlaws and recall them from exile.

“They are reformed, civil, full of good, and fit for great employment,” he said.

The Duke willingly granted his pardon, and then the whole party returned happily to Milan, where the same day wedding feasts were appointed for the two marriages—Valentine with Silvia, and Proteus with Julia.

[Pg 54]



“Dear Lady Disdain”

here was rejoicing in Messina, for the war was over, and Don Pedro, the victorious Prince of Arragon, was returning in triumph. Tidings were sent to Leonato, the Governor, to expect his speedy approach; and Leonato himself, with his daughter Hero and his niece Beatrice, received the Prince’s messenger, and questioned him eagerly as to the welfare of their friends.

“How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?” inquired Leonato.

“But few of any sort, and none of name,” replied the messenger.

“I find in this letter that Don Pedro has bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio,” said Leonato. [Pg 55]

“Much deserved on his part and equally remembered by Don Pedro,” answered the messenger. “He has indeed borne himself gallantly, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion.”

When she heard this outspoken praise of the young Florentine, Hero, the Governor’s daughter, felt a warm thrill of joy, but she only smiled and blushed with pleasure.

“I pray you,” put in Beatrice, the Governor’s niece, who lived in her uncle’s house, and was the dear companion of his only daughter, “is Signor Mountanto returned from the wars or no?”

“I know none of that name, lady,” said the messenger, looking rather puzzled; “there was none such in the army of any sort.”

“Who is he that you ask for niece?”

“My cousin means Signor Benedick of Padua,” explained Hero.

“Oh, he has returned, and as pleasant as ever he was,” said the messenger.

“I pray you, how many has he killed and eaten in these wars?” said Beatrice mockingly. “But no, how many has he killed? For, indeed, *I* promised to eat all of his killing.”

“Faith, niece, you are too hard on Signor Benedick,” said Leonato. “But he will be even with you, I do not doubt.”

“He has done good service, lady, in these wars,” said the messenger; and then he went on to praise warmly the valour and noble qualities of the young lord; but Beatrice would do nothing but laugh and mock at all he said.

“You must not, sir, mistake my niece,” said Leonato at last. “There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her; they never meet but there is a skirmish of wit between them.” [Pg 56]

While they were still speaking, the Prince of Arragon, with his train of noble gentlemen, arrived. Leonato welcomed them most warmly. Count Claudio and Signor Benedick were old friends, and had previously stayed at the Governor’s palace; indeed, before starting for the wars Claudio had looked with more than an eye of favour on the gentle lady Hero. As for Beatrice and Benedick, they pretended to have a great aversion to each other, but, strange to say, instead of avoiding each other’s society, they seemed to delight in seizing every opportunity to plague and tease each other as much as possible.

On the present occasion Beatrice had not long to wait, and on Benedick’s making some jesting remark to Don Pedro and Leonato, she plunged into the fray.

“I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick; nobody marks you.”

“What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?” retorted Benedick.

“Is it possible that Disdain should die while she has such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy herself must turn into disdain if you come into her presence.”

“Then is Courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted; and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none,” remarked Benedick in a lofty manner.

“That is very happy for women; they would otherwise have been troubled with a most annoying suitor,” said Beatrice. “Thank Heaven, I am like you in that respect; I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.” [Pg 57]

“Heaven keep your ladyship still in that mind!” said the young lord devoutly. “So some gentleman or another shall escape injury.”

It was all very well for Benedick to scoff at love, but the young Count Claudio was of a different nature. Impulsive and passionate, he was not ashamed to own his love for the lady Hero, and with the sympathetic help of the Prince of Arragon he speedily won the lady’s consent and her father’s approval. The wedding-day was fixed for a week later, and the only trial the impatient young lover had to endure was the time that must elapse before the marriage.

Benedick, of course, did not spare his raillery on this occasion, and he laughed with the utmost scorn when Don Pedro and Claudio declared that his own turn would come.

“I shall see you, before I die, look pale with love,” said Don Pedro.

“With anger, with sickness, with hunger, my lord, but never with love,” declared Benedick.

“Well, if ever you fall from this faith you will prove a notable argument.”

“If I do, hang me in a bottle and shoot at me,” laughed Benedick.

“Well, as time shall try. ‘In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke,’” quoted Don Pedro.

“The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull’s horns, and set them in my forehead; and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write ‘Here is good horse to hire,’ let them signify under my sign, ‘Here you may see Benedick the married man!’” [Pg 58]

Benedick’s self-assured declaration that he never intended to fall in love or get married, and Beatrice’s equal scorn on the same subject, put a mischievous idea into Don Pedro’s head, and it occurred to him that the week which had to elapse before the wedding might be most amusingly occupied.

“I will warrant that the time shall not pass dully,” he said to Leonato and Claudio. “I will in the meanwhile undertake one of Hercules’ labours, which is to bring Signor Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection one for the other. I would fain have it a match, and I do not doubt of bringing it about, if you three will but help me in the way I point out.”

“My lord, I am for you, though it cost me ten nights’ watching,” said Leonato.

“And I, my lord,” said Claudio.

“I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good husband,” said the gentle Hero.

“And Benedick is not the least hopeful husband I know,” said the Prince. “Thus far I can praise him: he is of noble race, of approved valour, and of steadfast honesty. I will teach you how to humour your cousin that she shall fall in love with Benedick, and I, with the help of Leonato and Claudio, will so practise on Benedick that, in spite of his quick wit and fastidious temper, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer; his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods! Come with me, and I will tell you my plan.” [Pg 59]

A Plain-dealing Villain

Now, among the gentlemen in the Prince of Arragon's train there was one of a very different nature from Claudio and Benedick. This was Don John, a half-brother of the Prince, and a man of sullen, envious, and malicious temper. He was spiteful to all the world, but in especial he hated his half-brother, and he bore a furious grudge against the young Florentine lord Claudio, because the latter stood high in the favour of the Prince of Arragon. Don John had long sullenly opposed his brother, and had only lately been taken into favour again. It now only depended on his own behaviour as to whether he should go on and prosper, or whether he should fall again into disgrace. But Don John had no intention of acting more amiably than he could possibly help. His followers, Borachio and Conrade, urged him to conceal his feelings, and to bear a more cheerful countenance among the general rejoicings, but Don John flatly refused.

"I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in my brother's grace," he said sullenly. "It better fits my humour to be disdained of all than to fashion a behaviour to rob love from any. In this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering, honest man, it must not be denied that I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted,—with a muzzle; and set free,—with a clog; therefore I have determined not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth I would bite, if I had my liberty I should do my liking; in the meantime let me be what I am, and do not seek to alter me."

The news that the gallant young Claudio was to wed the daughter of the Governor of Messina [Pg 60] put Don John into a fresh fury.

"That young start-up has all the glory of my overthrow," he declared. "If I can cross him in any way, I shall only be too delighted."

His two men, Borachio and Conrade, who were as evil-natured as their master, promised to help him in any scheme of vengeance he could devise, and it was not long before Borachio came to him and said that he had found a way to cross Count Claudio's marriage.

"Any bar, any cross, any hindrance, will do me good," said Don John. "I am sick with displeasure, and whatsoever comes athwart his desire will go evenly with mine. How can you cross this marriage?"

"Not honestly, my lord, but so secretly that no dishonesty shall appear in me."

"Show me briefly how."

"I think I told your lordship a year since how much I am in favour with Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero."

"I remember."

"I can at any unseasonable instant of the night appoint her to look out at her lady's chamber window."

"What good will that be to put an end to the marriage?"

"The poison of it lies with you to mix. Go to the Prince your brother, tell him he has wronged his honour in allowing the renowned Claudio—whom you must praise warmly—to marry lady like Hero, who has already another lover."

"What proof shall I make of that?"

"Proof enough to hurt the Prince, to vex Claudio, to ruin Hero, and to kill Leonato. Do you look for any other result?" [Pg 61]

"I will do anything only to spite them."

"Go, then, find a fitting hour when Don Pedro and Count Claudio are alone, and tell them that you know Hero loves me," said the wicked Borachio. "They will scarcely believe this without proof. Offer them the opportunity to test the truth of your words. Bring them outside Leonato's house the night before the wedding; and in the meanwhile I will so fashion the matter that they shall see Margaret speak to me out of the window, they shall hear me call her 'Hero,' and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty that Claudio in his jealousy will feel quite assured of it, and all the preparations for the wedding shall be overthrown."

"Let the issue of this be what it may, I will put it in practice," said Don John. "Be cunning in working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats."

"You be steady in the accusation, and my cunning shall not shame me," was Borachio's response.

"Cupid's Crafty Arrow"

Benedick was strolling alone in Leonato's orchard, and as he went he mused to himself.

"I do wonder," he thought, "that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he is in love, after he has laughed at such shallow follies in others, will himself become the object of his own scorn by falling in love; and such a man is Claudio. I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife, and now he had rather hear the tabor and the pipe. I have known when he would have walked ten miles on foot to see a good armour, and now will he lie [Pg 62] ten nights awake, carving the fashion of a new doublet. He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier; and now his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes. Shall I ever be so converted, and see with those eyes? I cannot tell. I think not. I will not be sworn that love may not transform me to an oyster, but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool. One woman is fair, yet I

am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be—that's certain; wise and virtuous, or I'll have none of her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair—her hair shall be of what colour it pleases God.... Ha! the Prince and Monsieur Love. I will hide me in the arbour."

And Benedick hastily concealed himself, as Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato approached, followed by some musicians.

"Come, shall we hear this music?" said Don Pedro, seating himself on a bench within earshot of the arbour. "See you where Benedick has hidden himself?" he added in a low voice.

"Oh, very well, my lord," answered Claudio. "When the music is ended, we will give him something to think about."

"Come, Balthasar, we'll hear that song again," said Don Pedro. [Pg 63]

So the musicians lightly touched the strings of their instruments, and Balthasar began his song:

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea, and one on shore,
To one thing constant never:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny!

"Sing no more ditties, sing no more,
Of dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of man was ever so,
Since summer first was leafy:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny!"

"By my troth, a good song!" said the Prince. "Balthasar, I pray you get us some excellent music, for to-morrow night we would have it at the lady Hero's chamber-window."

"The best I can, my lord."

"Do so; farewell.... Come hither, Leonato," said Don Pedro, when the young musician had retired. "What was it that you told me of to-day—that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signor Benedick?"

"Go on," whispered Claudio. "We shall catch our bird. I did never think that lady would have loved any man," he added aloud, for Benedick's benefit.

"No, nor I neither," said Leonato; "but it is most wonderful that she should so doat on Signor Benedick, whom she has in all outward behaviour always seemed to abhor." [Pg 64]

"Is it possible? Sits the wind in that corner?" murmured the astonished Benedick in his hiding-place.

"By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it, but that she loves him frantically," continued Leonato. "It is past the bounds of belief."

"Has she made her affection known to Benedick?" asked Don Pedro.

"No, and swears she never will; that is the cause of her unhappiness."

"'Tis true indeed," put in Claudio. "'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so often encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'"

"'I measure him by my own spirit,' she says," continued Leonato, "'for I should flout him if he wrote to me—yea, though I love him, I should.'"

"And then she weeps and sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair," said Claudio.

"My daughter is sometimes afraid she will do a desperate outrage to herself," said Leonato.

"It were good if Benedick knew it from someone else, if she will not reveal it," said Don Pedro.

"To what end?" asked Claudio. "He would make but a sport of it, and torment the poor lady worse."

"If he did it would be a charity to hang him," said Don Pedro indignantly. "She is an excellent, sweet lady."

"And she is exceedingly wise," put in Claudio.

"In everything but in loving Benedick," said Don Pedro.

"Oh, my lord, I am sorry for her, as I have just cause, being her uncle and her guardian," said Leonato.

"I would she had bestowed this affection on me," said Don Pedro. "I would marry her at once. [Pg 65] Well, Leonato, I am sorry for your niece. I pray you tell Benedick of it, and hear what he will say."

“Never tell him, my lord,” said Claudio. “Let her wear out her affection with good counsel.”

“Nay, that’s impossible,” said Leonato; “she may wear her heart out first.”

“Well, we will hear further of it from your daughter,” said Don Pedro. “I love Benedick well, and I could wish he would modestly examine himself to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady.”

“My lord, will you walk? Dinner is ready,” said Leonato.

“If he do not doat on her after this, I will never trust my expectation,” laughed Claudio, as the conspirators withdrew.

“Let there be the same net spread for Beatrice,” said Don Pedro, “and that your daughter and her gentlewomen must carry out. The sport will be when they each believe in the other’s doating, when there is no such matter; that’s the scene I should like to see.... Let us send her to call him in to dinner.”

When the others had gone, Benedick came forth from his hiding-place, deeply impressed with what he had heard.

“Poor lady!” he thought. “So she really loves me! Well, her affection must be requited. I hear how I am censured. They say I will bear myself proudly if I see the love come from her. They say, too, she will rather die than give any sign of affection.... I never thought to marry.... I must not seem proud. Happy are those that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; ’tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous; it is so. And wise; but for loving me. By my troth, it is no addition to her wit, and no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I may chance to have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage; but does not a man’s opinion alter?... When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I was married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day, she is a fair lady! I do spy some marks of love in her.” [Pg 66]

“Yet tell her of it; hear what she will say.”

Quite unconscious of all that had taken place, Beatrice advanced, and in her usual mocking style announced: [Pg 67]

“Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.”

“Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains,” said Benedick.

“I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me,” said Beatrice carelessly. “If it had been painful I would not have come.”

“You take pleasure, then, in the message?” said Benedick eagerly.

“Yes, just so much as you may take upon a knife’s point, and choke a daw withal,” laughed Beatrice. “You have no appetite, signor? Fare you well.” And off she went gaily.

“Ha! ‘Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.’ There’s a double meaning in that,” thought the poor deluded Benedick. “‘I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me.’ That’s as much as to say, ‘Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks.’ If I do not take pity on her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a Jew. I will go get her picture!”

The same trick which Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato had played on Beatrice by her cousin Hero and her gentlewomen, Margaret and Ursula. Beatrice was lured into [Pg 68] the garden, and there, unseen, as she imagined, by the others, she heard them discussing Benedick's love for her. They followed much the same lines as the three men had done with regard to Beatrice. They spoke of Benedick's hopeless affection, of his many good qualities, and of his fear of exciting Beatrice's scorn if he should say anything of his devotion. They said it was a great pity that the lady Beatrice was so proud and hard-hearted, and that they certainly would never tell her of Benedick's feelings towards her, for she would only laugh at him and treat him with cruel scorn.

"Yet tell her of it; hear what she will say," Ursula pretended to urge Hero.

"No," said Hero, "I would rather go to Benedick and counsel him to fight against his passion."

Having skilfully performed their task, the ladies retired, leaving Beatrice overcome with wonder at what she had heard, and with all her pride melting into a strange new feeling of love.

The Night before the Wedding

It was not likely that Benedick's changed behaviour should escape notice, and Don Pedro and Claudio pretended to think he was in love, and began to tease him unmercifully. Benedick met their raillery with an air of lofty scorn, but nothing would stop the shafts of wit which the light-hearted gentlemen levelled at their deluded companion, and they continued to twit him on his [Pg 69] pensive demeanour, and the new air of fashion which he was adopting.

But all gladness and gaiety were suddenly clouded over with heavy gloom.

Having carefully prepared his villainous plot by the aid of his follower Borachio, Don John came to Claudio and the Prince of Arragon, and told them what had been agreed—namely, that Hero was unworthy to be the wife of Claudio, for she was already in love with Borachio, and that if the Prince and Count Claudio wished to prove the truth of his statement they had only to go that night to the street outside Leonato's palace, where they would see Hero speaking out of a window to Borachio.

Don Pedro and Claudio were, of course, at first stunned and incredulous, but Don John never faltered in the terrible lie he was relating.

"If you will follow me I will show you enough," he concluded, "and when you have heard more and seen more, proceed accordingly."

"If I see anything to-night why I should not marry her to-morrow," said Claudio, "in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her."

"And as I helped you to woo her, I will join with you to disgrace her," said Don Pedro.

Now, the watchmen who kept the streets of Messina were a set of silly old men, whose only idea of duty was to potter about the streets, and keep as far as possible out of the way of anyone who was likely to give them any trouble. Chief of them was a constable called Dogberry, whose ignorance and stupidity were only equalled by his enormous self-conceit. On the night before the [Pg 70] wedding, however, these brilliant watchmen actually did contrive to effect a capture which led to the happiest results.

Dogberry had finished his string of ridiculous instructions to the band, and had just taken his departure, when two wayfarers came along from opposite directions, and stopped to speak to each other. These were Borachio and Conrade, the two followers of the wicked Don John.

The street was quite dark, and apparently deserted, and as at that moment it began to drizzle with rain, the two men took shelter under a convenient pent-house. Suspicious of some treason, the watchmen concealed themselves near, and thus overheard the whole tale of villainy which Borachio confessed to Conrade.

"Know that I have to-night wooed Margaret, the lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of Hero," he said. "She leans out of the window to me, she bids me a thousand times good-night. But I should first tell you how the Prince, Claudio, and my master, placed and instructed by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this affectionate interview."

"And did they think Margaret was Hero?"

"Two of them did—the Prince and Claudio—but the devil, my master, knew she was Margaret. Deceived partly by the darkness of the night, but chiefly by my villainy, which confirmed any slander that Don John invented, away went Claudio enraged, swore he would meet her as was appointed next morning at the church, and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he had seen, and send her home again without a husband." [Pg 71]

Borachio had scarcely finished speaking when the watchmen pounced on the two villains. Surprised by the suddenness of the onslaught, they were quickly overpowered, and, finding any attempt at resistance useless, they had to submit to being led ignominiously away.

“A thousand times good-night.”

“Done to Death by Slanderous Tongues”

[Pg 72]

Next morning a brilliant company were assembled in the great church at Messina to see the wedding of Count Claudio and the lady Hero. Beatrice, of course, was there with her cousin, and Leonato to give his daughter away. The young maiden, in her snowy robe and veil, stood ready, and facing her was the gallant young Count, in his bridal splendour of white and gold.

“You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?” said the Friar.

“No,” said Claudio.

The bystanders were astonished at this curt response, but Leonato corrected the Friar’s words.

“To be married to her; Friar, *you* come to marry her.”

“Lady, you come hither to be married to this Count?”

“I do,” said Hero, in a low but steady voice.

“If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoined, I charge you on your souls to utter it,” said the Friar.

“Know you any, Hero?” demanded Claudio sternly.

“None, my lord,” came the slightly wondering but unfaltering answer.

“Know you any, Count?”

“I dare make his answer, none,” interposed Leonato.

“Oh, what men dare do! what men may do! what men daily do, not knowing what they do!” cried Claudio, in a burst of bitter scorn. Then, turning to Leonato, he said: “Will you with free soul give me this maid, your daughter?”

[Pg 73]

There, Leonato, take her back again.

“As freely, son, as God gave her to me,” said Leonato. [Pg 74]

[Pg 75]

“And what have I to give you that shall equal in worth this rare and precious gift?” said Claudio.

“Nothing, unless you render her again,” said Don Pedro.

“Sweet Prince, you teach me noble thankfulness. There, Leonato, take her back again.”

And then Claudio, as he had sworn, in the presence of the whole congregation, brought forth his terrible accusations against Hero, and declared he would not marry her. Stung to fury by what he considered her wickedness and deceit—for the young girl’s blushing modesty and grace appeared to him nothing but seeming—he related what he and the Prince had seen the night before, and how Hero had spoken out of her window with a ruffian. It was useless for Hero to protest her innocence; nothing could destroy the evidence of their own eyes.

Unable to endure this cruel and astounding calumny, Hero sank fainting to the ground. Don Pedro, Claudio, and Don John left the church; the amazed wedding guests dispersed; and Leonato, Beatrice, Benedick, and the Friar were left alone with the unhappy Hero.

“How doth the lady?” asked Benedick, approaching the spot where Beatrice was eagerly trying to recall her cousin to consciousness.

“Dead, I think,” cried Beatrice in despair. “Help, uncle! Hero—why, Hero! Uncle! Signor Benedick! Friar!”

“Death is the fairest cover for her shame that can be wished for,” said the heart-broken father. [Pg 76]

“How now, Cousin Hero!” said Beatrice, as the young girl slowly opened her dazed eyes.

“Have comfort, lady,” said the Friar tenderly.

“Do you look up?” said Leonato.

“Yes; wherefore should she not?” said the Friar.

In his terrible grief, not questioning the truth of the story, Leonato declared that death was the happiest thing that could happen to Hero after such dishonour, and that if her spirit had strength enough to survive such shame, he could almost be tempted to kill her with his own hands.

“Sir, sir, be patient!” pleaded Benedick. “For my part, I am so attired in wonder I do not know what to say.”

“Upon my soul, my cousin is belied!” exclaimed Beatrice.

Then the Friar stepped forward, and declared his absolute belief in Hero’s innocence, and his words were so clear and convincing that even Leonato began to think his daughter must be wrongfully accused. The mystery was puzzling, for, as Benedick remarked, the Prince and Claudio were the soul of honour, and were only too terribly convinced themselves of the truth of what they had said. If they had been misled in any way, it must be the work of Don John, who delighted in planning deeds of villainy.

By the good Friar’s advice, it was agreed that for the present Hero should stay secretly in retirement, so that the outside world should imagine she was really dead. Slander would then be changed to remorse, and she would be lamented, excused, and pitied by everyone. For it generally falls out that we do not prize to its full worth what we have; but when it is lacked and [Pg 77] lost, then we appreciate its value. So it would fare with Claudio. When he should hear that Hero had died at his words, the sweet remembrance of her lovely life would creep into his soul; then he would mourn and wish he had not so accused her.

“Signor Leonato, let the Friar advise you,” said Benedick. “And though you know my loyalty and love to the Prince and Claudio, yet by mine honour I will deal as secretly and justly in this matter as your soul would with your body.”

So it was agreed, and then the good Friar and Leonato took away Hero to put their plan into

execution.

Left alone with Benedick, Beatrice's rage and indignation found full vent. She was justly furious at the indignity that had been put on her gentle cousin, and though for a moment Benedick won her to a lighter mood by confessing his love for her, yet she speedily returned to the subject of which her heart was full.

"Oh that I were a man!" she cried, her one desire being to revenge Hero, and punish the dastards who had wrought such an insult on her. If Benedick really loved her, she declared, he would take this office on himself and kill Claudio.

"Kill Claudio!"

Benedick hesitated. No, he could not do that. Claudio was his friend.... But he loved Beatrice; her generous, whole-hearted sympathy for her cousin could not but prevail with one of Benedick's chivalrous nature.

"Think you in your soul that Count Claudio has wronged Hero?" he asked solemnly. [Pg 78]

"Yes, as surely as I have a thought or a soul," said Beatrice, with noble pride.

"Enough; I am engaged. I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. Go, comfort your cousin. I must say she is dead. And so, farewell."

Benedick, the scoffer, the jester, the light-hearted wit of the Prince's Court, showed in this moment that he was also a high-souled chivalrous gentleman, fitting mate for the brave and noble-spirited Beatrice.

In accordance with his promise, Benedick went to seek Claudio. He presently found him with Don Pedro. The two gentlemen had just had a painful interview with Leonato, who had indignantly reproached them for their behaviour. They felt anything but happy, although they persisted in thinking that they were quite justified in acting as they had done. However, at the sight of Benedick their spirits rallied, and they tried to assume their usual teasing vein of raillery. But Benedick was in no jesting humour. With cold self-possession he delivered his challenge to Claudio, and then he took a dignified leave of the Prince of Arragon.

"My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you," he said. "I must discontinue your company. Your brother Don John is fled from Messina; you have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord Lackbeard there, he and I shall meet; and till then peace be with him."

"He is in earnest," said the Prince, as Benedick withdrew.

"In most profound earnest," said Claudio; "and, I'll warrant you, for the love of Beatrice." [Pg 79]

"And has challenged you."

"Most sincerely."

"What a pretty thing man is when he goes in his doublet and hose, and leaves off his wit!" said Don Pedro disdainfully.

But the self-satisfaction of the Prince and Claudio were soon to receive a severe shock. The watchmen now approached, bringing with them their capture of the night before, the culprits Borachio and Conrade, and the whole miserable tale of treachery was duly unfolded. Leonato was sent for in haste.

"Are you the slave that with your slander slew my innocent child?" he asked of Borachio.

"Yes, even I alone."

"No, not so, villain; you belie yourself," said Leonato. "Here stand a pair of honourable men; a third is fled that had a hand in it. I thank you, Princes, for my daughter's death: it was bravely done, if you bethink you of it."

Claudio was overwhelmed with remorse; he dared not ask pardon of the deeply-wronged Leonato, but he besought him to chose his own revenge, and to impose on him any penance he choose to invent. Don Pedro also joined him in expressing his deep penitence.

"I cannot bid you bid my daughter live," replied Leonato, "but I pray you both proclaim to all the people in Messina how innocent she died. Hang an epitaph upon her tomb, and sing it there to-night. To-morrow morning come to my house, and since you cannot be my son-in-law, be my nephew. My brother has a daughter almost the copy of my child that's dead. Marry her, as you would have married her cousin, and so dies my revenge." [Pg 80]

Claudio willingly agreed to carry out this suggestion, and that night he went to the church with a solemn company, and read aloud the following scroll:

"Done to death by slanderous tongues
  Was the Hero that here lies;
Death, in guerdon of her wrongs,
  Gives her fame which never dies.
So the life that died with shame
Lives in death with glorious fame."

"Hang thou there upon the tomb, praising her when I am dumb," he added, placing the scroll on the family monument of Leonato.

The following morning a large company again assembled in Leonato's house, for another wedding was to take place. This time all the ladies were veiled, and it was not until the words were spoken in which Claudio took an unknown maiden to be his wife that the bride threw back her veil and revealed the well-loved face of Hero.

Benedick had already announced to the Friar that he intended to marry the lady Beatrice, and Leonato had given his willing approval. Benedick therefore approached the group of still masked figures to find his own lady, and called Beatrice by name.

"What is your will?" she inquired, taking off her mask.

"Do not you love me?" asked Benedick.

"Why, no—no more than reason," said Beatrice provokingly.

"Why, then, your uncle and the Prince and Claudio have been deceived; they swore you did." [Pg 81]

Beatrice laughed.

"Do not you love me?" she asked in her turn.

"Troth, no; no more than reason," said Benedick loftily.

"Why, then, my cousin, Margaret and Ursula are much deceived, for they swore you did."

"They swore you were almost ill for me," declared Benedick.

"They swore that you were wellnigh dead for me," retorted Beatrice.

"'Tis no such matter. Then you do not love me?"

"No, truly, but in friendly recompense," said Beatrice, with airy indifference.

"Come, cousin, I am sure you love the gentleman," said Leonato.

"And I'll be sworn that he loves her," said Claudio.

"Come, I will have thee," said Benedick. "But by this light I take thee for pity."

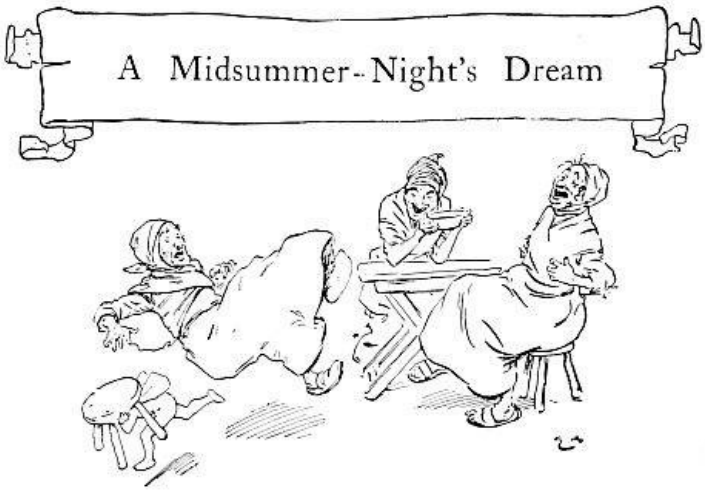
"I would not deny you," said Beatrice, "but by this good day I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption."

"Peace, I will stop your mouth!" said Benedick; and he silenced her merry chatter with a loving kiss.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Don Pedro, with shy malice. "How dost thou, *Benedick the married man*?"

But the lovers' happiness was proof against any raillery that could be lavished on them, and no lighter hearts led off the revelry that wedding-day than those of Beatrice and Benedick.

[Pg 82]



Helena and Hermia

heseus, Duke of Athens, was to wed Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, and the whole city was given up to merriment in honour of the occasion. Theseus had won his bride by the sword, but he was to wed her in another fashion—with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling. Four days had yet to elapse before the marriage, and during that time the citizens of Athens were to busy themselves with preparations for the great event.

In the midst of the general rejoicing, a gentleman of Athens, by name Egeus, came to invoke the authority of the Duke. Full of vexation, he came to complain against his child, his daughter Hermia. Egeus wished her to marry a certain gentleman called Demetrius; but meanwhile [Pg 83] Hermia had already fallen in love with another gentleman called Lysander, and she declared she

would marry no one but Lysander.

Now, the law of Athens at that time gave full power to a father to dispose of his daughter as he chose; that is to say, if she declined to marry the man he selected, the father had power to put her to death or to shut her up in a convent.

The Duke of Athens gave Hermia four days to make her choice. At the end of that time she must either consent to marry Demetrius, in accordance with her father's wishes, or else she must retire to a convent for the rest of her days.

Hermia answered without hesitation: she would rather be shut up in a convent all her life than marry a man she did not love.

Lysander himself pleaded that he was in every way as suitable a match as Demetrius—quite as well born and equally wealthy. Beyond all this, he was beloved of Hermia. Why, then, should he not try to win her? Besides, he added, Demetrius had already paid court to another lady—Helena—and had won her heart; and this sweet lady was still devoted to this fickle and unworthy man.

"I must confess I have heard of this, and I intended to speak to Demetrius on the subject," said the Duke. "But being so overfull of my own affairs, the matter slipped out of my mind. But come, Demetrius, and come, Egeus, I wish to speak to you both in private. As for you, fair Hermia, see that you prepare to obey your father's will, or else the law of Athens which I have no power to alter, yields you up to death or to a vow of single life." [Pg 84]

The Duke went off with Egeus and Demetrius, and Hermia and Lysander were left alone. They were very sorry for themselves, and began to lament the misfortunes and the difficulties that always seem to beset the path of true love.

Hermia was inclined to submit without further struggle, but Lysander was not going to give in so easily, and he hurriedly unfolded a plan to save Hermia from the fate that lay before her.

"I have a widow aunt, very wealthy, who has no child," he said. "Her house is seven leagues distant from Athens, and she treats me as her own son. There, gentle Hermia, I can marry you, and in that place the sharp law of Athens cannot touch us. If you love me, then, steal from your father's house to-morrow night, and I will wait for you a league outside the town, in that wood where I met you once with Helena, gathering flowers before the dawn on the first of May."

"My good Lysander!" cried Hermia, hiding her real earnestness under half-jesting words, "I swear to you by Cupid's strongest bow—by his best arrow with the golden head—and by all the vows that ever men broke, that I will truly meet you to-morrow in the place you have appointed."

"Keep promise, love. Look! here comes Helena."

From their earliest days Helena and Hermia had been the dearest of friends and the closest of companions, never apart, either at work or play, growing up together side by side, like a double cherry, or two lovely berries moulded on one stem. [Pg 85]

But, alas! love—or, rather, jealousy—had come to thrust them apart. Demetrius, who had at first paid court to Helena, afterwards transferred his affection to Hermia, and persuaded her father Egeus to favour his suit. Hermia cared nothing at all for Demetrius, and loved no one but Lysander. But Helena could not forgive her friend for having taken her fickle lover from her, and now she bitterly lamented that her own charms had been powerless to retain him.

"I frowned upon Demetrius, but he loves me still," said Hermia, for she did not wish her friend to think she had acted unfairly. "The more I hate, the more he follows me."

"The more I love, the more he hates me," said Helena sadly.

"His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine," said Hermia.

"None. Your only fault is your beauty. Would that fault were mine," sighed Helena.

"Take comfort; he shall see my face no more," said Hermia. "Lysander and I are going to fly this place. We are to meet to-morrow in that wood where you and I have so often wandered, and thence we shall turn our eyes from Athens to seek new friends and strange companions. Farewell, sweet playfellow; pray for us, and good luck grant you your Demetrius."

Helena's passion for Demetrius was so strong that it overpowered all other consideration, and on this occasion it made her do a very mean and disloyal action. Anxious to win back a little affection from her faithless lover, no matter at what cost, she determined to betray Hermia's secret, and to go and tell Demetrius of her flight. Then Demetrius would pursue her to-morrow night to the wood, and if he rewarded Helena with even a little gratitude for the information, she felt her attempt would not have been in vain. [Pg 86]

Playing the Lion

Unknown to the lovers, that same wood was chosen as a meeting-place for the following night by a very different set of people. Several of the petty artisans of Athens, anxious to celebrate the wedding in proper style, had decided to perform a little play—or "interlude," as it was called—in the presence of the Duke and Duchess. Quince, the carpenter, was supposed to direct the proceedings of this little band of amateur actors, but the ruling spirit of the company was in reality Bottom, the weaver. Bursting with self-conceit, never able to keep silent a moment, Bottom was ready to instruct everyone else in his duties, and if it had only been possible for him to have played every character in the piece, in addition to his own, he would have been quite content. As each part was mentioned, and Quince began to apportion them out, Bottom's voice

was heard again and again, declaring how well *he* could perform each one. The play was to be "The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby," and Bottom was selected for Pyramus, the hero.

"What is Pyramus—a lover or a tyrant?" he inquired.

"A lover that kills himself most gallantly for love," answered Quince.

"That will ask some tears in the true performing of it," said Bottom, swelling with self- [Pg 87]
importance. "If *I* do it, let the audience look to their eyes."

The next character was Thisby, the heroine, and this was given to Flute, the bellows-mender, a thin, lanky youth with a squeaky voice.

"Nay, faith, let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming," he said piteously.

"That's all one; you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will," said Quince.

"If I hide my face, let *me* play Thisby, too," cried Bottom eagerly. "I'll speak in a monstrous little voice. 'Thisne, Thisne!' 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisby dear, and lady dear!'"

"No, no! you must play Pyramus, and, Flute, you Thisby," said Quince.

"Well, proceed," said Bottom.

Quince went on with his list, and presently he called out the name of Snug, the joiner.

"You will play the lion's part, Snug," he said; "and now, I hope, there is the play fitted."

"Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study," said Snug modestly, for he was a very meek and mild little man.

"You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring," said Quince.

"Let *me* play the lion, too," burst in Bottom. "I will roar that it will do any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the Duke say: 'Let him roar again.'"

"If you should do it too terribly, you would frighten the Duchess and the ladies out of their wits, so that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all," said Quince. [Pg 88]

"That would hang us, every mother's son," agreed the rest of the little band, quaking with terror.

"I grant you, friends, that if you should frighten the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us," said Bottom. "But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar as if it were any nightingale."

"You can play no part but Pyramus," said Quince firmly. So Bottom had reluctantly to give in, and to devote his energies to deciding what coloured beard it would be best to play the important part of Pyramus in. It was really quite a difficult matter, there were so many to choose from,—straw-colour, orange tawny, purple-in-grain, or French-crown, which was perfect yellow. But Quince said any colour would do, or he might play it without a beard.

"Masters, here are your parts," he concluded, "and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you, to know them by to-morrow night, and meet me in the palace wood, a mile outside the town, by moonlight. There we will rehearse, for if we meet in the city we shall be dogged with company, and our devices known. I pray you, do not fail me."

The Magic Flower

Now, the wood which Hermia and Lysander had appointed as their trysting-place, and where Bottom and his fellow-actors were also to meet to rehearse their play, was the favourite haunt of [Pg 89]
fairies, and on this Midsummer Night Oberon, King of the Fairies, was to hold his revels there. Sad to say, for some time past there had been great dissension between Oberon and his Queen, Titania, and because of their quarrels nothing went well in the surrounding country. The cause of their disagreement was a lovely Indian boy, the sweetest little changeling imaginable. Queen Titania had him as her attendant, and jealous Oberon wanted the boy for his own page. Titania refused to give him up; he was the child of a dear friend, now dead, and for her sake she had reared up the boy, and for her sake she would not part with him.

Oberon and Titania never met now, in grove or green, by the clear fountain, or in the spangled starlight, without quarrelling so fiercely that their elves crept for fear into acorn-cups, and hid themselves there. They generally tried to keep out of each other's way, but on this night it happened that as King Oberon, with his little sprite Puck and his train, approached from one direction, Queen Titania and her attendant fairies came near from the other. Titania reproached Oberon with all the ill-luck that was happening because of their dissension, and Oberon replied that it only lay with her to amend it.

"Why should Titania cross her Oberon?" he asked. "I do but beg a little changeling boy to be my henchman."

"Set your heart at rest," replied Titania; "the whole of Fairyland will not buy the child of me."

"How long do you intend to stay in this wood?" asked Oberon.

"Perhaps till after Theseus's wedding-day," said Titania. "If you will join patiently in our dance, and see our moonlight revels, go with us. If not, shun me, and I will take care to avoid your [Pg 90]

haunts.”

“Give me that boy, and I will go with you,” said Oberon.

“Not for your fairy kingdom!” was the decided answer. “Fairies, away! We shall quarrel in earnest if I stay any longer.”

As he could not win the boy by entreaty, Oberon resolved to try another plan to gain his desire. Calling his little sprite Puck to him, he bade him go and fetch a certain magic flower, which maidens call “love-in-idleness.” The juice of this flower had a wonderful charm. When laid on the eyelids of a sleeping man or woman it had the power of making that person doat madly on the next living creature that was seen. Oberon determined to squeeze some of the juice of this flower on Titania’s eyes while she slept, so that when she woke up she should immediately fall in love with the first creature she saw, whether it were lion, bear, wolf, or bull, meddling monkey or busy ape. He determined also that he would not take off the charm (which he could do with another herb) until she had rendered up the little Indian boy as page to him.

“Fetch me this herb,” he said to Puck, “and be thou here again before the leviathan can swim a league.”

“I’ll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes,” cried the prompt little messenger, and away he flew.

While King Oberon was awaiting Puck’s return, he saw the unhappy lady Helena approaching with her faithless lover Demetrius. Oberon was invisible, and thus he overheard what they said. [Pg 91] Demetrius had come to the wood in search of Hermia and Lysander, for Helena had told him of their proposed flight. Oberon heard Helena confess how deeply she loved Demetrius, and he heard Demetrius spurn her roughly, and declare he loved no one but Hermia.

Oberon was sorry for Helena, and he determined to punish Demetrius. He resolved to put some of the magic juice on the eyes of Demetrius, so that when he woke and saw Helena he should fall in love with her again, and then it would be Helena’s turn to repulse Demetrius and refuse to listen to him.

Demetrius and Helena had scarcely gone on their way when Puck returned.

“Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer,” said Oberon.

“Ay, there it is,” said Puck.

“I pray thee, give it me,” said Oberon, and his voice glided into a sweet chant:

> “I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
> Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
> Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
> With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
> There sleeps Titania some time of the night,
> Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight;
> And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,
> Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in:
> And with the juice of this I’ll streak her eyes,
> And make her full of hateful fantasies.”

Oberon found Titania, as he had expected, and, stealing up quietly while she slept, he squeezed some of the magic juice on her eyelids, repeating this charm as he did so: [Pg 92]

> “What thou seest when thou dost wake,
> Do it for thy true-love take,
> Love and languish for his sake;
> Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
> Pard, or boar with bristled hair,
> When thou wakest, it is thy dear.
> Wake when some vile thing is near.”

And, laughing to himself at the strange experience which was likely to befall Titania, off went Oberon.

The next wanderers to pass through that part of the wood were Hermia and Lysander in their flight from Athens. Being weary, they lay down to rest, and speedily fell asleep.

King Oberon had told Puck to go in search of a sweet Athenian lady who was in love with a disdainful youth. When Puck found them, he was to drop some of the juice on the eyes of the man, but to take care to do this when the next thing he espied would be the lady. Puck would know the man by his Athenian garments, added Oberon. Of course, by this, Oberon meant Demetrius; but Puck came across Lysander and Hermia instead, and, thinking they must be the couple referred to, he squeezed the magic juice on the eyelids of Lysander.

This mistake of little Puck’s led to a great deal of fresh mischief.

Soon afterwards Demetrius came running along, followed by Helena. In the darkness of the night Demetrius did not notice the very people he was in search of—Lysander and Hermia. Demetrius was very angry that Helena would persist in following him, and, bidding her roughly stay where she was, he hurried off alone. Helena, indeed, was too weary to pursue him further. She was just bewailing his unkind treatment, when she was startled to see Lysander lying on the [Pg 93]

ground. She did not know whether he were dead or asleep, and hastily roused him.

"What thou seest when thou dost wake.
Do it for thy true-love take."

Now, what happened? The fairy charm began to take effect. Lysander had gone to sleep in love with Hermia, but, opening his eyes, his first glance fell on Helena, and, in accordance with the fairy charm, his affections were immediately transferred to Helena. He began speaking at once to Helena, and told her that he no longer cared for Hermia. [Pg 94]

Helena could not understand what all this meant. She thought Lysander was mocking her, and left him indignantly. But Lysander followed, for he was now determined to have no one but Helena.

"Lysander!... Alack, where are you?"

Poor Hermia awoke in terror from a horrible dream. She thought a serpent was crawling over her, eating her heart, and that Lysander sat by smiling. She shrieked to Lysander to come and help her. But there was no answer; Lysander had gone. Again she called:

"Lysander, lord! What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word! Alack, where are you? Speak, if you can hear! Speak! I almost swoon with dread."

But when again no answer came to her piteous appeal, Hermia knew in truth that Lysander was gone, and she set off at once to try to find him. [Pg 95]

Puck in Mischief

Queen Titania, meanwhile, was quietly sleeping, and she did not even waken when Quince and Bottom, with their ambitious little troupe of actors, came and began to rehearse their play close by. Bottom, as usual, took the lead, and made himself very officious in directing all the rest.

But if Titania did not see them, someone else did.

Puck, the little imp, or Robin Goodfellow, as he was also called, was always alert for any mischief. Sometimes he played pranks to frighten the village maidens; sometimes he frolicked in the churn, and prevented the butter coming, so that the busy housewife toiled in vain; at other times, as Hobgoblin or Will-o'-the-Wisp, he led astray unwary travellers by night; sometimes he took the guise of a roasted apple in a bowl of hot spiced ale, and bobbed against the lips of some old gossip as she was drinking; or perhaps just when some sedate elderly spinster was sitting down to tell a sad story, Puck would skip away with her three-legged stool, and down she would go on the ground—bang!—while all the other old cronies shook with laughter.

Puck was much diverted with the strange crew of petty artisans from Athens, who had come into the wood to rehearse their play, and he presently played one of his pranks on the conceited Bottom. The latter, having spoken some of his lines, stood aside for a few minutes, while the others went on with their parts, and, unseen by anyone, Puck seized this opportunity to pop an ass's head on Bottom.

Quite unconscious of the strange change that had taken place in his appearance, Bottom calmly advanced when his turn came again, but at the sight of the ass's head all his companions shrieked and fled in terror, calling out that they were bewitched. Bottom could not imagine why they behaved in this queer fashion, and thought it was some trick to frighten him. [Pg 96]

"I will not stir from this place, do what they can," he said stolidly. "I will walk up and down here, and I will sing, so that they shall hear I am not afraid."

So he began to pace up and down, singing in a very harsh, discordant manner, more like an ass's bray than a man's voice:

"The ousel-cock so black of hue,
  With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
  The wren with little quill——"

"What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?" cried Titania, starting up from slumber.

The charm was beginning to work, and she gazed with rapture on the curious monster.

Bottom sang on:

"The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
  The plain-song cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark,
  And dares not answer nay."

"I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again," entreated Titania. "My ear is charmed as much with your music as my eye is enthralled with your appearance. Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful." [Pg 97]

"Oh, how I love thee! how I doat on thee!"

"Not so, neither," said Bottom bluntly; "but if I had wit to get out of this wood I have enough to serve my own turn." [Pg 98] [Pg 99]

"Do not desire to go out of this wood," pleaded Titania. "Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wish it or not. I am a spirit of no common kind, and I love thee; therefore go with me. I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee, and they shall fetch thee jewels, and sing while thou liest sleeping on a bank of flowers. Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! and Mustard-seed!"

Four little elves came flying at the summons, and the infatuated Queen of the Fairies gave this

new object of her affections into their special charge. They led him away to the bower of the Queen, and there they decked him with flowers, while Titania lavished caresses on the clownish monster.

Bottom was not in the least impressed with the dainty loveliness of the Queen of the Fairies. He accepted all her attentions with stolid indifference, and ordered the little elves about with loutish stupidity. But the magic charm was so strong that Titania was quite bewitched with him.

“Say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat,” she said coaxingly.

“Truly, a peck of provender,” was the gruff reply. “I could munch you your good dry oats. But, I pray you, let none of your people stir. I feel I am getting sleepy.”

“Sleep thou, and I will stay here beside thee,” said the Queen. “Fairies, begone! Oh, how I love thee! how I doat on thee!”

Hermia had gone in search of Lysander, but instead of finding him she came across Demetrius. [Pg 100]
The latter immediately began, as usual, to declare his affection for her, and Hermia, as before, repulsed him angrily. Lysander was the only person in the world for whom she would ever care, though she could not imagine why he had deserted her so cruelly while she lay asleep.

“This is the Athenian whose eyes I told you to anoint,” said King Oberon to Puck, as they watched from the thicket all that was happening.

“This is the woman, but this is not the man,” said Puck.

“What have you done?” exclaimed the King. “You have made a great mistake. You have placed the love-juice on some true-love’s eyes, and now, because of your error, some true love has turned false, instead of some false love turning true! Go swifter than the wind through the wood, and look you find Helena of Athens. She is pale and ill with sighing for love. See that you bring her here by some device. I will charm the eyes of Demetrius before she appears.”

Puck flew off, eager to repair the mischief he had done, and King Oberon squeezed some of the magic juice on the eyes of Demetrius.

A few minutes later Helena arrived, but Lysander was with her. Now there were fresh troubles and perplexities. Demetrius woke up, and, as the first object on which his eyes fell was Helena, he immediately fell in love with her again, and forgot Hermia.

But Helena could not understand what all this meant. She thought both men were mocking and insulting her. She knew that only the day before Lysander had wanted to marry Hermia, and that [Pg 101]
Demetrius also wanted to marry Hermia, although he had originally paid court to herself. Why, then, did they both now pretend that it was herself that they wanted? She did not know it was all the fault of that mischievous little flower.

Hermia was as much distressed as Helena. It was perplexing enough when Demetrius suddenly turned round and would have nothing more to say to her; but what cut Hermia to the heart was that her own faithful Lysander should not only forsake her for Helena, but shower insults on her whenever she came near.

A pretty tangle Puck had caused by his mistake!

Demetrius and Lysander became so enraged with jealousy that they challenged each other to fight, but here Puck interfered again to good effect. He contrived so to baffle and mislead them that, instead of meeting, they did nothing but chase each other about in the darkness. At last, quite wearied out, Lysander sank down to rest, while the faithful Hermia took up her place near him. Then Puck applied the love-juice again to Lysander’s eyes, and this time when he woke his glance fell first on Hermia, so at last all went well. His affection was restored to her, and as Demetrius was already in love again with Helena, both sets of lovers could be happy.

In the meanwhile, King Oberon began to pity his beautiful Queen, for he could not bear to see her doating on such a hideous monster. Titania, in the height of her new folly, had willingly yielded up the little changeling, and now that Oberon had got possession of the boy he dissolved [Pg 102]
the spell without delay.

> “Be as thou wast wont to be;
> See as thou wast wont to see!”

he chanted. “Now, my Titania, wake, my sweet Queen!”

“My Oberon! What visions I have had!” said the Queen. “I thought I was in love with an ass.”

“There lies your love,” said the King, pointing to where Bottom still lay snoring.

“How came these things to pass? Oh, how I loathe his visage now!” exclaimed Titania, shrinking back in disgust.

Oberon next bade Puck remove the ass’s head from Bottom, so that when he awoke he should think that all that had happened was nothing but a dream, and then, to the sound of sweet music, the King and the Queen of the Fairies took flight, once more good friends.

Early the next morning, Theseus, Duke of Athens, with his promised bride, Hippolyta, went

hunting in the wood, and there they came across the two pairs of lovers. Egeus, the father of Hermia, was with the Duke, but there was no need now to enforce the cruel law. Demetrius resigned all claim on Hermia, and declared that the only person he wished to marry was his first love, Helena. To these happy lovers it seemed now that everything that had passed was a dream.

"Are you sure that we are awake?" said Demetrius. "It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream."

But their happiness was no dream, and did not melt away with morning light. The wedding of Lysander and Hermia and of Demetrius and Helena took place at the same time as that of Duke Theseus and Hippolyta. Great were the festivities at Athens, and one of the most notable features of the evening's entertainment was undoubtedly the play acted by Bottom and his valiant companions. [Pg 103]

"A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth," ran the title in the programme, and very mirthful tragedy most of the spectators found it.

[Pg 104]

A Merry Bond

hunned, hated, despised, insulted, the Jews in the Middle Ages led a cruel and embittered existence among their Christian brethren. But beaten down and oppressed as they were in most of the countries of Europe, they still prospered as far as money matters were concerned, and, in spite of the demands continually levied on them, they contrived to amass large hoards of wealth. When the great nobles or merchant princes of those days got into difficulties, it was to the Jews they turned for help, and the enormous sums charged as interest for the loan enabled the Jews to fill their coffers rapidly.

Shylock was one of the richest Jews in Venice, although he lived in a wretched, penurious style, with only a clownish lad to act as servant. Shylock had one child, a pretty, flighty daughter called Jessica, whose nature was very different from her father's. Jessica was gay, extravagant, without much heart, and with no respect or affection for her own race and kindred. She longed to free herself from the miserly restraint of her father's house, and to join in the amusements from which his severity debarred her. Not only this, but she had become acquainted with a handsome young Venetian called Lorenzo. She had secretly promised to become his wife, and intended on the first opportunity to elope with Lorenzo and to give up the Jewish religion. [Pg 105]

Shylock hated all Christians, which was scarcely to be wondered at, considering the way in

which he had been treated, but the special object of his aversion was a certain wealthy merchant named Antonio. Shylock hated Antonio partly because, whenever they happened to meet, the merchant treated him with contemptuous scorn, but chiefly because Antonio lent out money gratis, and so brought down the rate of usury in Venice. Antonio had also, at different times, released poor people whom Shylock had imprisoned for debt, and often on the Rialto (which was the public place in Venice, where the merchants congregated) Antonio had railed against the grasping avarice of the Jewish extortioner.

Thus Antonio had wounded Shylock in the two most intense passions of his life—his pride of race (for in his own way Shylock was a strict follower of his religion) and his love of money. Shylock brooded over his wrongs, and if ever the opportunity came when he could gratify his ancient grudge, he resolved to be bitterly revenged.

He had long to wait, but at last his chance came.

Antonio had a friend called Bassanio, a gallant, high-spirited gentleman, but one whose open-handed, generous disposition made him spend more freely than his means allowed. Bassanio was [Pg 106] in love with a beautiful lady called Portia, and had good reason for believing that he was looked on with an eye of favour. He would gladly have come forward in earnest as a suitor for her hand, but his somewhat extravagant mode of living had for the moment exhausted his means, and it was impossible for him to appear at Belmont, Portia's house, in the style befitting a suitor.

Antonio, who was devoted to Bassanio, had often helped him before, and on this occasion Bassanio turned to him again. Antonio was more than ready to help, and placed all he possessed at Bassanio's disposal. But, unfortunately, at that moment he could not lay his hand on a large sum of ready money, for all his fortune was on the high seas. However, he bade Bassanio go forth, and see what his credit could do in Venice; and he promised to become surety to the uttermost of his means, in order that Bassanio might be fittingly equipped on his quest to Belmont.

In his search for money Bassanio came across Shylock, one of the chief usurers in Venice, and to him he applied for a loan. Shylock did not at first appear very willing to grant his request.

"Three thousand ducats;—well?" he said in a pondering, deliberate fashion.

"Ay, sir, for three months," said Bassanio.

"For three months;—well?"

"For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound."

"Antonio shall become bound;—well?" echoed Shylock, still in the same slow voice. [Pg 107]

"Can you help me? Will you oblige me? Shall I know your answer?" said Bassanio rather impatiently.

"Three thousand ducats—for three months—and Antonio bound," murmured the Jew reflectively.

"Your answer to that?" demanded Bassanio.

"Antonio is a good man," mused Shylock.

"Have you heard any imputation to the contrary?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no! My meaning in saying he is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient. Yet his means are in supposition. He hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies. I understand, moreover, on the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he hath, squandered abroad. But ships are but boards, sailors but men; there be land-rats and water-rats, land-thieves and water-thieves—I mean, pirates; and then there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks. The man is, notwithstanding, sufficient. I think I may take his bond."

"Be assured you may," said Bassanio.

"I *will* be assured I may," said Shylock, with a sudden snarl, "and that I will be assured, I will bethink me. May I speak with Antonio?"

"Here he comes," said Bassanio; and at that moment Antonio joined them.

The merchant repeated the request that Bassanio had already made, and pressed Shylock for his answer. Could he oblige them with the loan? Then for a moment of ungovernable fury Shylock's long-hoarded venom broke forth. He reminded Antonio of the pitiless contempt with which he had always treated him, of the way in which he had publicly heaped insults and abuse on him. [Pg 108]

"It now appears you need my help," continued Shylock bitterly. "You come to me and you say, 'Shylock, we would have money'—*you* say so, that spurned me as you would a stranger cur over your threshold! Money is your suit! What should I say to you? Should I not say, 'Hath a dog money? Is it possible a cur can lend three thousand ducats?' Or shall I bend low, like a slave, and, with bated breath and whispering humbleness, say this, 'Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last; you spurned me such a day; another time you called me dog; and for these *courtesies* I'll lend you thus much money'?"

"For these *courtesies* I'll lend you thus much money."

"I am as like to call you so again, to spit on you again, to spurn you, too," burst out Antonio. "If you will lend me this money, do not lend it as if to a friend, but rather as if to your enemy, from whom, if he fails to pay, you can with better face exact the penalty." [Pg 109]

Then Shylock suddenly turned round, and became very fawning, and pretended that his only wish was to be friends with Antonio and have his love. He would supply his present needs, he said, and not take one farthing of interest. The only condition he imposed was that Antonio should go with him to a notary, and there, in merry sport, sign a bond that if the money were not repaid by a certain day the forfeit should be a pound of flesh, cut off and taken from what part of the merchant's body it pleased Shylock.

"Content, in faith; I'll seal to such a bond, and say there is much kindness in the Jew," said Antonio.

"You shall not seal to such a bond for me," cried Bassanio, aghast at the idea of such an agreement.

"Why, do not fear, man," said Antonio; "I will not forfeit it. Within the next two months—that's a month before the forfeit becomes due—I expect the return of thrice three times this bond."

And Shylock chimed in, pointing out that even if the bond *did* become forfeit, what should he gain by exacting the penalty? A pound of man's flesh would be of no use to him—not nearly so profitable as the flesh of mutton, beef, or goat.

"Yes, Shylock, I will seal this bond," declared Antonio; and it was useless for Bassanio to argue further, although his mind misgave him at such a sinister agreement. [Pg 110]

The Three Caskets

Portia, the lady whom Bassanio hoped to win for his wife, had inherited great wealth, but there was one strange clause in her father's will. She was not free to choose her own husband. Her father had ordained that there should be three caskets—one of gold, one of silver, one of lead—and Portia's portrait was to be placed in one of these caskets. Every suitor had to make his choice, and whoever was fortunate enough to select the one containing the portrait was to be rewarded with the lady's hand.

The report of Portia's wealth and wondrous beauty spread abroad, and many adventurers came in search of her. Portia liked none of them, and felt much aggrieved to be so curbed by her dead father's will. Her waiting-maid Nerissa tried to console her by reminding her how wise and good her father had always been. Holy men, she said, had often at their deaths good inspirations, and it would very likely come to pass that the casket would never be rightly chosen except by someone who rightly loved.

Portia listened, but she was scarcely convinced. Among her suitors there was not one for whom she felt anything but ridicule or contempt. She was therefore delighted when Nerissa went on to tell her that the gentlemen were departing to their own homes, and intended to trouble her no further, unless she could be won by some other means than those imposed by her father.

"I am glad the parcel of wooers are so reasonable, for there is not one among them but I doat on his very absence!" said Portia gaily. "Heaven grant them a fair departure!" [Pg 111]

"Do you not remember, lady, in your father's time, a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier, that came here in company of the Marquis of Monferrat?" asked Nerissa.

"Yes, yes, it was Bassanio," answered Portia quickly; then, more slowly, as if she would not have Nerissa notice her eagerness, "I *think* he was so called."

"True, madam. He, of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best deserving a fair lady."

“I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of your praise,” said Portia.

At that moment a serving-man entered to say that four stranger lords desired to take their leave of the lady Portia, and that a forerunner had come from a fifth, the Prince of Morocco, who brought word that his master would be there that night.

“Come, Nerissa,” said Portia, with a little gesture of half-comic despair. “While we shut the gates upon one wooer, another knocks at the door.”

The caskets were duly set out in order, and the Prince of Morocco was to make his choice. The first, of gold, bore this inscription:

“Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.”

The second, of silver, carried this promise:

“Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.”

The third, dull lead, had this blunt warning: [Pg 112]

“Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.”

Long and carefully the Prince of Morocco pondered, seeking to discover the hidden meaning that lay in each mysterious inscription. But at last his decision was made.

“Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.”

“Why, that’s the lady,” reflected the Prince. “All the world desires her; they come from the four corners of the earth to behold fair Portia. One of these three caskets contains her picture. Is it likely that lead contains her? That is too base a thought. Or shall I think she is immured in silver, when gold is ten times more valuable? Give me the key. I choose here.”

“There, take it, Prince,” said Portia, “and if my picture is there, then I am yours.”

The Prince of Morocco unlocked the golden casket. And what did he behold?... Not the fair image of the lovely Portia, but a grinning skull. In the empty eye there was a written scroll, and this is what it said:

> “All that glisters is not gold;
> Often you have heard that told:
> Many a man his life hath sold
> But my outside to behold:
> Gilded tombs do worms infold.
> Had you been as wise as bold,
> Young in limbs, in judgment old,
> Your answer had not been inscrolled.
> Fare you well; your suit is cold.”

“Cold indeed; and labour lost: then farewell, heat, and welcome, frost!” sighed the Prince; and there was nothing left for him to do but to take a dignified departure. [Pg 113]

The next suitor to put in an appearance was the Prince of Arragon, but he was no more fortunate than the Prince of Morocco. His choice fell on the silver casket, but for all his reward he found the portrait of a blinking idiot. Portia gladly saw him depart, and at the same moment arrived a messenger to announce the coming of a young Venetian lord. Some instinct made Portia guess who was approaching, and she was not mistaken; it was indeed the lord Bassanio.

Very different were the feelings with which Portia watched this suitor make his choice from those she had experienced on former occasions. She had even begged Bassanio to pause for a day or two, for if he chose wrongly she would lose his company. But Bassanio replied that he must choose at once, for as matters were now he lived upon the rack. His chief dread was that Portia might not care for him, but the lady soon comforted him on that point. Even if he lost the prize, he would have the consolation of knowing that he was really loved.

Portia bade Nerissa and the rest stand all aloof, and ordered sweet music to sound while Bassanio made his choice.

Like the Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Arragon, Bassanio stood long in reflection before the fated caskets. But, unlike these Princes, he made a happier choice. The gold and the silver he rejected, for he knew how often appearances were deceitful; but the humble lead, which rather threatened than promised anything, attracted his fancy. [Pg 114]

“Thou meagre lead, thy paleness moves me more than eloquence,” he said. “Here I choose; joy be the consequence!”

Bassanio unlocked the leaden casket, and there he found the portrait of the lady Portia, with her golden hair and her eyes smiling back at him in greeting.

With the picture was a scroll, on which was written:

> “You that choose not by the view,
> Chance as fair and choose as true!
> Since this fortune falls to you,
> Be content and seek no new.

If you be well pleased with this,
And hold your fortune for your bliss,
Turn you where your lady is
And claim her with a loving kiss."

"A gentle scroll. Fair lady, by your leave I come by note to give and to receive," said Bassanio, following the advice of the scroll. He was almost dazed at his own good fortune, and scarcely dared to believe it could be true until it was confirmed and ratified by the lady herself. But Portia left him no doubt on that point, and her love and joy overflowed in a generous surrender of herself and all her possessions to her new-found "lord, her governor, her king."

"This house, these servants, and myself are yours, my lord," she ended. "I give them with this ring, which when you part from, lose, or give away, let it foretell the ruin of your love."

Bassanio declared he had no words in which to answer; there was nothing but a wild sense of joy. And as for the ring, he would never part with it as long as he lived.

The happiness resulting from Bassanio's choice of the right casket did not end with themselves, [Pg 115] for now another couple stepped forward, and craved permission to be married at the same time as the lord and the lady. One of Bassanio's companions had come with him to Belmont, a gay, feather-brained young fellow called Gratiano. This lively chatterer had fixed his affections on Nerissa, the waiting-woman, and their fate, too, hung on the caskets, for Nerissa promised that if Bassanio succeeded in winning her mistress, *she* would consent to marry Gratiano. Nerissa, further, in imitation of Portia, gave her own wooer a ring; and Gratiano, like Bassanio, swore that he would never part with it.

"Revenge!"

Meanwhile, in Venice, things were not going well, either for Shylock or for Antonio. The three months for which Antonio had borrowed the money had almost expired, when a dreadful blow fell on the Jew. Jessica, his only child, fled with a Christian. Not only this, but she carried off with her rich plunder of money and jewels, stolen from her father's hoards. Shylock was almost out of his mind with rage and grief, and from his frenzied ravings it was difficult to say which loss he felt the most—that of his ducats or his daughter. Jessica, in her heedless extravagance, squandered money right and left, and even a precious turquoise ring which her mother had given to Shylock before their marriage was not held sacred—Jessica bartered it at Genoa to a sailor in exchange for a monkey! [Pg 116]

The news of his daughter's reckless prodigality cut Shylock to the heart, but he had one source of consolation to which he turned with savage glee. Antonio, the merchant, had met with heavy losses, and one ship after another had been wrecked at sea. On the Rialto it was reported that Antonio must certainly be bankrupt.

"Let him look to his bond!" cried Shylock. "He was wont to call me usurer; let him look to his bond! He was wont to lend money for Christian courtesy; let him look to his bond!"

"Why," said one of Antonio's friends, "I am sure if he forfeit you will not take his flesh. What's that good for?"

"To bait fish withal," said Shylock, with a snarl like a tiger. "If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He has disgraced me and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated my enemies: and what's his reason? I am a Jew!... Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you also in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, [Pg 117] REVENGE! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."

And Shylock's resolution was like rock—nothing could shake it. When the bond fell due, and Antonio failed to meet it, Shylock had him arrested, and insisted on the case being brought to trial before the Duke of Venice. No arguments could move him, no appeals for mercy—not even the offer of the money, if Antonio could have got it.

"I'll have no speaking; I will have my bond," was his only answer.

The Venetian gentleman with whom Jessica had fled to get married—Lorenzo—was a friend of Antonio and Bassanio. The young husband and wife in their flight happened to come across another friend of theirs who was conveying the news of Antonio's disaster to Bassanio, and at his request Lorenzo and Jessica went with him to Belmont. They reached the house at the very moment when everyone was in the full tide of joy after the successful choosing of the casket. Portia made them welcome, and Salerio handed a letter to Bassanio. The latter turned so pale on reading it that Portia guessed something terrible must have happened. She claimed her right as promised wife to share in all that concerned Bassanio, and he told her without hesitation how matters stood.

"Is it your dear friend who is thus in trouble?" asked Portia, when she had heard the account of Antonio's troubles, and how it was for Bassanio's sake he had run such a risk.

"The dearest friend to me, the kindest man!" answered Bassanio, "the most unwearied in doing courtesies, and the most unsullied in honour." [Pg 118]

"What sum does he owe the Jew?"

"For me, three thousand ducats."

"What! no more? Pay him six thousand and cancel the bond. Double six thousand, and then treble that, before such a friend shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault!" exclaimed Portia. "First go with me to church and call me wife, then hasten to Venice, to your friend. You shall have gold to pay the debt twenty times over.... But let me hear the letter of your friend."

"Sweet Bassanio," ran the letter, "my ships have all miscarried, my creditors grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit; and since, in paying it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are cleared between you and me if I might but see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure; if your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter."

"O love, despatch all business and begone!" cried Portia.

The two marriages were hastily solemnised, and then Bassanio and Gratiano started at once for Venice.

When they were gone, Portia announced to Lorenzo and Jessica that during her husband's absence she intended to retire into seclusion, and she committed the management of her house and estate into their hands. Then she gave some hurried directions to a serving-man—Balthasar; he was to carry a letter with all speed to Padua, to a learned cousin of Portia's—Doctor Bellario.

"Look what notes and garments he gives you," she said, "and bring them with all imaginable speed to Venice, to the public ferry. Waste no time in words, but get you gone. I shall be there before you.... Come, Nerissa," she continued, "I have work in hand that you do not yet know of; we shall see our husbands before they think of us!" [Pg 119]

"Shall they see us?" asked Nerissa.

"They shall, Nerissa, but in such a guise they will not know us. I'll wager you anything, when we are both dressed like young men, I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two, and wear my dagger with a braver grace! But come, I'll tell you my whole device when we are in my coach, which waits for us at the park gates. Hasten, for we must measure twenty miles to-day."

A Pound of Flesh

In the Court of Justice at Venice a great trial was to take place. Shylock the Jew claimed the forfeit of his bond. Antonio had signed the agreement that, if he failed to repay the loan of three thousand ducats by a certain date, the penalty was to be a pound of his own flesh, cut off from whatever part of his body the Jew pleased.

Antonio had failed to repay the money, and Shylock insisted on the terms of the bond being carried out to the very letter.

Terrible as this alternative was, there was no evading it. The Duke of Venice himself had to admit that, if Shylock chose to exact the penalty, there was no law of Venice that could prevent him. In this extremity the Duke sent for the learned doctor, Bellario, at Padua, to come and help them with his counsel, but when the Court opened Bellario had not yet arrived. [Pg 120]

The Duke entered and took his seat. He looked round at the assembled people.

"What! is Antonio here?"

"Ready, so please your grace," came back the quiet answer, and Antonio stepped forward from the place where he stood surrounded by a little band of friends. Bassanio was there, and Gratiano, and many others, who had come to show their sympathy with the merchant, though they could not help him in his dire extremity.

The Duke spoke a few words to Antonio, saying how sorry he was to find him in the power of such a terrible adversary, to which Antonio replied, with quiet dignity, that since Shylock was relentless, and that no lawful means could save him, he was prepared to suffer patiently.

Then Shylock was called into court, and the Duke began the trial by making an appeal to him for mercy. All the world, he said, thought that Shylock only intended to carry his apparent malice up to the hour of execution, and that then, at the last moment, he would show his mercy and remorse, and not only forego the forfeiture, but also forgive a portion of the loan, because of the enormous losses which had lately fallen on Antonio.

"We all expect a gentle answer, Jew," concluded the Duke.

Grim, stony, immovable, Shylock had listened to the Duke's appeal. The time for passionate frenzy was past; his venomed rage had settled down into a cold, calm hatred. One determination possessed him, and there was no power in the tongue of man to alter it—he would have his bond. He answered the Duke quietly, but with absolute decision. He was offered twice the amount of his loan. [Pg 121]

"If every ducat in six thousand ducats were in six parts, and every part a ducat, I would not draw them; I would have my bond," was his answer to this offer.

The Duke asked him how he could hope for mercy, since he rendered none.

"What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?" was Shylock's retort. "The pound of flesh

which I demand of the merchant is dearly bought; it's mine, and I will have it. I stand here for justice. Answer: shall I have it?"

As far as the decrees of Venice were concerned, Shylock had the law on his side, and the Duke dared not go against them. He had power, however, to defer the trial, and he was thinking of doing this, when he was told that a messenger had arrived from Padua, with letters from Bellario. The Duke bade that the messenger should be called into court, and Nerissa entered, dressed like a lawyer's clerk.

The letter from Bellario stated that he was too ill to come himself, but that he had sent in his place a very wise and learned young doctor, whom he had thoroughly instructed in the case, and whose wonderful skill and judgment could be thoroughly relied on. The letter ended by saying that the Duke must not mistrust the new-comer because of his lack of years, for Bellario "never knew so young a body with so old a head." [Pg 122]

It was well Bellario had given this warning, for surely no younger-looking Doctor of Laws had ever entered the Court of Justice. Portia's locks of sunny gold were hidden away beneath the doctor's cap, but nothing could conceal the youth and beauty of her face. No token of hesitation or inexperience, however, was visible in her handling of the case. She plunged at once into the heart of the matter.

Her first step was to appeal to Shylock on the score of mercy, and in words of the most moving eloquence she tried to soften the Jew's hard heart, and to show him that higher even than the *Justice* which he claimed was the quality of *Mercy*. But Shylock stood there rigid; he might have been cut in granite for any effect that Portia's words had on him.

"I crave the law, the penalty and forfeit of my bond," came the usual stubborn response.

Then Portia asked if Antonio had not money to discharge the debt. Yes, replied Bassanio, it was there ready in the court—yea, twice the sum. If that would not suffice, he would bind himself to pay it ten times over. If this did not satisfy the Jew, it was quite evident that he was acting through sheer malice; and Bassanio besought the learned young doctor to wrest the law just a little on this occasion, and, in order to do a great right, do a little wrong.

"It must not be," replied Portia. Nothing could alter an established decree, for many an error by the same example might creep into the State. The law must be kept; the bond must be fulfilled to the very letter.

"A Daniel come to judgment!" cried the triumphant Shylock. "O wise young judge, how I do honour thee!" [Pg 123]

The friends of Antonio stood silent in dismay. Even Gratiano, who had been loud in denunciation of the Jew's savage cruelty, had no words now.

The bond was forfeit, Portia continued, and the Jew had the right to exact the penalty if he chose. But her winning voice still pleaded:

"Be merciful! Take thrice thy money, bid me tear the bond."

"When it is paid according to the tenor," was the grim reply.

Antonio saw that all hope was over; there was no use in prolonging the discussion.

"Most heartily I do beseech the court to give the judgment," he said earnestly.

But even when acknowledging that the sentence must be carried out, Portia fought every inch of the way to secure some small concession for the unhappy merchant. Shylock had brought a knife into the court to cut the pound of flesh, and scales to weigh it, but he had provided no surgeon to dress the wound afterwards. Portia begged that he would provide one, if only out of charity. Was it so nominated in the bond? No. Therefore Shylock declined. Not the smallest point would he concede. The bond should be kept to the very letter.

Ah, if Shylock had only known what a pitfall he was digging for himself by insisting on this point!

In a clear, firm voice Portia began to pronounce sentence. A pound of the merchant's flesh was Shylock's; the court awarded it, and the law gave it. The flesh was to be cut off from his breast— [Pg 124]
("nearest his heart," as Shylock had savagely stipulated)—the law allowed it, and the court awarded it.

"Most learned judge! A sentence! Come, prepare!" cried Shylock; and, rattling his scales, he darted forward, knife in hand, upon the merchant.

But Portia's voice rang through the court,—"Tarry a little: there is something else!"

Shylock stood still, aghast; Antonio's friends looked up with sudden hope. It was Portia's turn now to keep to the letter of the law. The bond gave no mention of the word "blood"; the words expressly were "a pound of flesh." Let Shylock, then, take his bond, his pound of flesh; but if in the cutting it he shed one drop of Christian blood, his lands and goods were, by the laws of Venice, confiscate to the State of Venice.

"Is that the law?" gasped Shylock; and Portia answered that he should see the act for himself. As he had urged "justice," let him be assured he should have justice, more than he desired.

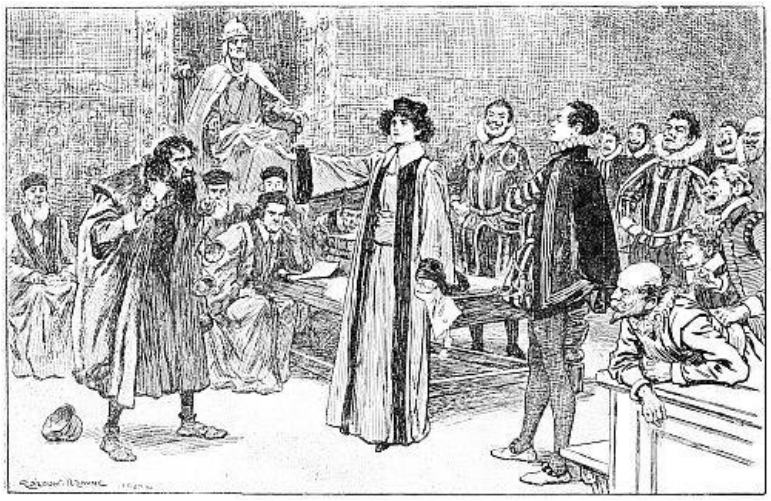
"O learned judge!" cried Gratiano, mocking Shylock's former words of praise. "Mark, Jew, a *learned* judge!"

"Pay the bond thrice and let the Christian go," said Shylock.

“Here is the money,” said Bassanio eagerly; but Portia held up her hand.

“Soft! The Jew shall have all justice. Soft, no haste! He shall have nothing but the penalty.”

Shylock was to cut off his pound of flesh, but he was to shed no blood. Nor was he to cut more or less than just one pound. If he cut more or less than a just pound— “If the scale turns even by the weight of a hair, thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate,” pronounced Portia. [Pg 125]



“Tarry a little: there is something else!”

“Give me my principal, and let me go,” said Shylock. [Pg 126]

“I have it ready for thee; here it is,” said Bassanio, again holding out the bags of gold; and again Portia stayed him. [Pg 127]

“He has refused it in the open court; he shall have merely justice and his bond.”

“Shall I not have barely my principal?” demanded the cowed Shylock.

“Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture, to be so taken at thy peril, Jew.”

“Why, then, the devil give him good of it! I’ll stay no further question,” cried Shylock, turning to leave the Court in a fury of baffled rage and spite.

But he was not to get off so easily. The law had still another hold on him. He, being an alien, had offended against the laws of Venice by seeking the life of a citizen. The penalty for this was that half his goods went to the citizen, the other half to the coffers of the State, and the offender’s life lay at the mercy of the Duke.

Stunned and crushed by this sudden calamitous turn of affairs, Shylock listened. All through the trial he had claimed nothing but “justice”; he had insisted that the very letter of the law should be fulfilled. The measure he had meted out to Antonio was now to be measured out for himself. But the Duke of Venice was merciful enough to pardon Shylock’s life before he asked it. As for his wealth, half of it would go to Antonio, the other half to the State, but humbleness might remit the latter into a fine. [Pg 128]

“Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that,” said Shylock, half dazed. “You take my house when you take the prop that sustains it; you take my life when you take the means whereby I live.”

Antonio said he would resign half the money due to him, provided Shylock would let him keep the other half in use, to render it at Shylock’s death to the husband of his daughter Jessica. Further, for this favour Shylock was to do two things: he was to give up his Jewish religion, and he was to make a will, leaving all his possessions to Lorenzo and his daughter.

“He shall do this,” said the Duke, “or else I will recant the pardon which I lately granted.”

“Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?” asked Portia.

And what was left for Shylock to answer? Baffled of his revenge, stripped of his wealth, forced to disown his faith, his very life forfeited—a hated, despised, miserable old man—he stood alone amidst the hostile throng. Not one face looked at him kindly, not one voice was raised in his behalf. Twice he strove to speak, and twice he failed. Then, in a hoarse whisper through the parched lips, came the faltering words:

“I—am—content.”

The Two Rings

Shylock, crushed and beaten, had left the court, followed by the yells and hooting of the crowds collected to hear the result of the trial, and Antonio and his friends hastened to express their warmest gratitude to the young Doctor of Laws who had so skilfully conducted the case. They begged him to accept a handsome fee, but he refused to take any money payment for his services. Bassanio insisted that he must certainly accept some remembrance, not as a fee, but as a tribute of their gratitude. [Pg 129]

Thus urged, the young doctor yielded. He looked at Antonio.

“Give me your gloves; I’ll wear them for your sake.” Then, to Bassanio: “And for your love I’ll take this ring from you.”

“And for your love I’ll take this ring from you.”

But Bassanio drew back. He began to make excuses; the ring was a trifle, he would not shame himself by offering it; it had been given to him by his wife, etc. The more reluctant he showed himself, the more the young doctor insisted. Finally he went off apparently in deep offence. Then Antonio urged Bassanio to give him what he asked, because of the services he had done, and Gratiano was sent after him to present the ring to him. [Pg 130]

Lorenzo and Jessica, meanwhile, had been staying at Belmont, but they were very glad to welcome back the lady of the house. It was a lovely moonlight night when Portia and Nerissa came home. Sweet music was sounding, and all was peace and beauty. Their return was speedily followed by the arrival of Bassanio, Antonio, and Gratiano. All was rejoicing, but in the midst of the general gladness sounds of discord were heard. Gratiano and his wife were having a hot dispute.

“A quarrel already? What’s the matter?” asked Portia.

“It’s about a paltry ring that Nerissa gave me, with a motto for all the world like cutlers’ poetry upon a knife, ‘Love me and leave me not,’” said Gratiano.

“Why do you talk of the motto or the value?” cried Nerissa. “You swore to me when I gave it you that you would wear it till the hour of death, and that it should lie with you in your grave. Even if not for my sake, yet because of your oath, you ought to have held it in respect, and kept it. Gave it to a judge’s clerk! No, indeed, the clerk that had it will never wear hair on his face!” [Pg 131]

“Yes, he will, if he lives to be a man.”

“Ay, if a woman lives to be a man!” said Nerissa scornfully.

“Now, by this hand. I gave it to a youth,” protested the exasperated Gratiano; “a kind of boy—a little scrubby boy, no higher than yourself, the judge’s clerk, a prating boy that begged it as a fee. I could not find it in my heart to deny him.”

“You were to blame, Gratiano—I must be plain with you—to part so lightly with your wife’s first gift,” said Portia gravely. “I gave *my* love a ring, and made him swear never to part with it,” she added, looking tenderly at Bassanio. “Here he stands. I dare be sworn he would not give it from his finger for all the wealth contained in the world. Now, in faith, Gratiano, you have given your wife unkind cause for grief. If it were me, I should be mad about it.”

How pleasant for Bassanio to hear this!

“I were best to cut my left hand off, and swear I lost the ring defending it,” he thought ruefully.

“My lord Bassanio gave his ring to the judge, who indeed well deserved it,” said Gratiano, in self-excuse. “And then the boy, his clerk, who took some pains in writing, he begged mine. And neither man nor master would take anything else but the two rings.”

“What ring did you give, my lord?” asked Portia. “Not, I hope, the one you received from me.”

“If I could add a lie to the fault, I would deny it,” said Bassanio. “But, you see, my finger has not the ring upon it; it is gone.”

Portia, on hearing this, pretended to get very angry and jealous, and no excuses that Bassanio made could appease her. [Pg 132]

“Sweet Portia,” he said, “if you knew to whom I gave the ring, if you knew for whom I gave the ring, and would understand for what I gave the ring, and how unwillingly I left the ring, when nothing would be accepted but the ring, you would abate the strength of your displeasure.”

“If you had known the virtue of the ring,” retorted Portia, “or half her worthiness that gave the ring, or your own honour to retain the ring, you would not then have parted with the ring.”

Portia thoroughly enjoyed the fun of teasing her husband, and she and Nerissa made the poor men quite unhappy before the secret was revealed. Finally Antonio, distressed at the discord which he imagined he had brought between husband and wife, interceded for Bassanio, and Portia allowed herself to be soothed.

“Since you will be surety for him,” she said to Antonio, “give him this ring, and bid him keep it better than the other.”

“By heaven it is the same I gave the doctor!” cried Bassanio.

So all ended happily. The mystery was explained, and Bassanio and Gratiano were duly forgiven. To add to the general pleasure, news reached Portia that three of Antonio’s argosies had come safely to harbour, so, after all, he was no longer a bankrupt, but once again a rich and prosperous merchant of Venice.

[Pg 133]

Oliver and Orlando

Deep in the Forest of Arden lived a merry company. The Duke of that country, banished by his usurping brother Frederick, had taken refuge among the green woods, and there, far from the pomp and envious clamour of Court, he lived happily with a few faithful followers. Custom had made this new life sweeter than the old one of showy state. Here were no fawning courtiers, no slander and intrigue; the only hardships were those of the changing seasons. Even when the keen winds of winter made the Duke shrink with cold, he would smile and say: “This is no flattery; these are counsellors that make me feel really what I am;” and the biting blast seemed to him less cruel than the falsehood and ingratitude of men. [Pg 134]

Not far from the forest was the house that had formerly belonged to a good gentleman—Sir Rowland de Boys. Dying, Sir Rowland had left all his possessions to his eldest son, Oliver, excepting one thousand crowns, which was to go to the youngest son, Orlando. Sir Rowland, however, had charged Oliver to bring up his two brothers carefully. Oliver had sent the second son, Jaques, to school, where the boy did well; but his youngest brother, Orlando, he kept at home, leaving him utterly neglected and without any sort of training. Not only did Oliver do nothing at all for his brother, but he even tried to take away what advantages Orlando possessed by nature. He made him feed with the servants, debarred him his place as brother, and in every way possible seemed to aim at unfitting him for his position as a gentleman.

Orlando was indignant at such treatment, and at last he rebelled openly, declaring he would endure such servitude no longer. There was an angry dispute between the young men, in which Oliver, as usual, tried to bully his brother into submission. But Orlando’s spirit was up. Stung to fury by Oliver’s insults, he seized hold of him, and compelled him to listen to what he had to say. A faithful old servitor of their father’s interposed, and tried to make peace, but Orlando was determined not to yield.

"You *shall* hear me," he said, as Oliver struggled to free himself. "My father charged you in his will to give me a good education. You have trained me like a peasant, hiding from me all gentleman-like qualities. The spirit of my father grows strong in me, and I will no longer endure it. Therefore allow me such exercises as becomes a gentleman, or give me the poor portion my [Pg 135] father left me in his will, and with that I will go seek my fortune."

"And what will you do with it? Beg, when that is spent?" sneered Oliver. "Well, sir, get you in; I will not be troubled with you much longer. You shall have part of what you wish. I pray you, leave me." And then, turning to the old servant Adam, he added savagely, "Get you with him, you old dog!"

"Is 'old dog' my reward?" said Adam sadly. "Most true, I have lost my teeth in your service. God be with my old master! He would not have spoken such a word."

But Oliver had a plan for getting rid of this younger brother, and that without expending a thousand crowns. Charles, the wrestler of the usurping Duke, was to show his skill the following day at Court, and Oliver knew it was Orlando's intention to try a match with this famous athlete. This report had also privately reached the ears of the wrestler. Charles was a most powerful opponent, deadly in skill and strength. Being a friend of Oliver's, and not wishing to harm the young Orlando, he came to Oliver's house to warn him to dissuade his brother from making the attempt, or at least to let him know, in the event of any injury happening to Orlando, that it would be entirely of the boy's own seeking, and altogether against Charles's will.

Oliver thanked Charles for his kind thought, and said he had himself tried by every means to dissuade Orlando, but that he was resolute.

"I tell you, Charles, he is the stubbornest young fellow in France," Oliver said maliciously, "full of ambition, envious of every man's good parts, a secret and villainous contriver against me, his [Pg 136] own brother. Therefore use your discretion. I had as lief you broke his neck as his finger. And you had better be on your guard, for if you do him any slight disgrace, or if he fails to win glory for himself, he will practise against you by poison, entrap you by some treacherous device, and never leave you till he has taken your life by some indirect means or other. For I assure you—and I speak it almost with tears—there is no one living at this day so young and so villainous."

Charles was naturally shocked to hear such a bad account of Orlando.

"I am heartily glad I came to you," he said. "If he comes to-morrow I'll give him his payment;" and away he went, vowing to punish Orlando.

"Now I'll stir up the youngster," thought Oliver. "I hope I shall soon see the end of him, for, though I don't know why, I have an absolute hatred of the boy. Yet he is gentle; never schooled, and yet learned; full of noble device; enchantingly beloved by everyone—indeed, so much in the hearts of all, especially of my own people, that I am altogether thrown in the shade. But it shall not be so long; this wrestler will put all right. Nothing remains but to make the boy more eager for the wrestling, and that I'll go and do at once."

Rosalind and Celia

When the rightful Duke was sent into banishment, Frederick, the usurping Duke, allowed his daughter Rosalind to stay on at Court, to be a companion to his own young daughter Celia. The [Pg 137] cousins had been brought up together from their cradles, and were so devoted to each other that if Rosalind had been sent into banishment Celia would either have followed her or died of grief at the separation. Celia strove by all the means in her power to cheer her cousin's sorrow for the loss of her father, and assured her that when Duke Frederick died she would never consent to be his heir, but would immediately restore to Rosalind all that he had wrongfully taken away.

Rosalind's own nature was too bright and happy to waste time in useless repining, and her deep affection for her cousin made her respond very willingly to Celia's loving attempts at consolation. The girls' gay wit and merry chatter never failed, and their leisure moments found additional food for entertainment in the whimsical utterances of the Court fool, or jester, Touchstone. Under his apparent nonsense often lay hidden much quaint philosophy, and Touchstone found his fool's motley a convenient cloak for levelling many a sharp-edged shaft of truth at his hearers.

On the day appointed for the wrestling match, Rosalind and Celia were among the spectators. Charles had already shown his prowess by speedily overthrowing one after the other three goodly young men. Now they all lay on the ground with broken ribs, and their poor old father made such a doleful lament over his three sons that all the beholders took his part and wept in sympathy.

When Orlando appeared as the next champion, there was a general feeling of dismay and [Pg 138] compassion. What chance had this slender lad against the doughty Charles? Duke Frederick, in pity for his youth, would fain have dissuaded him, but he would not be entreated. Rosalind and Celia then tried, but even they were not more successful. Orlando thanked them courteously, but refused to give up the attempt. Since their entreaties were of no avail, the only thing the ladies could do was to bestow on him their best wishes, and this they did most heartily.

The result was a surprise to all. Orlando was the victor, and this time it was the redoubtable Charles who was carried senseless from the field.

Duke Frederick was interested enough in the young wrestler to inquire who he was, but was far from pleased to learn he was a son of Sir Rowland de Boys. Sir Rowland was an honourable gentleman, but he had been no friend to the usurping Duke. Rosalind's father, on the contrary,

had loved Sir Rowland dearly, and by the rest of the world he had been equally esteemed. Celia was hurt by her father's churlish remarks to Orlando, and tried to make up for them by some kind and gracious words. Rosalind, equally moved, took a chain from her neck and gave it to the young victor.

"Gentleman, wear this for me, one out of suit with fortune, who could give more but that her hand lacks means."

Orlando would fain have expressed his thanks, but some strange feeling held him speechless. He had overcome the mighty Charles, but he could not master this stronger champion. He was still musing over what had passed, when one of the lords-in-waiting, Le Beau, came to him, and [Pg 139] counselled him in friendship to leave the place at once. Duke Frederick had taken a prejudice against him, and was likely to resent everything he did.

"I thank you," said Orlando. "Pray tell me one thing—which of those two ladies was daughter of the Duke who was here at the wrestling?"

Le Beau answered that it was the smaller of the two ladies. The other was the daughter of the banished Duke, detained by her usurping uncle to keep his own daughter company.

"But I can tell you," continued Le Beau, "that lately this Duke Frederick has taken a violent displeasure against his gentle niece, for no other reason than that the people love her for her virtues, and pity her for her good father's sake. I am quite sure his malice against the lady will suddenly break forth."

Then Le Beau took a courteous farewell, and Orlando went his way, lost in a dream, and murmuring "Heavenly Rosalind!"

For her part, Rosalind had been equally attracted by the gallant young wrestler, and when Celia began to rally her about her pensive looks, she was quite ready to admit the truth.

"In good earnest," said Celia, "is it possible that you should suddenly take so strong a liking for old Sir Rowland's youngest son?"

"The Duke, my father, loved his father dearly," urged Rosalind in self-excuse.

"Does it therefore follow that you should love his son dearly?" laughed Celia. "By this sort of reasoning *I* should hate him, for my father hated his father dearly. And yet I do not hate Orlando." [Pg 140]

"No, faith, for my sake do not hate him!" said Rosalind. "Love him because I do."

The cousins were interrupted by Duke Frederick, who entered hurriedly, his eyes full of anger. What Le Beau foretold had come to pass. The Duke's displeasure against Rosalind had been growing for some time, for he was jealous at her being so universally beloved, and alarmed for the safety of his own position. Now, in a few curt words, he ordered her to leave the Court, saying that if in ten days' time she were still found within twenty miles of it, she should be put to death. Rosalind was amazed and indignant, but all appeals were useless. Celia in vain tried to plead for her cousin. Duke Frederick would listen to no reason. He declared that Rosalind was a traitor, subtle enough to steal the affections of the people away from Celia herself, and that once she was gone Celia would shine to far greater advantage. The sentence he pronounced was irrevocable. Rosalind was banished.

"Pronounce that sentence, then, on me, my liege," said Celia. "I cannot live out of her company."

"You are a fool!" was the Duke's contemptuous answer. Then to Rosalind he added: "You, niece, provide yourself; if you stay longer than the time, you die."

When her father left them, Celia again strove to cheer her cousin. She utterly refused to be parted from her, insisted on sharing her griefs, and declared that, no matter what Rosalind said, she intended to go with her.

"Why, whither, shall we go?" asked Rosalind.

"To seek my uncle in the Forest of Arden," replied Celia.

This was a good suggestion, and in order to avoid the danger of two high-born and beautiful [Pg 141] maidens travelling alone, it was further agreed that Celia should stain her face brown, and attire herself in mean apparel, while Rosalind, who was tall of stature, should for better security, disguise herself as a youth, armed with curtle-axe, and with a boar-spear in her hand.

"Let what fear there will, lie hidden in my woman's heart," she said gaily, "at least we'll have a dashing and a martial outside!"

In their new guise Rosalind declared she would take no worse a name than Jove's own page—Ganymede; while Celia, in reference to her own banished state, thought that Aliena would be a very suitable name for herself.

"Cousin," said Rosalind, "what if we tried to steal the clownish fool out of your father's Court? Would he not be a comfort to us in our travels?"

Celia was delighted with the suggestion.

"Touchstone would go with me all over the wide world," she said. "Leave me alone to manage him. Now let us go and get our money and jewels together, and devise the fittest time and safest [Pg 142] way to hide from the pursuit that will be made when my flight is known. Come! We go contentedly—to *liberty*, and not to banishment!"

“We’ll have a martial outside!”

In the Forest of Arden

On reaching home after the wrestling match, Orlando was met by the old retainer, Adam, who implored him to fly at once. The fame of his victory had already reached Oliver’s ears, and he was so incensed at the praises lavished on his brother that he was quite resolved to do away with him by some means or other. The faithful old man went on to say he had five hundred crowns, saved during his service with his late master, and he begged Orlando to take this money, and also to let him go with him as his servant. He was old, he said, but still strong and active, and could serve him as well as a younger man.

Orlando was deeply touched by the fidelity and devotion of this old retainer, and willingly agreed to his request, saying that before the money was spent they would doubtless have found some humble means of support. So the outcasts departed: the young man left the home of his father, and the old man the place where he had spent more than sixty years of faithful service.

They started not unhopefully, but matters did not go well with them. Scarcely knowing where to direct their steps, they plunged into the Forest of Arden, and there, in the depths of the greenwood, they lost their way. Worn out with fatigue, almost starving for food, they wandered on, till at last Adam’s strength failed, and he sank to the ground. [Pg 143]

“Dear master, I can go no further. Oh, I die for food!” he gasped. “Farewell, kind master!”

With the tenderest words Orlando strove to cheer the poor old man, and, carefully placing him in a more sheltered spot, he dashed off almost desperate in his quest for food.

Not far off in the forest a very different scene was taking place. In the bright days of early summer the days slipped pleasantly past with the banished Duke and his little band of faithful followers. Clad in their foresters’ garb, and living the simple life of outlaws, they hunted, sang, laughed, and feasted under the greenwood tree. The most notable of the band was a certain lord called Jaques, who had been a brilliant and reckless courtier in his early days, but was now a cynic and philosopher, half sad, half satiric, whose moods seemed to vary between biting humour and pensive melancholy. He had a sharp tongue, and took no pains to make himself agreeable, but his quaint moralisings afforded much entertainment to his companions, and especially to the Duke.

On the day when Orlando and Adam were starving in one part of the forest, the Duke and his band were having a merry time in another part. One of the lords, by name Amiens, could sing very pleasingly, and he now led a ditty in praise of their woodland life, while the others joined in the chorus: [Pg 144]

“Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird’s throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither.
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

“Who doth ambition shun
And loves to live in the sun,
Seeking the food he eats
And pleased with what he gets,

Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.”

The banquet was spread, and the Duke had taken his place, when Jaques came up, apparently much diverted with something he had just seen.

“A fool! a fool!” he cried. “I met a fool in the forest!”

The cynical lord was amused to find a fellow-philosopher under the motley of a fool, and quoted the mangled scraps of moral wisdom he had let fall, with much enjoyment.

“‘Good-morrow, fool,’ quoth I. ‘No, sir,’ quoth he, ‘call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune.’ Then he drew a dial from his pocket, and, looking at it with his dull eyes, said very wisely: ‘It is ten o’clock. Thus we may see how the world wags. An hour ago it was nine o’clock, and in another hour it will be eleven. And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, and so from hour to hour we rot and rot, and thereby hangs a tale.’” [Pg 145]

“It is ten o’clock.”

Jaques was greatly diverted at the idea of a fool in motley moralising thus on the time, and declared that henceforth he intended to don a fool’s dress himself, in order that he might have the privilege that fools have, of speaking out his mind freely on all occasions.

“And those that are most hurt with my folly,” he said, “they most must laugh. Dress me in motley, and give me leave to speak my mind, and I will guarantee to cure the world of much evil.”

The Duke would not agree that Jaques’s plan for reforming the world was a good one, and reminded Jaques that he himself was anything but free from faults. Jaques still held to his [Pg 146] opinion, and was arguing the matter, when their discussion was interrupted by the startling appearance of a haggard youth with a drawn sword, who demanded food in the most peremptory fashion, and threatened to kill anyone who attempted to eat until his wants were supplied.

“I almost die for food; let me have it!” he cried fiercely.

“Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table,” said the Duke kindly.

When Orlando saw the gentleness of the Duke, and that there was no occasion for such violence on his part, he softened at once, asked their pardon, and explained that he had only put on this stern manner of command because he expected to find everything in the forest rude and savage. He implored them, if ever they had led a gentle, civilised life, and knew what pity was, that they would refrain from eating till he had fetched a poor old man, who was spent with age and hunger. Till he was first satisfied, Orlando said, he would not touch a bit.

The Duke bade Orlando go and fetch Adam, and when they returned he made them sit down and eat before he troubled them with any questions. To give them time to recover, he called for some music, and bade Amiens sing.

“Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man’s ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.

[Pg 147]

“Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,

That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot;
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.”

While the song was being sung, Orlando was able to tell the Duke, in a low voice, a little of his story, and hearing that he was the son of his dear friend, Sir Rowland de Boys, the Duke gave him a hearty welcome, and carried him off to his own cave to hear the rest of his adventures. Old Adam, too, was made right welcome; and so, for the present, he and his master contentedly stayed on with the outlaws.

The fool whom Jaques had met in the forest was Touchstone. Like Orlando and Adam, the other party of wanderers were very weary before they found a resting-place. Rosalind and Celia, attended by the Court jester, had come in search of Rosalind’s father, but so far they had found no trace of the banished Duke. Celia was tired and Touchstone was cross, but Rosalind did her best to encourage her companions.

“Well, this is the Forest of Arden,” she said cheerfully.

“Ay, now I am in Arden,” grumbled Touchstone. “The more fool I! When I was at home I was in a better place; but travellers must be content.”

“Ay, be so, good Touchstone,” counselled Rosalind. “Look you, who comes here; a young man and an old in solemn talk.”

The newcomers were two shepherds called Corin and Silvius. The young man, Silvius, soon went away, and then Rosalind appealed to the old shepherd, asking if he could direct them to any place where they could rest themselves and get something to eat. [Pg 148]

Corin replied that he would gladly have helped them if he could, but his fortune was very humble; he was only shepherd to another man, and did not own the flocks he looked after. His master was very churlish and inhospitable, and, besides, at this moment his cottage and flocks were on sale, so there was no food at home that he could offer them. However, if they liked to come and rest in the cottage, they were heartily welcome.

Rosalind asked who was going to buy the flock and pasture. Corin replied that it was the young swain who had just left him, and who cared nothing at all about the matter.

“I pray you, if you can do so honestly, buy the cottage, pasture, and flock,” said Rosalind, “and we will give you the money to pay for them.”

“And we will increase your wages,” added Celia. “I like this place, and would willingly spend some time here.”

So Celia and Rosalind, still attended by Touchstone, took up their abode in the shepherd’s cottage; and that was how the cynical lord Jaques happened to meet the fool in the forest.

The Shepherd Youth

Orlando, in his new life, did not forget the lady whom he had seen at the wrestling match, and who had so quickly won his heart. As he had no chance of speaking to Rosalind, the only way in which he could show his love was to carve her name on all the trees, and perpetually to write verses in her praise, which he hung all over the forest. [Pg 149]

“Hang there, my verse, in witness of my love,” he would say. “O Rosalind, these trees shall be my books, and I will trace my thoughts in their bark, so that every eye which looks in this forest shall see your praise everywhere.”

Rosalind came across some of these papers, and wondered greatly who the person could be who thus carved and hung her name on all the trees; but Celia, who had also found some of the verses, was able to enlighten her, for she had happened to see the writer. On hearing that it was really Orlando, Rosalind became quite excited, and Celia had no time to answer half the eager questions showered on her before Orlando himself came that way.

Rosalind now for the first time rather regretted her boy’s dress, for, of course, Orlando did not recognise the cousins in their present attire. But, at any rate, in the guise of a saucy youth she determined to have a little fun, and presently a whimsical idea occurred to her nimble brain. Seeing how disconsolate Orlando was, she suggested to him that she should *pretend* to be really his Rosalind, and that he should address all his affectionate speeches and verses to her exactly in the same way as he would have done to the real person. If he did this, she said, she would soon cure him of his love. [Pg 150]

Orlando replied that he did not want to be cured, but, all the same,

“Hang there, my verse, in witness of my love.”

he was perfectly willing to go every day to the shepherd’s cottage, and talk to this youth as if he were really Rosalind. The plan succeeded admirably.

Since he could not have Rosalind herself, it pleased Orlando to be always talking about her, and he did not notice how much in earnest this half-jesting companionship gradually became.

Audrey, the goatherd.

As time went on, the exiles from Duke Frederick’s court made other acquaintances in the forest. Touchstone had found an object of interest, which served as an excellent butt for displaying his satire. This was a rustic goatherd, called Audrey, a simple, not bad-natured girl, but one of the very stupidest and most ignorant specimens of humanity possible to imagine. Touchstone seemed to be quite fascinated by her extreme silliness, and out of sheer perversity declared he meant to marry her. As for Audrey, she was perfectly unconscious of any ridicule he chose to lavish on her, and followed Touchstone about like a willing little slave. [Pg 151]

Rosalind and Celia, also, had come across Jaques, and the latter would willingly have become closer friends with the shepherd youth, but Rosalind’s sunny nature had nothing in sympathy with this cynic.

“They say you are a melancholy fellow,” she said one day, in answer to a suggestion from Jaques that they should become better acquainted.

“I am so; I love it better than laughing,” he replied. “It is good to be sad and say nothing.”

“Why, then, it’s good to be a post,” remarked Rosalind.

There were many different kinds of melancholy, Jaques explained, such as the scholar’s, the musician’s, the courtier’s, the soldier’s, etc.; his, however, was a melancholy of his own, compounded of many different ingredients, but especially due to reflections over his travels. [Pg 152]

“Yes, I have gained my experience,” he ended, with mournful satisfaction.

“And your experience makes you sad?” quoth Rosalind. “I would rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad. And to travel for it too!”

But the joyous, free life of the forest was drawing to a close, though much happiness was still in store for those who had wandered there. A day came when Orlando for once failed to keep his tryst. He had left Rosalind, promising to return within an hour, but in his stead there came to the two cousins a stranger bearing a handkerchief stained with blood. Briefly he told his tale. Orlando had been walking through the forest, when he saw a wretched man, ragged and unkempt, sleeping under a tree. Round his neck a green and gilded snake had twined itself, and its head was just poised to strike, when, seeing Orlando, it glided away under a bush. But the peril was not yet over, for under that very bush couched a famished lioness, watching like a cat, to pounce on the sleeping man the moment he should stir. And having seen this, Orlando approached, and found it was his brother—his eldest brother.

Remembering the cruel way in which Oliver had always treated him, his first impulse was to leave him to his fate, but his better nature conquered. Orlando did battle with the lioness, who quickly fell before him.

“And in the noise of the struggle I awakened from my miserable slumber,” said the stranger.

“Are you his brother? Was it you who so often plotted to kill him?” asked Celia. [Pg 153]

“And your experience makes you sad?” quoth Rosalind.

“It *was* I, but it is I no longer,” said Oliver. [Pg 154]

Orlando’s noble behaviour had completely overcome his malicious nature; all evil thoughts against Orlando were banished, and for the future the two brothers were the best of friends. [Pg 155]

Oliver was made welcome by the Duke, and was afterwards talking to Orlando in his own cave, when his brother, calling on the name of Rosalind, suddenly fainted. His arm had been badly torn by the lioness, and had been bleeding all this time. Oliver revived him, bound up the wound, and after a little, Orlando, being brave of heart, begged his brother, stranger as he was, to find his friends at the shepherd’s cottage, and explain to them why he had been unable to keep his promise. He sent the handkerchief dyed in his blood to the shepherd youth whom he had called in sport his Rosalind.

On hearing of the peril through which Orlando had passed, Rosalind was so moved that she almost betrayed herself by fainting. Oliver was somewhat astonished at such weakness on the part of a youth, but Rosalind tried to pretend it was only a counterfeit. Her pale looks, however, showed too plainly that the swoon was no counterfeit, though she persisted in declaring it was, and bade Oliver carry back word to Orlando how well she had pretended to faint.

The sweetness and grace of Celia made so strong an impression on Oliver that he soon fell deeply in love with her, and as she was equally attracted by him, and as he was now quite converted from his former evil nature, it was agreed they should be married without delay. [Pg 156] Orlando did all he could to help forward the wedding, though the sight of his brother’s good fortune made him realise only more clearly his own unavailing love for Rosalind.

“They shall be married to-morrow, and I will bid the Duke to the nuptial,” he said. “But, oh, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man’s eyes!”

“Why, then, to-morrow I cannot serve your turn for Rosalind?” asked the real Rosalind.

“I can live no longer by thinking,” said Orlando.

“I will weary you, then, no more with idle talking,” said Rosalind. “Know now that I speak to some purpose. Believe, if you please, that I can do strange things. I have, since I was three years old, conversed with a magician, deeply skilled in his art. If you love Rosalind as heartily as you appear to do, then, when your brother marries Aliena, you shall marry Rosalind. I know into what straits of fortune she is driven, and it is not impossible to me, if it does not seem inconvenient to you, to set her before your eyes to-morrow, human as she is, and without any danger.”

“Do you speak in sober earnest?” demanded Orlando, scarcely able to credit what he heard.

“I do, on my life—which I value tenderly, though I *am* a magician. Therefore put on your best array, invite your friends: for if you will be married to-morrow, you shall; and to Rosalind if you will.”

The promise, which appeared so amazing to Orlando, was, of course, easily kept, and the following day, when the Duke and all the wedding guests assembled to witness Oliver’s wedding, Rosalind and Celia appeared without their disguise, and in their real attire. The banished Duke [Pg 157] found a daughter, and Orlando found his Rosalind.

In the midst of the wedding festivities arrived the second son of Sir Rowland de Boys, bearing the tidings that Duke Frederick had been converted by a religious man, and meant to leave the world and all its pomp. He bequeathed his crown to his banished brother, and restored all their lands to the lords who had been exiled with him.

In the general chorus of pleasure there was only one discordant note. Jaques the cynic —“melancholy Jaques”—refused to join in the harmless mirth. He announced his intention of following Duke Frederick into retirement. He bade the others all follow their different forms of enjoyment,—as for himself, “I am for other than for dancing measures,” he declared.

“Stay, Jaques—stay,” begged the Duke.

“Not to see any pastime,” was the grim response. “If you want anything, I will stay to hear it at

your abandoned cave.”

Like King Solomon of old, Jaques had tasted all the pleasures of life, and had delighted in studying his fellow-mortals; but his stores of wit and wisdom brought him no real satisfaction. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” was all that his worldly philosophy had taught him, and his sharp-eyed cynicism saw only the base and ludicrous side of human nature. So he went his way, rejecting the kindly fellowship that was offered him, and taking a half-exultant pride in his own loneliness and melancholy.

But the Duke ordered the rejoicings to proceed, and the green glades of the Forest of Arden rang with the sound of song and laughter.

[Pg 158]

A Rough Courtship

“

atherine the curst!” That is not a pretty title for a maiden, but that was the nickname given to one, renowned all through Padua for her scolding tongue.

Baptista Minola had two daughters, both young and beautiful, but very different in disposition, for while Bianca, the younger, was so sweet and gentle that she was beloved by all, the elder sister Katharine had such a violent and ungovernable temper that everyone feared and disliked her.

Bianca had several suitors, but Baptista, her father, was firmly resolved not to allow his youngest daughter to marry until he had secured a husband for the elder. In the meantime he [Pg 159] declared Bianca should stay quietly at home; but as he loved his daughter, and did not want the time to pass heavily with her, he promised to provide schoolmasters, to instruct her in the studies in which she took most delight—music and poetry.

Bianca meekly submitted to this somewhat hard decree, but two of her suitors—Gremio and Hortensio—were very indignant that she should be kept secluded in this fashion. They were rivals in their courtship, but this hindrance to them both made them friends. They agreed to do their best to find a husband for Katharine, and thus, when the younger sister was free again, to set to work afresh to see which could win her.

On the very day when Baptista announced his resolve, there arrived in Padua a great friend of Hortensio’s, whose name was Petruchio, and who lived in Verona. Petruchio told Hortensio that his father was dead, and that he had now come abroad to see the world. He had money in his pockets, possessions at home, and possibly he would marry if he could find a wife.

Hortensio’s thoughts, of course, at once flew to Katharine, and half in jest he offered to supply Petruchio with a wife, shrewish and ill-favoured, he said, but rich—very rich.

“But you are too much my friend,” he concluded; “I could not wish you to marry her.”

Petruchio, in his own way, was as perverse and self-willed as Katharine, and he immediately replied that the lady might be old, ugly, and as great a shrew as Xantippe, wife of Socrates, but so long as she was wealthy he was quite ready to marry her. [Pg 160]

Seeing his friend in this mood, Hortensio continued in earnest what he had begun in jest.

“Petruchio,” he said, “I can help you to a wife, with wealth enough, and who is young and beautiful, and brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman; her only fault, and that is fault enough, is that she has an intolerable temper, and is so violent and wayward, beyond all measure, that if I were far poorer than I am I would not wed her for a mine of gold.”

Petruchio, however, was a gentleman of valiant disposition and most determined will, and he was not in the least daunted by all the reports he heard of Katharine's terrible temper.

"Do you think a little noise can frighten me?" he said. "Have I not in my time heard lions roar? Have I not heard the seas puffed up with wind, rage like an angry boar? Have I not heard great ordnance in the field, and heaven's artillery thunder in the skies? Have I not in a pitched battle heard loud alarums, neighing steeds, and trumpets clang, and do you tell me of a woman's tongue? Tush, tush! Frighten boys with bogies!"

Bianca's suitors were delighted to have found such a match for Katharine, and the lady's father was equally pleased, and promised a handsome dowry, though he was rather doubtful of Petruchio's success in winning his daughter. But it soon turned out Petruchio had not in the least over-rated his powers.

He knew that kindness and soft words would be thrown away in dealing with such a nature as Katharine's; she was accustomed to everyone's giving in to her, and the very gentleness and submission of Bianca had only the effect of irritating her more. Petruchio determined to adopt an [Pg 161] entirely different plan, and to fight Katharine, as it were, with her own weapons. Instead of meekly yielding to all her whims and tantrums, he intended to thwart her on every possible occasion; if she railed at him, then he would tell her plainly that she sang as sweetly as a nightingale; if she frowned, he would say she looked as clear as morning roses newly washed with dew; if she were mute and would not speak a word, then he would praise her volubility, and say she spoke with piercing eloquence; if she bade him depart, he would thank her as though she bade him remain for a week; if she refused to wed him, he would ask what day he should have the banns called, and when be married.

The plan that Petruchio had had the shrewdness to invent he had strength of will to carry out. It was absolutely useless for the fiery lady to try to overawe him by anger, scorn, ridicule, or insolence. Petruchio ignored all her insulting speeches with the most perfect good-humour, and his own self-possession and satirical remarks reduced her to a state of hopeless fury. The moment she appeared he started by contradicting her, insisted that she was called "Kate," although she said she was called "Katharine," and declared that, having heard her mildness praised in every town, her virtues spoken of, and her beauty extolled, he had come to woo her for his wife. It was useless for Katharine to get into a passion and shower abuse on him. The ruder she became, the more charming he pretended to think her.

"I find you extremely gentle," he said. "It was told me you were rough and coy and sullen, but now I find report is a liar; for you are pleasant, playful, extremely courteous; a little slow in [Pg 162] speech, but sweet as spring flowers; you cannot frown, you cannot look askance, not bite your lip as angry wenches will; nor does it please you to be cross in talk, but you entertain your suitors with gentle conversation, soft and affable."

This method of treatment was entirely novel to Katharine, and she scarcely knew how to contain herself at such audacity; but the torrent of angry words she poured out had no effect whatever on this determined suitor. He treated her furious speeches as idle chat, and told her calmly that her father had given his consent, the dowry was agreed on, and that, willing or unwilling, he intended to marry her. The beauty of this fiery maiden took his fancy, and the thought of taming her wild nature to his own will filled him with more pleasure than he would have felt at winning a gentle and submissive creature for his wife. When Baptista a few minutes later entered to ask how the courtship was speeding, Petruchio announced that he and Katharine were so well agreed that they were going to be married on the following Sunday.

"I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first," was Katharine's wrathful rejoinder; but, all the same, when Sunday arrived the bride was ready, dressed, and waiting for her eccentric bridegroom.

The Marriage, and After

The bride was ready, the guests were assembled, but the bridegroom still tarried. Petruchio intended to teach Katharine a severe lesson. She had never shown the slightest consideration for [Pg 163] anyone else; her proud, overbearing nature had always carried everything before it, and her violent temper had quelled any attempt at argument. But in Petruchio she had met her match. It was his aim to humble her pride thoroughly, and to show her how unpleasant it is for others to have to live with a person who is perpetually flying into a passion.

The first humiliation to Katharine was the lateness of the bridegroom's arrival, but still more mortifying to her pride, when he did at last appear, was the extraordinary array in which he had chosen to attire himself. His hat was new, but his jerkin was old, and his breeches had been turned three times; his boots were not a pair, one was buckled, the other laced; and he had taken out of the town armoury a rusty old sword with a broken hilt. His horse was a poor wretched creature, scarcely able to hobble, and the rotten harness was pieced together with pack-thread. His servant, Grumio, was equipped in the same fashion, all odds and ends, a linen stocking on one leg and a woollen one on the other, gartered with red and blue list; an old hat with a tattered rag of a feather—in fact, he was a perfect guy in dress, not like a Christian foot-boy or a gentleman's lackey.

Katharine had already started for the church, when Petruchio came rushing in, demanding his bride. He declined to give any explanation of his delay, and when Baptista and the other gentlemen begged him to put on more becoming wedding garments, he flatly refused. Kate was to be married to him, and not to his clothes, he declared, and off he hurried to the church.

There he behaved in such a strange, mad fashion that the guests were scandalised, and the bride was perfectly terrified. He cuffed the clergyman who was marrying them, called for a glass of wine, drank it noisily, and then threw the dregs in the old sexton's face, giving as his only reason that his beard seemed to him thin and hungry. When they got back to the house after the wedding, things went no better. Baptista had prepared a great feast in honour of the occasion, but Petruchio refused to stay and share it, and announced that he must depart at once. Entreaties were of no avail, and even Katharine was refused when she joined her voice to the others. [Pg 164]

"Nay, then, do what you like," she cried indignantly; "*I* will not go to-day—no, nor to-morrow, not till I please myself. The door is open, sir; there lies your way; you had better be moving before your boots grow old. As for me, I shall not go till I please myself. A nice surly husband you are likely to prove, if this is the way you begin."

"O Kate, content thee; prithee, do not be angry."

"I *will* be angry. Father, be quiet; he shall stay my leisure. Gentlemen, forward to the bridal dinner. I see a woman may be made a fool if she has not spirit to resist."

"They shall go forward, Kate, at thy command," said Petruchio. "Obey the bride, you that attend on her; go to the feast, revel, be mad and merry—or go hang yourselves! But as for my bonny Kate, she must go with me. Nay, look not big, nor stamp, nor stare, nor fret; I will be master of what is mine own. She is my goods, my chattels, my everything; and here she stands, touch her whoever dare! Fear not, sweet wife, they shall not touch thee, Kate!" And, making belief that they were beset with thieves, Petruchio shouted to his man-servant Grumio to come and help rescue his mistress, and so dragged Katharine reluctantly away. [Pg 165]

"Fear not, they shall not touch thee, Kate!"

The wedding journey was unpleasant. Katharine's horse fell with her in one of the muddiest places, and Petruchio left her to struggle free by herself, while he belaboured Grumio heartily because her horse had stumbled. Katharine had to wade through the mire to pray for mercy for the man before her husband would leave off beating him. Arrived at his country house, Petruchio had all the other servants assembled, and then stormed at them roundly because nothing was right. Katharine had again to intercede, and she tried to point out they were not to blame; but the angry master would listen to no excuses. Supper was brought, but Petruchio pretended it was badly cooked, and threw the meat about all over the place, refusing to let his wife taste a morsel. She was now really hungry, and would gladly have eaten the food he threw away; but Petruchio intended that she should be much more hungry and submissive before he allowed her anything to eat. She was also very tired, but he took care she should get no sleep that night; he tossed about the furniture in the room, finding fault with everything; and all this was done with the pretence that it was out of loving care for her own comfort. [Pg 166]

By the following day Katharine felt almost famished. She implored Grumio to go and fetch her something to eat; she did not mind what it was so long as it was wholesome food. The man tantalized her for some time by suggesting one dish after another, any one of which she would gladly have accepted, and finally ended by saying impertinently he could fetch her some mustard without any beef.

At that moment Petruchio entered, bringing some meat which he said he had himself prepared for her.

"I am sure, sweet Kate, this kindness merits thanks. What, not a word? Nay, then, you do not

like it, and all my pains are of no use. Here, take away this dish."

"I pray you let it stand," said Katharine. [Pg 167]

"The poorest service is repaid with thanks, and so shall mine be before you touch the meat," said Petruchio.

"I thank you, sir," Katharine compelled her proud lips to murmur, for, indeed, she was nearly starving, and could not endure to see the food carried away untouched.

"Now, my honey love," continued Petruchio, who was always most affectionate in his speech, and pretended that everything he did was out of devotion to his wife, "we will return to your father's house, decked out as bravely as the best, in gay apparel;" and, scarcely allowing her a moment in which to snatch a morsel of food, he ordered in the tailor and haberdasher, who had been preparing some fine new clothes.

But, as usual, nothing pleased him.

"Here is the cap your worship bespoke," said the haberdasher.

"Why, this was moulded on a porringer, a velvet dish!" exclaimed Petruchio, with an air of disgust. "It's a cockle or a walnut-shell—a toy, a baby's cap! Away with it! Come, let me have a bigger."

"I'll have no bigger," declared Katharine. "This suits the present style, and gentlewomen wear such caps as these."

"When you are gentle, you shall have one too, and not till then," said Petruchio, in rather a meaning voice.

Katharine's old spirit blazed up again at this rebuke, but the only notice Petruchio took of her angry words was to pretend to think she was agreeing with him in his abuse of the cap. Then he ordered the tailor to produce the gown. [Pg 168]

"O heavens! what silly style of stuff is here?" he cried in horror. "What's this? A sleeve? It's like a demi-cannon! What, up and down, carved like an apple-tart? Here's snip and nip, and cut, and slish and slash, like a censer in a barber's shop. Why, what in the name of evil, tailor, do you call this?"

"You bade me make it well and properly, according to the fashion and the time," said the tailor.

"Marry, so I did, but, if you remember, I did not bid you mar it to the time. Come, be off; I'll none of it. Hence, make the best of it you can."

"I never saw a better-fashioned gown," said Katharine, "more quaint, more pleasing, nor more praiseworthy. I suppose you mean to make a puppet of me."

"Why, true, he means to make a puppet of you," said Petruchio, wilfully mistaking to whom she spoke.

"She says your worship means to make a puppet of her," explained the tailor.

But Petruchio would listen to no reason or argument, and sent the tailor away in the most peremptory manner, though privately the man was told he would be paid for the gown, and that he was not to be offended at Petruchio's hasty words.

"Well, come, my Kate, we will go to your father's house even in this honest, mean raiment," said Petruchio. "After all, fine clothes are of no importance. Is the jay more precious than the lark because his feathers are more beautiful? Oh no, good Kate; neither are you any the worse for this mean array. If you feel ashamed about it, lay the blame on me; and so, be cheerful. Come, we will go at once to feast and amuse ourselves at your father's house. Let me see: I think it is now about seven o'clock; we shall easily get there by dinner-time." [Pg 169]

"What's this? A sleeve?"

Katharine looked at her husband in astonishment; and well she might, for it was already the middle of the day. [Pg 170] [Pg 171]

“I assure you, sir, it is almost two o’clock; it will be supper-time before we get there.”

“It shall be seven o’clock before I get to horse,” declared Petruchio. “Look, whatever I speak or do, or think to do, you are always crossing me! I will not go to-day, and before I do, it shall be whatever time I say it is.”

Petruchio’s determined will at last gained the day, and Katharine learned that it was useless to attempt to battle with him. When in their journey to her father’s house he chose to say it was the moon shining in the sky, she had to agree that it was the moon, although everyone could see it was the sun; and then, when he declared immediately that it was the blessed sun, she had also to change her statement and say it was the sun.

“What you will have it named, even that it is,” she said, quite tired out by his strange freaks, “and so it shall be so for Katharine.”

“Petruchio, go your way, the field is won,” said his friend Hortensio, who was with them.

When matters had come to this point with the haughty Katharine, there was not much fear that she would resume her old imperious ways.

It may be remembered that, when Katharine’s father ordered his younger daughter Bianca to keep in seclusion till a husband had been found for Katharine, he had provided schoolmasters to [Pg 172] divert her tedious hours. Two of her suitors had contrived to get into the house under the guise of masters of music and poetry, and one of them—Lucentio—she presently married, while the other —Hortensio—found consolation in a wealthy widow. To the wedding feast came Petruchio and Katharine, Hortensio and his wife, with many other guests, and during the meal a rather hot discussion sprang up as to the amiability of some of the ladies present. Petruchio remarked that his friend Hortensio was afraid of his wife, whereupon that lady retorted that he who is giddy thinks the world goes round, meaning by this that Petruchio was afraid of his own wife. Katharine was indignant at this, and even the gentle Bianca plunged rather sharply into the argument. After the ladies had retired from table the gentlemen still continued the discussion. Petruchio said the jest had glanced away from him, and had probably hurt Lucentio and Hortensio worse.

“Now, in good sadness, son Petruchio,” said Baptista, “I think you have the veriest shrew of all.”

“Well, I say no,” said Petruchio. “So to make sure, let each one of us send to his wife, and he whose wife is most obedient to come at once when he sends for her, shall win the wager which we will propose.”

“Content,” said Hortensio. “What is the wager?”

“Twenty crowns,” suggested Lucentio.

“Twenty crowns!” cried Petruchio. “I’d venture as much on my hawk or my hound, but twenty times as much on my wife.”

“A hundred, then,” said Lucentio.

“A match! It’s done,” said Petruchio. [Pg 173]

“Who shall begin?” asked Hortensio.

“I will,” said Lucentio.

So a message was first sent to Bianca. But she sent back word that she was busy and could not come.

“How? She is busy and she cannot come! Is that an answer?” said Petruchio mockingly.

“Ay, and a kind one too,” said one of the guests. “Pray heaven, sir, your wife do not send you a worse.”

“I hope, better,” replied Petruchio.

“Signor Biondello, go and entreat my wife to come to me forthwith,” said Hortensio.

“O, ho! *entreat* her!” laughed Petruchio. “Nay, then, she must needs come.”

“I am afraid, sir, do what you can, yours will not be entreated,” retorted Hortensio. Then, as the messenger returned, “Now, where’s my wife?”

“She says you have some goodly jest in hand; she will not come. She bids you go to her.”

“Worse and worse, ‘she will not come!’” said Petruchio. “Intolerable, not to be endured! Grumio, go to your mistress: say I command her to come to me.”

“I know her answer,” said Hortensio.

“What?”

“She will not come.”

But the next moment in walked Katharine.

“What is your will, sir, that you send for me?”

“Where is your sister, and Hortensio’s wife?” asked Petruchio.

“They are sitting talking by the parlour fire.”

“Go, fetch them hither; if they refuse to come, beat them forth to their husbands. Away, I say, and bring them straight here.” [Pg 174]

“Here is a wonder, if you talk of a wonder,” said Lucentio, as Katharine obediently departed.

“And so it is. I wonder what it bodes,” said Hortensio.

“Marry, peace it bodes, and love, and quiet life—in short, everything that is sweet and happy,” said Petruchio.

“Now, fair befall you, good Petruchio!” said Baptista. “You have won the wager, and I will add to it twenty thousand crowns—another dowry to another daughter, for Katharine is changed as if she had never been.”

“Nay,” said Petruchio, “I will win my wager better yet, and show more signs of her obedience. See where she comes and brings your froward wives as prisoners to her womanly persuasion.” Then, as Katharine entered with Bianca and Hortensio’s wife, he continued: “Katharine, that cap of yours does not become you; off with that bauble, throw it underfoot.”

Greatly to the disgust of the other two wives, Katharine instantly obeyed.

“Lord, let me never have a cause to sigh till I be brought to such a silly pass,” said Hortensio’s wife, and even the gentle Bianca exclaimed with equal disdain:

“Fie! what sort of foolish duty do you call this?”

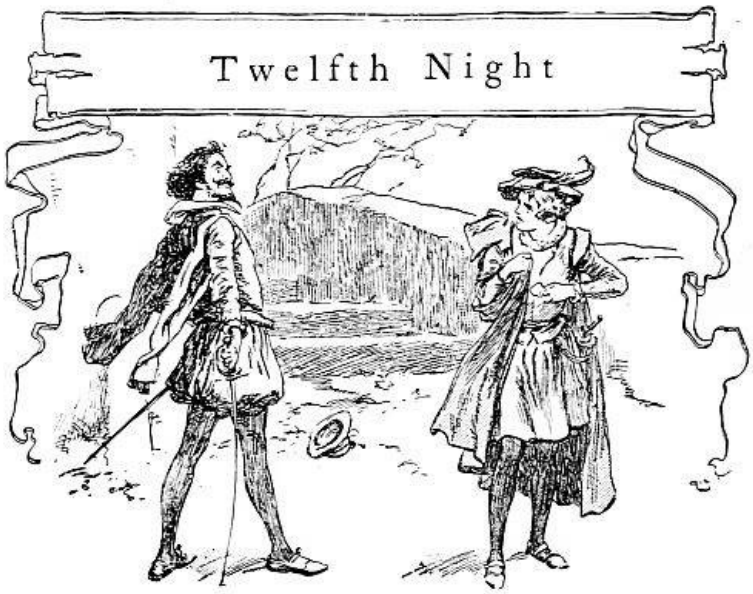
“I wish your duty were as foolish, too,” said her husband. “The *wisdom* of your duty, fair Bianca, has cost me a hundred crowns since supper-time.”

“The more fool you, for wagering on my duty!” was Bianca’s unkind reply.

Then Petruchio bade Katharine tell the other headstrong women what duty they owed their husbands. And this she straightway did, in a speech of such wonderful grace and submission that all her hearers were amazed. As for her husband, he was delighted with the result of his somewhat rough schooling. “Come, Kate!” he said. “Good-night!” And he retired triumphantly with his now loving and devoted wife. [Pg 175]

“Come, Kate!... Good-night!”

[Pg 176]



Orsino’s Envoy

Sebastian and Viola were brother and sister, twins, and they resembled each other so closely that it would have been impossible to know them apart if it had not been for the difference in dress.

Travelling by sea on one occasion, they met with a dangerous adventure, for near the coast of Illyria their ship was wrecked, and though both managed to get safely to land, each feared the other had perished. The captain of the ship, who was saved in the same boat with Viola, kindly befriended her. It happened he knew that country well, for he was born and bred there, and had only left it a month before. He told Viola that it was governed by a Duke, [Pg 177] noble in nature as in name, and that this Duke was in love with a fair lady called Olivia. The father and brother of the lady, however, had both died within the last year, and the Countess Olivia out of love for them and grief for their loss had shut herself up in seclusion ever since, and refused to see anyone.

Viola, who had been cast quite destitute on shore, would gladly have served this lady for awhile till the opportunity came to show what was her real estate in life; but the captain said that would be difficult to manage, for the Countess would listen to no kind of suit, not even the Duke Orsino’s. Then the idea came to Viola to disguise herself as a page, and to seek service with the Duke, of whom she had heard her own father speak. She could sing and play to him in many sorts of music, which would make her well worth his service, for the Duke was especially fond of music. The captain promised to keep concealed who she really was, aid her in getting a disguise, and present her to the Duke.

All went well. Viola, with her grace, beauty, and noble bearing, made such a gallant young page that she was received into instant favour, and before three days were over, the Duke, won by some irresistible charm, had confided to “Cesario” (as he called her) all the secret of his unhappy love for the lady Olivia. His suit so far had been rejected, even his messengers were denied admittance; but it occurred to Orsino that if he sent this pretty lad to the Countess perhaps he might be more successful in pleading his cause than some older envoy of graver aspect. He bade Cesario insist on admittance, and refuse to be sent away without seeing Olivia. When he gained [Pg 178] speech with the Countess, he was to tell her of Orsino’s devotion, and relate his woes.

“Prosper well in this,” he ended, “and you shall live as freely as your lord, and call his fortunes yours.”

Alas, poor Viola! The Duke little thought what a task he was setting his young page. The sweetness and charm of his own nature had already won Viola’s heart, and how gladly she would have accepted the love which Olivia rejected!

But she must be faithful to her trust.

“I’ll do my best to woo your lady,” she said, and so departed on her mission.

While the lady Olivia lived in grief and retirement, there were others of her household very far from sharing in her desire for quiet and gravity. Her steward, Malvolio, was indeed a staid and respectable personage, stiff in bearing, hating all forms of wit and levity, very fault-finding with others, and extremely well satisfied with himself. Olivia had a real esteem for Malvolio, for she knew him to be worthy and conscientious, although, as she told him, he was “sick of self-love.” But there were others who conducted themselves very differently from Malvolio, and between these noisy dependents and the austere steward there was a constant smouldering resentment, always ready to break into open warfare.

The chief source of unruliness was a certain riotous knight, called Sir Toby Belch, an uncle of Olivia’s, who since her brother’s death had taken up his abode in the house. He loved feasting

and revelry, and his wild behaviour was likely soon to bring discredit on the household if some check were not put to it. His boon companion was an idle knight, called Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who under a smattering of foreign languages concealed an unlimited fund of native stupidity. Sir Toby was quite aware of Sir Andrew's silliness, and loved to laugh at him and parade his folly; but none the less he thought this foolish gentleman would do very well as a husband for Olivia, and he encouraged him to come to the house on every occasion. A third member of the band was Feste, the clown, or jester. Feste was a privileged person, and, like all fools or Court jesters in those days, was allowed to speak his mind much more freely than ordinary mortals; even the stately Countess herself did not escape his sharp speeches. In days gone by, Olivia's father had taken much delight in him, and now Olivia listened indulgently to his chatter, and rebuked Malvolio for the sour ill-temper with which he tried to snub the fool's sallies. In addition to his fool's wit, Feste possessed a gift of real power, a wonderfully sweet voice for singing, and wherever he went could be heard snatches of song, gay and jocund, or plaintive and of touching pathos. [Pg 179]

Olivia's waiting-maid, Maria, regarded Malvolio with no more favour than did the rest of this noisy company. She was a quick-witted, lively young person, delighting in fun, and Malvolio's solemn primness and rigid severity seemed to her nothing but hypocrisy.

"An affected ass," she described him, with small reverence, "with the best possible opinion of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellences that he firmly believes that all who look on him love him." [Pg 180]

And it was from this intense self-conceit of Malvolio's that this mischievous little band of conspirators—Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste the clown, and Maria—found means to revenge themselves by playing a humiliating trick on the pompous steward.

When Viola, in the character of Cesario, reached Olivia's house, she was at first refused admittance, but as she announced her intention of standing at the door until she had given her message, and absolutely declined to take any denial, Olivia at last consented to see her.

"Give me my veil," she said to Maria. "Come, throw it over my face. We will once more hear Orsino's embassy;" and Viola, attended by four or five servants of the Duke, was ushered into her presence.

"The honourable lady of the house, which is she?" she demanded.

"Speak to me; I shall answer for her. Your will?" said Olivia curtly.

"Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty," began Viola, with high-flown gallantry, and enjoying the humour of her own words, for, as Olivia was closely veiled, she could not see whom she was addressing. Not in the least abashed, however, by that lady's stately dignity, she begged permission to deliver her message, and to speak it to Olivia alone. The quaint impertinence of the pretty lad, his ready wit, and his noble bearing, took Olivia's fancy, and, instead of dismissing him abruptly, as had been her first intention, she sent away her attendants and bade him speak on.

But when Viola uttered Orsino's name, Olivia, as usual, drew back. Even from this messenger she had no wish to hear of Orsino's devotion, and she checked him rather abruptly. [Pg 181]

Look you, sir. Is it not well done?

"Have you no more to say?" she added. [Pg 182]

[Pg 183]

"Good madam, let me see your face," pleaded Viola, for she longed to behold the lady who could so enchant Duke Orsino.

"Have you any commission from your lord to see my face?" asked Olivia, not ill-pleased. "You are now out of your message; but we will draw the curtain, and show you the picture. Look you, sir, such a one I am now. Is it not well done?"

She threw back her veil, and her dazzling beauty shone forth in all its radiance.

Viola gazed at her in admiration.

“Excellently done, if God did all,” she murmured, for she could scarcely believe such loveliness of tint could be natural.

“’Tis in grain, sir; it will endure wind and weather,” replied Olivia.

“It is beauty truly blent, whose red and white were laid on by Nature’s own sweet and cunning hand,” said Viola. “Lady, you are the cruellest person alive if you let these graces go down to the grave and leave the world no copy.”

“Oh, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted,” said Olivia, with gentle sarcasm; “I will give out divers schedules of my beauty; it shall be all entered in an inventory, and duly labelled; as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two gray eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise me?”

“I see you what you are—you are too proud,” said Viola. “My lord and master loves you. Oh, such love deserves its recompense, though you were crowned peerless in beauty.” [Pg 184]

To this Olivia replied that Orsino knew her mind; she could not love him. She knew him to be noble, of great estate and stainless youth, generous in disposition, learned, valiant, graceful, and handsome in person. Yet she could not love him. He might have taken his answer long ago.

“If I loved you as my master does, with such fire and suffering, I would find no sense in your denial,” said Viola. “I would not understand it.”

“Why, what would you do?”

“Make me a willow cabin at your gate, write loyal songs of love, and sing them loud, even in the dead of night,” cried Viola; “call out your name to the echoing hills, and make the babbling air cry out ‘Olivia!’ Oh, you should have no rest, but you should pity me!”

“You might do much,” said Olivia, with assumed sarcasm, but really touched by the young page’s enthusiasm. “What is your parentage?”

“Above my fortunes, yet my estate is good.”

“Get you to your lord; I cannot love him. Let him send no more—unless, perchance, you come to me again to tell me how he takes it. Fare you well; I thank you for your pains. Spend this for me.”

“I am no fee’d post, lady; keep your purse,” said Viola. “My master, not myself, lacks recompense. When your turn comes to love, may your own lover’s heart be made of flint, and may your affection, like my master’s, be held in contempt! Farewell, fair cruelty!” [Pg 185]

Viola had done her best for her master, but the only success she had was to win his lady’s heart for herself. The stately lady Olivia, so cold and proud to the noble Duke Orsino, was now forced to own to herself that she found a strange fascination in this young page. He had refused the gift of money which, in accordance with the custom of those times, Olivia had offered, but she could not let him pass out of her sight, perhaps for ever, without a remembrance.

“What ho! Malvolio!” she called.

“Here, madam, at your service.”

“Run after that same peevish messenger, the Duke Orsino’s man,” she said. “He left this ring behind him. Tell him I’ll none of it. Desire him not to flatter his lord, nor feed him up with hope. I will never marry him. If the youth will come this way to-morrow, I will give him reasons for it. Hasten, Malvolio.”

“Madam, I will,” said the steward; and he stiffly departed, and ungraciously fulfilled his errand.

Viola had given no ring to Olivia, and she could not fail to see that the Countess intended this gift as a mark of favour, and had taken a great liking for herself. This was anything but pleasing to her, for she knew it could lead to nothing but fresh trouble.

“Poor lady! she had better love a dream,” she thought. “How will matters turn out? My master loves her dearly; I, poor fool! am just as fond of him; and she, mistaken, seems to doat on me! What will become of this? O time, you must untangle it, not I! It is too hard a knot for me to unravel.” [Pg 186]

A Dream of Greatness

The disagreement always existing between the steward Malvolio and the riotous members of Olivia’s household broke at last into warfare. On the night of the day when Duke Orsino’s messenger came to Olivia, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew chose to sit up late, drinking and singing. Feste, the clown, joined them, and after one song, sung sweetly enough by himself, the whole trio united in yelling out a noisy catch. The din they made roused the household, and Maria came hurrying in to beg them to be quiet.

“Why, what a caterwauling you keep here!” she cried. “If my lady have not called up her steward Malvolio and bade him turn you out of doors, never trust me.”

But all her attempts to silence them were useless. They laughed, shouted, called for more wine, and went on singing at the pitch of their voices. In vain she begged for peace; they were quite beyond control. When Malvolio himself appeared, they paid no more heed to him than they had done to Maria, and only answered his rebuking words by each singing at him in turn snatches of different songs.

“My masters, are you mad, or what are you?” he cried, with just indignation. “Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do you make an alehouse of my lady’s house that you squeak out your vulgar catches at the top of your voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?”

“We did keep time, sir, in our catches,” said Sir Toby. “Shut up!” [Pg 187]

“Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that, though she harbours you as her kinsman, she is not allied to your bad behaviour. If you can separate yourself from your misdoings, you are welcome to the house; if not, if it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell.”

“Farewell, dear heart, since I must needs be gone!” trolled out Sir Toby, in mock melancholy, and not in the least impressed by Malvolio’s stern rebuke.

“Farewell, dear heart, since I must needs be gone!”

“Nay, good Sir Toby,” pleaded Maria. [Pg 188]

“‘His eyes do show his days are almost done,’” chimed in the clown, carrying on the song.

All Malvolio’s angry speeches were met with the same musical mockery, and nothing would make the culprits stop. Almost speechless with fury, Malvolio left the revellers, declaring that his lady should know of their goings-on.

“I have no exquisite reason.”

“Sweet Sir Toby, be patient for to-night,” urged Maria. “Since the youth of Duke Orsino’s was to-day with my lady, she is much disquieted. For Monsieur Malvolio, let me alone with him. If I do not gull him into a by-word and make him a general laughing-stock, never trust my wit. I know I can do it.”

“Good, good! Tell us something about him,” said Sir Toby.

“Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of puritan,” said Maria.

“Oh, if I thought that, I’d beat him like a dog!” cried the silly Sir Andrew.

“What, for being a puritan?” asked Sir Toby, who was always ready to ridicule Sir Andrew’s brainless remarks, though he made such a companion of him. “Thy exquisite reason, dear knight?”

“I have no exquisite reason for it, but I have reason good enough,” said the foolish young man sulkily.

Maria then went on to say that Malvolio’s self-conceit as to his own merits was so great that he imagined everyone who looked at him loved him, and this would give them an opening for their revenge. She would drop in his way some vaguely expressed letters of love, in which he should find his different peculiarities so well described that there could be no doubt as to whom was meant. She could write very like the lady Olivia; in fact, they sometimes could not tell their own handwritings apart. Malvolio would think the letters he found came from Olivia, and that she was in love with him. [Pg 189]

Maria’s trick was not a very praiseworthy one, but her hearers were not troubled with scruples. They only thought how delightfully comic it would be to see the stiff and starched steward

priding himself on the conquest he had made, and what deep humiliation would fall on him when his mistake was discovered.

Maria was not long in carrying out her scheme, and Malvolio was immediately caught with the bait. Having once got into his mind the absurd idea that the Countess Olivia was in love with him, he began weaving plans of what he should do when he was advanced to the high position of her husband. His ambitious meditations were overheard by the conspirators, for Maria had run into the garden to warn them of his approach.

"Get all three into the box-tree," she cried; "Malvolio is coming down this walk. He has been yonder in the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half-hour. Observe him, for the love of mockery, for I know this letter will make an idiot of him. Hide, in the name of jesting!... [Pg 190] Lie thou there," she added, throwing down a letter, "for here comes the trout that must be caught with tickling."

"It is but fortune—all is fortune," murmured Malvolio, as he paced along with solemn stride. "Maria once told me that she liked me, and I have heard herself go so far as to say that if ever she fancied anyone, it should be one of my complexion. Besides, she treats me with more exalted respect than any one else of her followers. What should I think of it?"

Malvolio's imagination now soared beyond all bounds, and he marched up and down, pluming himself like a turkey-cock.

"To be Count Malvolio!" he exclaimed in ecstasy, and forthwith began to consider how he should comport himself in that exalted sphere.

"Having been three months married to her, sitting in my state," he mused, gesticulating to himself as if all he described were really taking place, "calling my officers about me, in my branched velvet gown, and telling them I knew my place, as I wished they should know theirs, I would ask for my kinsman Toby. Seven of my people, with an obedient start, make for him; I frown the while, and perchance wind up my watch, or play with my—some rich jewel. Toby approaches, bows humbly to me——"

"Shall this fellow live?" cried the exasperated real Sir Toby in the box-tree.

"I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control ——"

"And does not Toby give you a blow on the lips then?" fumed the hearer.

"Saying, 'Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this privilege of [Pg 191] speech. You must amend your drinking habits. Besides, you waste the treasure of your time with a foolish knight——'"

"That's me, I warrant you," put in Sir Andrew.

"One Sir Andrew——"

"I knew it was I, for many call me fool," said Sir Andrew, quite pleased at his own penetration.

But Malvolio's imaginary rebuke to Sir Toby came abruptly to an end, for he now caught sight of the letter which Maria had thrown on the ground.

"What have we here? By my life, this is my lady's hand; these are her very C's, her U's, and her T's; and thus she makes her great P's. Beyond all question it is her hand." Then Malvolio read aloud the inscription: "'To the unknown beloved, this, and my good wishes.' Her very phrases! By your leave, wax. Soft! And the impression her own seal! It is my lady. To whom should this be?"

The letter was written in the most nonsensical terms, but Malvolio at once began to puzzle a meaning into it.

"Jove knows I love:
  But who?
Lips do not move;
No man must know."

"'No man must know,'" he echoed. "If this should be thee, Malvolio!"

"I may command where I adore;
  But silence, like a Lucrece knife,
With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore,
  M, O, A, I, doth sway my life."

Malvolio pondered deeply over these mystic lines. "I may command where I adore" was, of [Pg 192] course, quite simple. Olivia might command him, for he was her servant. But what about the letters M, O, A, I?

"M—Malvolio; M—why, that begins my name!" came the sudden flash of discovery.

The succeeding letters were not so easy to explain, for they did not follow in their proper order. But Malvolio was not discouraged; he had at least the satisfaction of knowing that every one of these letters was in his name.

"Soft! There follows prose," he continued.

> "If this fall into thy hands, reflect," ran the absurd epistle. "In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. Thy fates open their hands, and to accustom thyself to what thou art likely to be, throw off thy humble shell, and appear afresh. Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants; let thy tongue tang arguments of State; put thyself into the trick of singularity; she thus advises thee that sighs for thee. Remember who commended thy yellow stockings, and wished to see thee ever cross-gartered—I say, remember! Go to, thou art made, if thou desirest to be so; if not, let me see thee a steward still, the fellow of servants, and not worthy to touch Fortune's fingers. Farewell. She that would alter services with thee,
>
> "The Fortunate-Unhappy."

There was also a postscript, which said:

> "Thou canst not choose but know who I am. If thou entertainest my love, let it appear in thy smiling. Thy smiles become thee well, therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee."

This ridiculous letter quite turned poor Malvolio's head. He never doubted but that Olivia had really written it; he resolved in rapture to do everything he was bidden, and hurried away to put on as quickly as possible the yellow stockings and cross-garters. [Pg 193]

Maria was delighted with the success of her trick, for all the things she had commended to Malvolio were what Olivia especially disliked.

"He will come to my lady in yellow stockings, and it is a colour she abhors," she cried gleefully; "and cross-gartered, a fashion she detests. And he will smile upon her, which will now be so unsuitable to her disposition, being addicted to melancholy as she is, that it cannot but turn him into great contempt."

And away went Maria and the others to see the first approach of the deluded Malvolio in his extraordinary new guise before his lady.

The Challenge

When Viola, saved from the wreck, was grieving over the supposed loss of her brother, she was comforted by the sea-captain, who told her that he had seen Sebastian bind himself to a strong mast, which floated on the sea, and that probably he too had been saved. This turned out to be really the case. Sebastian was picked up by another ship, the captain of which, Antonio by name, most kindly befriended the destitute young stranger. For three months he kept Sebastian with him, and he loved the boy so dearly that, when Sebastian left him to go to the Court of Orsino, Antonio followed him to Illyria, fearing lest some harm should come to him. [Pg 194]

Antonio dared not show himself openly in Illyria, for several years before he had fought valiantly on the side of the enemies of Orsino, and done much damage to the Duke's fleet. When on their arrival, therefore, Sebastian proposed to take a walk to see anything of note in the city, Antonio replied that it would be better for himself to go and secure a lodging, and order food to be prepared; he knew of a place that would suit very well, the Elephant Inn, in the south suburbs of the city. Sebastian in the meanwhile could go for a walk, and join him in about an hour's time.

Knowing that Sebastian had no money, or very little, Antonio further insisted on giving him his purse, in case he should see any trifle he wished to purchase. Everything being thus arranged, they parted, Antonio to go to the Elephant Inn, and Sebastian to take a walk through the town.

In the palace of the Duke there was still sadness, for the young page Cesario, in spite of his kind reception by the Countess Olivia, had brought back no more cheering answer than former envoys. Weary at heart, Orsino longed to hear some soothing music, and he called for a touching little song which he had heard sung the night before—a plaintive, old-world ditty, whose quaint sadness and simplicity had more power to relieve his sorrow than the more light and cheerful strains of modern music. [Pg 195]

His servants told him that the person who had sung the song was Feste the jester, who had been in the service of the Countess Olivia's father, and, as he was still about the house, Orsino ordered him to be fetched. So Feste came, and this was the song he sang:

"Come away, come away, death,
  And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
  I am slain by a fair, cruel maid;
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
      O, prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
      Did share it.

"Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
  On my black coffin let there be strown;

Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be strown;
A thousand, thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O where
Sad true lover never find my grave
To weep there!”

This sad little song just suited the melancholy mood of the Duke, and when Feste had sung it, and gone away, Orsino went on talking to Viola—or his young page Cesario, as he thought her—about his unhappy love for Olivia. He bade her go once more to the cruel lady, and *insist* on her listening to him.

“But if she cannot love you, sir?” said Viola.

“I cannot be answered so,” said Orsino.

“Sooth, but you must,” replied Viola. “Say that some lady, as perhaps there is, has as great a love for you as you have for Olivia; you cannot love her; you tell her so; must she not then be answered?” [Pg 196]

Orsino replied that no woman could ever love any man as he loved Olivia; that women’s hearts were much more shallow than men’s, etc. Viola, knowing her own deep and hidden affection for the Duke himself, protested that she knew too well how much women could love, and in veiled language she went on to describe the case of “a daughter of her father,” whom Orsino naturally took to mean a sister, but who was in reality herself. However, the end of it was that Viola again went to Olivia.

She was received just as kindly as before, but Olivia said plainly that it was quite useless for her to plead on behalf of Orsino, although if Cesario would undertake another suit she would listen to it more gladly than to the music of the spheres. Viola could only reply to this as she had done before, that she had one heart, and that no woman except herself should ever be mistress of it. So she took her leave.

The interview between the Countess and the young page had been jealously watched; the spectator was the foolish knight, Sir Andrew Aguecheek. It had occurred to Sir Toby that it would be a very good plan to wed his niece Olivia to this silly gentleman, and he kept urging Sir Andrew to pay his court to her. Sir Andrew spent money lavishly in riotous living with Sir Toby, hoping to repay himself when he married Olivia. He was therefore very indignant when he saw her bestow more favours on Orsino’s messenger than she had ever done on him, and he angrily told Sir Toby that he intended to leave at once.

Sir Toby tried to soothe him, and he and another gentleman of Olivia’s household who happened to be present persuaded him that Olivia knew all the time that he was looking on, and only showed favour to the youth to exasperate Sir Andrew and to awaken his dormouse valour. They said he ought immediately to have fired up, and frightened the boy into dumbness, and that he had damaged his own cause by not doing so. The only thing now to do was to redeem it by some laudable attempt either of valour or policy. [Pg 197]

“If it is to be anyway, it must be with valour, for policy I hate,” said Sir Andrew.

“Why, then, build your fortunes on the basis of valour,” said Sir Toby in his loud, jovial voice. “Challenge the youth to fight; hurt him in eleven places; my niece shall take note of it; and be assured, nothing prevails more to win a man favour with women than a report of valour.”

“There is no way but this, Sir Andrew,” added Fabian.

“Will either of you bear a challenge to him from me?” asked Sir Andrew.

“Go, write it in a martial hand,” said Sir Toby. “Be sharp and brief. Make it as rude and insolent as you possibly can.”

Sir Andrew retired to write his challenge, leaving the other two men to laugh heartily over the prospect of a good joke.

“We shall have a rare letter from him,” said Fabian, “but you will not deliver it?”

“Faith, and I will!” exclaimed Sir Toby, “and by all means stir on the youth to an answer. I think oxen and cart-ropes will not drag them together.”

For he knew Sir Andrew had not a grain of courage in his whole body; and as for Orsino’s page, he looked far too soft and gentle to be in the least brave or daring. [Pg 198]

Sir Andrew wrote his challenge, but when finished it was such an extraordinary production that Sir Toby decided not to deliver it.

“The behaviour of the young gentleman,” he said, “shows him to be of good capacity and breeding; therefore this letter, being so excellently ignorant, will not terrify him in the least; he will know it comes from a clodpole. I will deliver his challenge by word of mouth, give a notable report of Aguecheek’s valour, and drive the gentleman, who is so young I know he will readily believe it, into a most hideous opinion of his rage, skill, fury, and impetuosity. This will so frighten them both that they will kill each other by the look, like cockatrices.”

What Sir Toby had planned came to pass, and he and Fabian were soon hugely enjoying the success of their joke. They first found Viola, and delivered Sir Andrew’s challenge, assuring her

that he was terribly incensed, and was a most dangerous adversary.

"If you hold your life at any price, betake you to your guard," counselled Sir Toby, "for your opponent has everything that youth, strength, skill, and wrath can furnish a man with."

Poor Viola was in the greatest alarm on hearing of the encounter that awaited her; she would gladly have wriggled out of it if she could, but Sir Toby would listen to no excuses. [Pg 199]

"I will return again to the house, and desire some escort of the lady," said Viola. "I am no fighter."

But Sir Toby insisted that she positively *must* fight with Sir Andrew, that he had real ground of injury, and that if she declined to fight with him she would have to fight with himself, which would be just as dangerous.

"This is as uncivil as strange," said poor Viola, inwardly quaking with terror. "I beseech you, do me the courtesy to find out from the knight what my offence is; it must be some oversight on my part—certainly I have done nothing on purpose."

"I am no fighter."

"I will do so," said Sir Toby. "Signor Fabian, stay with this gentleman till my return."

Sir Toby went off in search of Sir Andrew, to whom he proceeded to give the most glowing account of the young page's furious disposition, and his marvellous skill in fencing. Sir Andrew was in a perfect agony of fear.

"If I thought he had been valiant and so cunning in fence, I would have seen him hanged before I would have challenged him!" he cried miserably. "Let him let the matter slip, and will give him my horse, Gray Capilet."

"I will suggest it to him," said Sir Toby. "Stand here, make a good show of it; this shall end without loss of life." Then, with a chuckle to himself: "Marry, I'll ride your horse, as well as I ride you!... I have his horse to take up the quarrel," he added in a low voice to Fabian. "I have persuaded him the youth is a fury." [Pg 200]

"He thinks just as horribly of Sir Andrew," laughed back Fabian, "and pants and looks pale as if a bear were at his heels."

"There is no remedy, sir; he will fight with you, because of his oath," announced Sir Toby to Viola. "He has thought better of his quarrel, and finds now that is scarcely worth talking of; therefore draw, for the sake of his vow; he protests he will not hurt you."

"Pray heaven defend me," murmured Viola aside. "A little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man."

"Give ground, if you see him furious," advised Fabian apart to Viola.

"Come, Sir Andrew, there is no remedy," said Sir Toby aside to the other trembling combatant. "The gentleman will, for his honour's sake, have one bout with you; he cannot, by the laws of duelling, avoid it; but he has promised me, as he is a gentleman and a soldier, he will not hurt you. Come on; begin!"

"Pray heaven he keep his oath!" murmured Sir Andrew.

"I do assure you it is against my will," said Viola piteously.

The two unhappy champions then reluctantly allowed themselves to be almost dragged into position by their determined seconds, who had much ado to prevent them both ignominiously taking to their heels. It would be difficult to say which was in the most abject state of fear. Sir [Pg 201] Andrew was quaking in every limb, and Viola turned quite pale at the sight of her own sword. But before their shaking weapons managed to meet there came an interruption. Antonio, the sea-captain, passed that way, and seeing Viola, he thought it was Sebastian, for in her page's dress Viola had copied her brother in every particular.

Ever careful for Sebastian's safety, Antonio at once interfered.

"Put up your sword," he said to Sir Andrew. "If this young gentleman has offended you in any way, I take the fault on me. If you offend him, I will fight you for him."

"You, sir! Why, what are you?" demanded Sir Toby, not at all pleased to have his joke spoilt in this fashion.

"One, sir, who for his love dares yet do more than you have heard him brag to you he will," said Antonio proudly.

"Nay, if you are a boaster, I am for you," said Sir Toby, who, with all his faults, was no coward.

The swords clashed in good earnest this time, but again there came an interruption. Some officers arrived, who proceeded to arrest Antonio at the suit of Duke Orsino; he had been seen and recognised as an ancient enemy; there was no escape.

"This comes with seeking you," said Antonio to Viola, whom he took for Sebastian; "but there is no remedy, I shall answer it. What will you do now that my necessity makes me ask you for my purse? I am much more grieved for what I am prevented doing for you than for anything that befalls myself. You stand amazed, but be comforted." [Pg 202]

“Come, sir, away,” said one of the officers, as Viola stood staring in astonishment at Antonio. Of course she did not know in the least what he meant, for she had never seen him before in her life.

“I must entreat of you some of that money,” pleaded Antonio.

“What money, sir?” asked Viola. “Because of the kindness you have shown me here, and partly prompted by your present trouble, I will lend you something out of my own very small means; I have not much. I will divide with you what I have. Hold! there is half my purse.”

Antonio was deeply wounded by such apparent ingratitude from one for whom he had done so much. He was reluctant to proclaim his own good deeds, but when Viola persisted in declaring that she did not know him, he could not help relating how he had saved the youth from shipwreck, and what devotion he had lavished on him afterwards. In telling this, he called him by his name, as he thought—“Sebastian”—but he was hurried away by the officers before Viola had time to answer.

This name “Sebastian” filled her with sudden hope; she knew how closely she resembled her brother, and she had imitated the same fashion, colour, and ornament which he was accustomed to wear. Perhaps, then, the tempests had been kind and Sebastian was really saved.

“A very dishonest, paltry boy, and more a coward than a hare,” was Sir Toby’s disgusted comment, as Viola walked off. “His dishonesty appears in leaving his friend here in necessity, and denying him; and for his cowardice, ask Fabian.” [Pg 203]

“A coward—a most devout coward,” agreed Fabian.

“Ha, I’ll after him again, and beat him,” said the valiant Sir Andrew.

“Do, cuff him soundly, but never draw your sword,” said Sir Toby.

“If I do not——” bragged Sir Andrew, swaggering away.

“Come, let us see what happens,” said Fabian.

“I dare lay any money, it will be nothing, after all,” said Sir Toby shrewdly.

Yellow Stockings

Olivia was very sad when Viola, or the young page Cesario, as she thought her, went away saying that no woman should ever win his heart; and feeling that Malvolio’s grave dignity just suited her present mood, she asked for her steward.

“He is coming, madam, but in very strange manner,” said the naughty Maria. “He is surely possessed, madam.”

“Why, what is the matter? Doth he rave?”

“No, madam, he does nothing but smile. Your ladyship were best to have some guard about you if he come; for, sure, the man has something wrong with his wits.”

“Go, call him hither,” said Olivia.

When Maria returned with Malvolio, Olivia was amazed to see the extraordinary change that had come over her usually sober and sedate steward. Malvolio advanced with mincing step and many fantastic gestures, which he intended to represent gracious affability; his lantern jaws and [Pg 204] severe features were twisted into strange grimaces, which he imagined to be fascinating smiles; his lanky legs were encased in brilliant yellow stockings, and were further adorned with cross-gartering from the ankle upwards. Olivia thought he must certainly be bereft of his wits, especially when, in answer to all her questions, he poured forth a series of incomprehensible remarks. They were really quotations from the letter he had picked up, but Olivia, of course, did not know this, and to her they sounded like senseless jargon. Malvolio kept on bowing and smirking, and kissing his hand to Olivia, while he waved Maria aside with intense scorn. Olivia was really distressed to think of the sudden calamity that had befallen the poor man’s wits, for she valued his honesty and faithful service. She gave directions that her people should take especial care of him, and sent Maria to find Sir Toby to look after him.

Malvolio was quite pleased to find himself of such importance, and continued his self-complacent reflections on the greatness which he thought he had achieved. He was firmly convinced that Olivia really liked him, and that she had only sent for Sir Toby on purpose that he might be severe with him, as the letter advised. When Maria reappeared with Sir Toby and Fabian, he treated them all with the most lofty disdain. They were greatly delighted with the success of their trick, and determined to carry on the joke still further. Pretending to think that Malvolio had really lost his wits, they had him bound and carried to a dark room. Then Feste, the clown, disguised his voice, and spoke to him as if he were a curate, come to visit him in his [Pg 205] misfortune. He had an argument with Malvolio, in which the poor man made it quite apparent that he was still in possession of his proper reason. But Feste, or Sir Topas, as he called himself for this occasion, would not hold out any hope of release, and, as far as Malvolio could tell in his dark prison, presently departed, without bringing him any comfort.

Sir Toby now began to think the joke had gone far enough, and that it was time to release Malvolio as soon as it could conveniently be done. He knew that Olivia would be seriously displeased if she came to learn what had happened, and he was already so deep in disgrace with his niece that he could not with safety pursue the sport any further. He therefore told the clown to speak to Malvolio in his own voice. Feste began singing one of his songs, as if he had just come near, and Malvolio, recognising it, called piteously to him for help.

“Good fool, as ever you will deserve well at my hand, help me to a candle, and pen, ink, and paper; as I am a gentleman, I will live to be thankful to you for it!”

The clown still went on teasing Malvolio a little before he would grant his request, but finally said he would get what he wanted, and went off to fetch a light and writing materials. Malvolio wrote his letter, which the clown duly delivered, and which clearly proved that the poor man was quite sane, though justly indignant at the way in which he had been treated. Olivia ordered his immediate release, and when Malvolio came and bitterly reproached her for the letter she had written, and the way in which he had been befooled, she assured him that the fault was none of [Pg 206] hers, and that the handwriting was Maria’s.

Fabian then stepped forward and took the whole blame on himself and Sir Toby. He said they had played this trick on Malvolio because of his ill-nature towards themselves. Maria had only written the letter under great persuasion from Sir Toby, who now, out of recompense, had married her. Fabian added that he thought the playful malice with which the joke was carried out deserved laughter rather than revenge, if the injuries on both sides were justly weighed.

“Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee!” said Olivia.

“I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you,” cried Malvolio, taking himself off in a terrible fury.

And the laughter of the others was checked by the stern rebuke of Olivia:

“He has been treated most shamefully.”

Sebastian and Viola

Olivia, wishing to speak once more with the young page Cesario, sent the clown in search of him, but Feste, by chance, happened to meet Sebastian instead, and thinking he was the person he was in search of, he delivered his lady’s message to him.

Sebastian could not understand in the least what he meant, but he was still further surprised when a very foolish-looking gentleman ran up to him, and struck him a blow, saying: [Pg 207]

“Now, sir, have I met you again? There’s for you!”

“Why, there’s for you, and there, and there!” retorted Sebastian, repaying his blows with interest. “Are all the people mad?”

Sir Andrew was surprised and very much disgusted to find that the young man whom they had taken for a coward could strike so vigorously with his fists. Sir Toby interfered on behalf of his timorous friend, and he and Sebastian had drawn their swords to fight in earnest, when Olivia, warned by Feste, came hurrying up. She sternly commanded Sir Toby to stay his hand, and implored Sebastian, whom she took for Cesario, to pardon the rudeness of her kinsman, and to go with her into the house.

“Either I am mad or else this is a dream,” thought the bewildered Sebastian, when he heard this beautiful lady speaking to him as if he were already a dear friend. But, dream or not, it was extremely pleasant, and he was quite willing that the illusion should continue. “If it be thus to dream, let me sleep still,” he said to himself.

This handsome young gallant was by no means so indifferent to the Countess Olivia as Cesario had been, and when she proposed that they should be married at once, he was quite willing to consent. He would gladly have consulted his kind friend Antonio, the sea-captain, but this was not possible, for on going to the Elephant Inn, which was the place of meeting arranged, Antonio had never appeared to keep his appointment. The reason we know already, although Sebastian did not—Antonio had been arrested by Duke Orsino’s officers.

The marriage had only taken place two hours, when Orsino, accompanied by Viola, came to [Pg 208] Olivia’s house, and almost immediately afterwards Antonio was led in by the officers. Now came fresh confusion; Antonio again thought Viola was Sebastian, and taxed him bitterly with his ingratitude. Viola stoutly denied ever having seen Antonio before, except on the one occasion when he had saved him from the valiant Sir Andrew. Antonio declared that for the last three months they had never parted company, day or night, whereupon the Duke declared his words must be madness, because for the last three months the youth had been his own attendant.

Then came Olivia, who thought that Viola was the man to whom she had been married, and amazed her by calling her “husband.” The priest who had actually married them was called as witness, and declared this was true. It was now the Duke’s turn to be indignant with Viola for her supposed deceit and treachery, for he thought that when he had sent Cesario to woo Olivia on his behalf, the young page had taken the opportunity to secure the lady for himself.

Matters were in this tangled state of confusion, when all was happily put right by the arrival of Sebastian. When the twins stood together everyone was amazed at the resemblance. The brother and sister were delighted to meet once more. Antonio found that his friend was not the monster of ingratitude he had taken him for; and Olivia was restored to a handsome and devoted husband, who had no intention of denying his own wife.

Orsino might perhaps have been sad at discovering that the Countess Olivia was now lost to him for ever, but while a charming young bride stood ready at his hand, he was not unwilling to [Pg 209] be consoled. Viola’s faithful service met its reward.

“Since you have called me ‘master’ for so long,” said the Duke, “here is my hand; you shall from this time be your master’s mistress.”

Olivia said that Viola and the Duke must now look on her as a sister, and that the wedding should take place from her house.

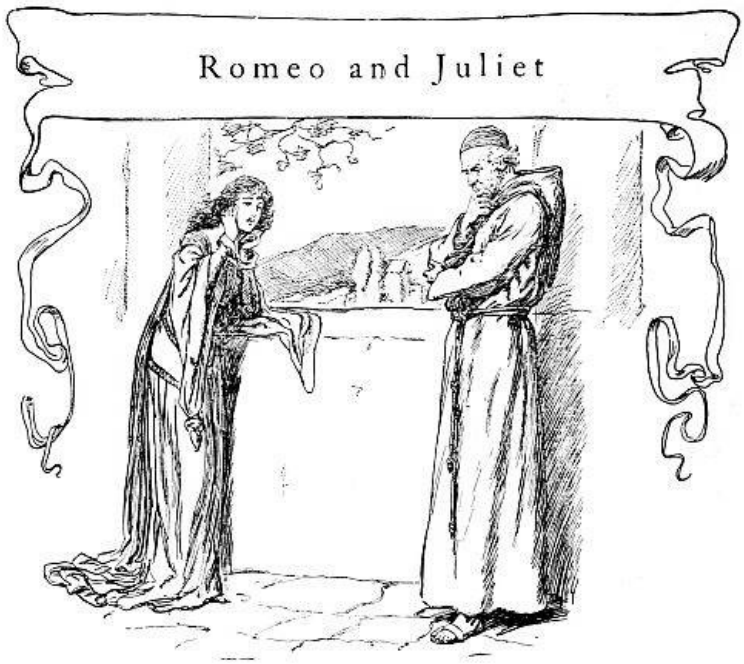
So they all trooped merrily away, and Feste, the clown, was left singing to himself:

"When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day.

"But when I came to man's estate,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,
For the rain it raineth every day.

"A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day."

[Pg 210]



The Masked Ball

here was a long-standing feud between the houses of Montague and Capulet, two of the noblest families of ancient Italy, and the narrow streets of Verona rang constantly with the sound of brawl and strife. The enmity between the heads of the family and their noble kinsmen descended, of course, to their retainers, and the servants of both houses never met without quarrel, and frequent bloodshed. The [Pg 211] Prince of Verona vainly tried to stop this incessant bickering; again and again it burst out with renewed fury. Three serious outbreaks had already occurred in the city, when not only the servants of the families, but even respectable citizens had joined in the fray, and became for the moment furious partisans of one side or the other. Finally, the Prince, enraged by another of these skirmishes, started by the servants, but joined in afterwards by the heads of the houses themselves, pronounced sentence indignantly on Montague and Capulet. If ever they disturbed the streets again, he declared, their lives should pay the forfeit of the peace.

When the rioters had dispersed and the Prince had retired, Lady Montague began to make anxious inquiry about her son, saying how glad she was he had not been in the fray. Her nephew Benvolio replied that an hour before dawn, driven to walk abroad by a troubled mind, he had seen young Romeo walking in a grove of sycamore outside the city, but that, as soon as Romeo became aware of his approach, he stole away into the covert of the wood. To this Montague added that his son had been seen there many mornings, evidently in deep sorrow, and that when he was in the house he penned himself up in his own room, shut up his windows, locked out the fair daylight, and made an artificial night for himself. Montague neither knew the cause of this strange behaviour, nor could he learn it of him, though both he and his friends had earnestly entreated Romeo to tell them the cause of his grief.

At this moment the young man himself came in sight, and Benvolio hastily begged his uncle and Lady Montague to step aside, saying that he would certainly find out what was the matter. Perhaps Benvolio used more tact in dealing with his cousin, or perhaps Romeo was at last not sorry to confide his trouble; at any rate, he confessed to Benvolio that the reason of his unhappiness was that he was in love with a beautiful lady called Rosaline, who was very cold and indifferent, and did not in the least return his affection. [Pg 212]

As there seemed no hope of Romeo's winning the lady, Benvolio very sensibly advised him to think no more about her, but to try to find someone else equally beautiful and charming. Romeo replied that this was quite impossible, but Benvolio did not at all despair of effecting his cure.

And, as it happened, the very remedy suggested was successful, and that within the next few hours. This was how it came about.

The rival house of Capulet, like that of Montague, boasted of but one child, but while the Montagues' was a son, Romeo, the Capulets' only surviving offspring was a daughter, a lovely young girl called Juliet.

Up to the present Juliet had been too youthful to take part in the gaieties of the world, but a certain noble young Count called Paris, a kinsman of the Prince of Verona, had already been attracted by her charms, and now begged permission from her father to pay his suit to her. Capulet replied that Juliet was very young still to think of marriage, but that if Paris liked to try to win her heart, and succeeded in doing so, he would willingly add his consent to hers. Further, he said that he was holding that night an old-accustomed feast, to which he had invited a number of guests, including many beautiful maidens; among them Paris would behold his daughter, and he could then compare her with others, and judge whether she still surpassed them as he now thought. He was to see all, hear all, and to like her the best whose merit should be the most. [Pg 213]

The servant sent out by Capulet to carry his invitations was no scholar, and happening to meet Romeo and Benvolio, he appealed to them to read over to him the list of invited guests. Among the names written there, Romeo found that of Rosaline, with other admired beauties of Verona, and Benvolio advised him to go to the ball, and without prejudice to compare her face with some of the other ladies present, when he would find that, after all, she was no such paragon.

Romeo replied that he would go, not for this reason, but to delight in the splendour of his own lady.

Even although it was to an enemy's house he was going, and he was placing himself in grave peril if his identity were discovered, it was not a difficult matter for Romeo to gain admittance to the Capulets, for all the guests were to go in fancy dress, and wear masks. Romeo chose the disguise of a pilgrim. When the night came he was still sad at heart, and declared he would join in no dancing; he had a soul of lead that bore him to the ground, so that he could hardly move.

Besides Benvolio, on this night, Romeo had with him another friend, a very light-hearted, witty gentleman, called Mercutio, a kinsman of the Prince of Verona. As they went along, Mercutio tried to laugh Romeo out of his melancholy mood, and to chase away his sadness with his gay chatter. But nothing he could say served to cheer up Romeo; a dark misgiving seemed to hang over him, and it was with no festive spirit that he entered the brilliantly lighted hall of Capulet's house. [Pg 214]

All here was splendour and gaiety. Crowds of quaintly dressed figures wandered to and fro. Capulet himself, with his daughter Juliet and others of his house, received the guests, and gave them a hearty welcome. Then the music began, and the dancers grouped themselves for the stately and graceful measures of those days.

Romeo was late in arriving, and the dancing had already begun when he entered the hall. He stood for a while looking on at the scene. His Rosaline, no doubt, was there, among other proud beauties of Verona, but to-night her sway was to be broken for ever. For there among the dancers was one who far surpassed her fellows, even as a snowy dove trooping with crows. In the dazzling radiance of her first youthful bloom, moved the daughter of the house, and when he saw this slender maiden with her peerless beauty, and her locks of shining gold, all lesser feelings melted out of Romeo's heart, and he knew he had never really loved till now.

Romeo's half-uttered exclamations of rapture were overheard by a nephew of Lady Capulet's, a fiery nobleman called Tybalt, always ready for brawls and quarrelling.

"This, by his voice, should be a Montague," he said, and immediately ordered his page to fetch his rapier. "How dares the slave come hither, covered with an antic face, to fleer and scorn at our solemnity? Now, by the honour of my kin, I would hold it no sin to strike him dead." [Pg 215]

"Why, how now, kinsman? Why do you storm so?" asked Capulet.

"Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe—a villain who has come here in spite to scorn at our solemnity."

"Young Romeo, is it?"

"It is he—that villain Romeo!"

"Content you, gentle cousin, let him alone," said Capulet. "He bears himself like a gallant gentleman, and to say truth, Verona boasts him to be a virtuous and well-governed youth. I would not for the wealth of all the town do him any wrong here in my house. Therefore be patient, take no notice of him—it is my will, and if you respect it, show an amiable face, and put off those frowns, which are not a pleasing expression at a feast."

“It fits when such a villain is a guest,” said Tybalt sullenly. “I’ll not endure him!”

“He *shall* be endured,” said Capulet sternly. “What, goodman boy! I say he *shall*; go to! Am I the master here, or you? Go to! *You’ll* not endure him! *You’ll* make a mutiny among my guests! *You’ll* be the man!”

“Why, uncle, it’s a shame,” persisted Tybalt.

“Go to—go to!” cried the exasperated old man. “You are a saucy boy! Go! Be quiet, or——More light! More light!—I’ll make you quiet.”

Burning with wrath against Romeo, and furious at the rebuke which his presumption had won from his uncle, Tybalt withdrew, silenced for the moment, but his heart filled with the bitterest spite, and determining to be revenged at the first opportunity for the humiliation he had suffered.

[Pg 216]

In the meanwhile the dance was ended, and Romeo had been able to approach Juliet. In his rôle of a pilgrim he carried on with her a half-jesting conversation which barely veiled the deep devotion he was already beginning to feel; and, according to the customs of those days, he was even permitted to salute the lady with a courteous kiss.

Their conversation was interrupted by Juliet’s nurse, who came to summon Juliet to her mother, and then Romeo learnt for the first time that the young girl who had so enchanted him was the daughter of the house, a Capulet, the child of his foe.

And a few minutes later, Juliet, also making eager inquiry about the young guest in the guise of a pilgrim, heard that his name was Romeo, a Montague, the only son of the great enemy of her father’s house.

Mercutio

When the ball was over, Romeo’s friends, Mercutio and Benvolio, looked for him to return with them, but Romeo was nowhere to be found. Unable to leave the neighbourhood of the lady who had so suddenly taken possession of his heart, Romeo had scaled the wall of Capulet’s orchard. As he drew near the house, a window above opened, and Juliet herself stepped out on to a balcony. Romeo was hidden among the shadows of the trees, but the silver rays of a summer moon shone full on Juliet, and lighted up her sweet young face and her ball-dress of shimmering white satin.

[Pg 217]

Like Romeo, Juliet was sad at heart, for all her thoughts were running on the gallant young stranger, and it grieved her to remember that he was the son of her father’s enemy. Believing herself to be alone, Juliet spoke her meditations aloud, and in the silence of the night they were clearly heard by the unseen listener below.

“O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?” she sighed. “Deny thy father, and refuse thy name. Or, if thou wilt not, only swear to love me, and I’ll no longer be a Capulet.”

“Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?” said Romeo to himself, enraptured at hearing such words.

“It is only thy name that is my enemy,” continued Juliet. “What’s ‘Montague’? It is not hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man. O, be some other name! What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.... Romeo, doff thy name, and for that name which is no part of thee, take all myself!”

“I take thee at thy word!” cried Romeo, unable to keep silence any longer. “Call me but love, and I will be new baptized; henceforth I never will be Romeo!”

Juliet was greatly startled to find that her rash words had been overheard, but she soon recognised the voice to be that of Romeo. She warned him of the peril he ran if he should be discovered, but Romeo cared little for the swords of her kinsmen, provided that he won the love of the lady. It was too late now to deny what she had so frankly confessed, and the darkness of the night hid Juliet’s blushes. She therefore took courage, and spoke out candidly, saying that if

[Pg 218]

Romeo really loved her, let him pronounce it faithfully, and though he might think she was too easily won, yet she would prove more true than many who had more cunning in feigning coldness.

Romeo was all fire and eagerness, and was beginning to swear his unswerving constancy when Juliet checked him. Her heart was still troubled, and, though she rejoiced to find that Romeo loved her, she could scarcely rejoice in the contract they had made; it seemed too rash, too unadvised, too sudden, to last. But if Romeo’s purpose still held, and he wished to marry her, Juliet bade him send word the next day by a trusty messenger, where and at what time the ceremony should be performed; and she would lay all her fortune at his feet, and follow him, her husband, throughout the world.

In this sudden emergency Romeo knew to whom to apply. There was a good old man, called Friar Laurence, a friend of both the families, who was much grieved at the bitter dissension between them, and had many times tried to induce them to become reconciled. Friar Laurence had often chided Romeo for his extravagant doating on Rosaline, and his unrestrained grief because she would not listen to him. The good man was somewhat astonished at this sudden turn of events; he foresaw that one of Romeo’s passionate, excitable nature was never likely to be happy; the hot-headed young man was always in extremes, either in a state of rapture or in the depths of despair. He would listen to no counsel, and never paused to reflect. But when Friar Laurence on this occasion understood what was wanted of him, he did not refuse his aid, for he

[Pg 219]

thought this alliance might prove so happy that it would turn the rancour of the two households into peace and love. So word was sent to Juliet, and, with the connivance of her old nurse, who was fully in the confidence of the two young lovers, Juliet stole away the next morning to Friar Laurence's cell, and was there secretly married to Romeo.

On this same morning of the marriage it happened that Romeo's friends, Mercutio and Benvolio, were walking through Verona. It was a very hot day, and Benvolio presently suggested they should go home, saying that the Capulets were abroad, and that if they met, they would certainly not escape a brawl, for these hot days fevered the blood, and made men quarrelsome.

Mercutio laughed at Benvolio's caution, and accused him of being as hot-tempered a man as any in Italy.

"Nay, if there were two such we should have none shortly, for one would kill the other," he said jeeringly. "Thou! Why, thou wilt quarrel with a man that hath a hair more or a hair less in his beard than thou hast; thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but because thou hast hazel eyes. Thy head is as full of quarrels as an egg is full of meat. Thou hast quarrelled with a man for coughing in the street, because he hath wakened thy dog that hath lain asleep in the sun. Didst thou not fall out with a tailor for wearing his new doublet before Easter, and with another for tying his new shoes with old riband? And yet thou wilt tutor me from quarrelling!"

"If I were as ready to quarrel as thou art," retorted Benvolio, "any man should buy the fee simple of my life for an hour and a quarter." [Pg 220]

It will easily be seen that these gentlemen were not in the most amiable frame of mind, and it was unfortunate that at that moment a party of the Capulets should come up, among them being the fiery-tempered nephew of Lady Capulet. The incident of the night before still rankled in Tybalt's mind, and any friend of Romeo's was fit subject on which to wreak his spite. But Mercutio was not a man to brook insult, and he returned Tybalt's insolence with interest.

"Gentlemen, good-day; a word with one of you," said Tybalt, advancing.

"Only one word with one of us?" said Mercutio in a mocking voice. "Couple it with something: make it a word and a blow."

"You shall find me apt enough at that, sir, if you give me occasion," said Tybalt, glaring at him.

"Could you not take some occasion without giving?" sneered Mercutio.

"Mercutio, thou consortest with Romeo——"

"Consort!" echoed Mercutio. "What, do you make us minstrels? If you make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but discords. Here's my fiddlestick; here's that which shall make you dance!" And he laid his hand threateningly on his sword.

"We talk here in the public haunt of men," interposed Benvolio, for their wrangling had begun to attract the attention of two or three inquisitive passers-by. "Either withdraw to some private place, and talk over your grievances calmly, or else depart; here all eyes gaze on us." [Pg 221]

"Men's eyes were made to look, and let them gaze," said Mercutio coolly. "I will not budge for any man's pleasure, I!"

"Well, peace be with you, sir; here comes my man," said Tybalt, for he saw Romeo approaching.

"But I'll be hanged, sir, if he wears your livery!" said Mercutio.

Straight from his marriage with Juliet, his heart full of joy, and his spirit breathing peace to all mankind, came Romeo. Even the insult with which Tybalt greeted him did not at such a moment rouse his anger. Tybalt was Juliet's kinsman; in his overflowing love for Juliet, Romeo could not quarrel with one who might be dear to her.

"Romeo, the hate I bear thee can afford no better term than this—thou art a villain!" said Tybalt.

"Tybalt," returned Romeo mildly, "the reason I have for loving you prevents the rage which should follow such a greeting. I am no villain. Therefore, farewell. I see you do not know me."

"Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries you have done me. Therefore turn and draw."

"I do protest, I never injured you, but love you better than you can guess, till you shall know the reason of my love. And so, good Capulet—which name I speak as dearly as my own—be satisfied."

Mercutio had listened in amazement to Romeo's gentle responses to Tybalt's insults, but at this he could contain himself no further.

"O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!" he cried in wrath, and drew his sword. "Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?" [Pg 222]

"What would you have with me?"

"Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives. Will you pluck out your sword? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears before it be out."

"I am for you," said Tybalt, drawing.

"Gentle Mercutio, put your rapier up," entreated Romeo.

"Come, sir, begin," was Mercutio's only answer.

“Draw, Benvolio, beat down their weapons,” cried Romeo imploringly. “Gentlemen, for shame, forbear this outrage! Tybalt, Mercutio, the Prince has expressly forbidden fighting in the streets of Verona. Hold, Tybalt! Good Mercutio!”

In his eagerness to stay the combatants, Romeo tried to strike up their weapons, and Tybalt, seizing his advantage, stabbed Mercutio under Romeo’s arm. Then, seeing him reel back into Benvolio’s arms, Tybalt fled with his followers.

“I am hurt,” said Mercutio. “A plague on both your houses! I am done for.... Is he gone, and hath nothing?”

“What, are you hurt?” said Benvolio.

“Ay, ay, a scratch—a scratch,” said Mercutio, with an attempt at his old light manner. “Marry, it’s enough. Where is my page? Go, villain, fetch a surgeon.”

“Courage, man, the hurt cannot be much,” said Romeo tenderly.

“No, it’s not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door,” said Mercutio, in his usual jesting style, though he could only gasp out the words with difficulty; “but it’s enough; it will serve. Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a *grave* man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this world.... [Pg 223] A plague on both your houses! ... Why the devil did you come between us? I was hurt under your arm.”

“I thought all for the best,” said poor Romeo.

“Help me into some house, Benvolio, or I shall faint,” gasped Mercutio.... “A plague on both your houses! ... they have made worm’s meat of me ... your houses....”

Benvolio supported Mercutio away, but returned in a few minutes with the mournful tidings that the brave and gallant spirit had taken flight. Mercutio, the brilliant wit, the loyal friend, the light-hearted comrade, had fallen a victim to the dissension between the houses of Montague and Capulet. Jealous of his friend’s honour, as of his own, he had risked all in its defence, and he faced death, as he had done life, with undaunted bearing and a smile on his lips.

Benvolio had scarcely told the news when back came Tybalt, and, furious at the loss of his friend, Romeo hurled aside all thoughts of leniency, and straightway sprang at his murderer. The fight was brief, and Tybalt fell. Romeo was hastily hurried off by Benvolio, for the whole town was now in an uproar, and he knew that, if taken, Romeo would probably be doomed to death. Dazed by all the calamities which had suddenly fallen on him, Romeo let himself be persuaded, and departed almost in a dream.

The Prince of Verona now arrived, also Capulet and Montague, and crowds of other citizens. In reply to the Prince’s inquiries, Benvolio gave an account of what had happened, telling the story in the most favourable light he could for the absent Romeo, whose fault, indeed, it had no wise [Pg 224] been. He told how Tybalt had provoked him, and how Romeo had tried to keep the peace, reminding the quarrelsome nobleman of the Prince’s displeasure; also how Tybalt had slain Mercutio when Romeo was trying to stop the duel; and how, after Mercutio’s death, Tybalt had come back and fought with Romeo. Before Benvolio could part them, Tybalt was slain, and now Romeo had fled.

The Capulets began to clamour for revenge. Benvolio, they said, was a kinsman to the Montagues, and his affection made him speak falsely; the matter was not as he described it. They begged for justice. Romeo had slain Tybalt; Romeo must die.

“Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio,” said the Prince, grieving for the loss of his own kinsman. “Who owes the price for Mercutio’s dear blood?”

“Not Romeo, Prince; he was Mercutio’s friend,” said Montague. “His fault only concludes what the law should have ended—the life of Tybalt.”

“And for that offence we exile him immediately,” pronounced the Prince, determined by severe measures to put a stop to the incessant brawling that was bringing sorrow to so many noble families. “I have suffered because of your hate—my dear kinsman is slain. But I will punish you with so heavy a fine that you shall all repent my loss. I will be deaf to pleading and excuses; neither tears nor prayers shall soften this sentence, therefore use none. Let Romeo leave the city at once; else, when he is found, that hour shall be his last. Mercy only encourages murder when it pardons those who kill.” [Pg 225]

“Banished!”

When Juliet hastened to Friar Laurence’s cell to be married to Romeo, her nurse went off in another direction, to secure a ladder of cords, so that the young husband might visit his wife that evening, and speak to her with less danger of discovery than if she were up in the balcony and he below in the orchard.

This nurse of Juliet’s was a talkative, easy-tempered old person, very fond of her nursling—of whom she had had charge since she was a baby—and good-natured after a fashion, but vulgar-minded, and very selfish if anything came to cross her own convenience. Juliet had coaxed her into sympathy about her present affairs, and Romeo, being a very handsome, open-handed young gentleman, the nurse for the moment was on their side, and consented to act as messenger between them. But her own aches and pains were at all times more important to the old woman than the concerns of anyone else; and even when returning from her mission to settle the time of the marriage, she was more occupied in recounting her own ailments than in relieving the

anxiety of her young mistress to hear news of Romeo.

However, as long as things went well, she was willing to be amiable, and the young girl was at least not left entirely destitute of any confidant. But when trouble arose, the nurse's shallow, selfish nature became apparent, and poor Juliet was soon to learn that she must rely solely on her own strength and judgment in the sorrows that overwhelmed her.

After the marriage Juliet returned home, and there presently the nurse joined her. She carried [Pg 226] the ladder of cords she had gone to fetch, but she flung it down with a gesture of despair, and her face was the picture of woe.

"Ay me! What news? Why do you wring your hands?" exclaimed Juliet, a sudden chill of terror clouding the sunshine of her joy.

"Ah, well-a-day! he's dead, he's dead, he's dead!" wailed the nurse. "We are undone, lady—we are undone! Alack the day! He's gone, he's killed, he's dead!"

Juliet thought, of course, that the nurse referred to Romeo, especially when she went on weeping and wailing and saying that she had seen him lying dead with her own eyes. Juliet's heart was nearly broken at the dreadful news, when suddenly the stupid old woman, in her confused style began to lament:

"O Tybalt, Tybalt, the best friend I had! O courteous Tybalt! Honest gentleman! That ever I should live to see thee dead!"

"What do you mean?" said poor, bewildered Juliet. "Is Romeo slaughtered, and is Tybalt dead? My dear-loved cousin and my dearer lord?"

"Tybalt is gone, and Romeo banished," said the nurse. "Romeo that killed him, he is banished."

Her words were plain enough now. Juliet shrank back in horror.

"Did Romeo's hand shed Tybalt's blood?"

"It did—it did. Alas the day, it did!"

Juliet's first impulse was to heap reproaches on her newly made husband, who hid so vile a nature under so fair a seeming; but when the nurse chimed eagerly in, and said there was no trust, no faith, no honesty in man,— they were *all* perjured, *all* dissemblers, Juliet immediately [Pg 227] changed her tone, and broke into an indignant defence of Romeo.

"Will you speak well of him that killed your cousin?" asked the nurse.

"Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?" cried Juliet. "Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name when I, thy three-hours wife, have wronged it?"

Worse, far worse to her, than her cousin's death was the terrible news that Romeo was banished. "Tybalt is dead, and Romeo—banished!" The dreadful words kept ringing in her ears. "Romeo is banished! There is no end, no limit, measure, bound, in that word's death; no words can fathom that woe," she mourned.

Juliet bade the nurse carry away the ladder of cords, for it was of no use now. Romeo was exiled, she would never see him again; death, and not Romeo, would be her husband.

The old woman was melted to pity at the sight of Juliet's misery.

"Go to your room," she said soothingly. "I'll find Romeo to comfort you. I know well where he is. Hark ye, your Romeo will be here at night. I'll go to him; he is hidden in Friar Laurence's cell."

"Oh, find him! Give this ring to my true knight," cried Juliet, "and bid him come to take his last farewell."

Forced to find a refuge after the death of Tybalt, Romeo had gone to the man who had always been a friend to him, and the good Friar Laurence had given him shelter in his cell. He then sallied forth to learn how matters were going, and presently returned with the news of the doom [Pg 228] that the Prince had pronounced—Romeo was banished. Romeo was in despair when he heard the sentence. To him banishment seemed worse than death. In vain the Friar tried to comfort him, pointing out that the sentence was more merciful than what he had a right to expect. Romeo declared it was torture, and not mercy. Heaven was here where Juliet lived; and henceforth every cat and dog, and little mouse, and unworthy thing, might look at her, but he might not. Every creature was free, but he was banished. Was there no poison, no sharp knife, no sudden way of death, however mean, that might have killed him, that he must live on in torture, with that word "banished"?

The good Friar tried to reason with him, but for the moment Romeo was past all reason; he refused to listen to any words of counsel, and flung himself down on the ground in a perfect frenzy of grief.

At that moment there came a knocking at the outside door.

"Arise; someone is knocking. Good Romeo hide thyself," entreated the Friar.

But Romeo refused to stir. The knocking came again, louder and more imperative.

"Hark how they knock!... Who's there?... Romeo, arise; thou wilt be taken.... Stay awhile.... Stand up! Run to my study.... In a minute.... Heavens! what folly is this?... I come—I come!"

The Friar's entreaties to Romeo were mixed with broken ejaculations to the person knocking

outside, but as the headstrong young man refused to move from the spot where he had flung himself down on the floor of the cell, Friar Laurence dared no longer delay to open the door. [Pg 229]

“Romeo, arise; thou wilt be taken!”

Happily the new-comer was only Juliet’s nurse, and no dangerous or inquisitive visitor. Romeo eagerly demanded news, and then, in a fresh passion of remorse at the misery he had brought on his dear lady, threatened madly to kill himself, and drew his sword.

The Friar stayed his hand, and now began sternly to rebuke him for his frantic behaviour and unmanly lack of all self-control. Then he pointed out that he had still many blessings left to him, though he chose sullenly to ignore them. Juliet still lived—he was happy in that; the law that might have condemned him to death had turned it into exile—he was happy in that; finally, the Friar bade him go to Juliet as had been arranged, and comfort her. [Pg 230]

“But take care not to stay till the watch be set,” he counselled, “for then you cannot pass to Mantua, where you shall live till we can find a time to publish your marriage, reconcile your friends, beg pardon of the Prince, and call you back, with twenty hundred thousand times more joy than you went forth in lamentation.”

Romeo was greatly cheered by the brave words of the Friar, and the nurse hurried back to Juliet with the news that her husband would soon be with her.

Comfort and Counsel

The second parting of Romeo and Juliet at the balcony looking into Capulet’s orchard was very different from the first. Then, indeed, Romeo had reluctantly torn himself away; but, after all, they had another happier meeting to look forward to on the morrow. Now, all was gloom and uncertainty, and who knew when they would ever see each other again? The lark, the herald of the morning, that sang joyously high overhead,—the golden rays of dawn that pierced the eastern clouds,—only brought sadness to the hearts of the young husband and wife, for they told that the fatal hour of parting had come. Longing to keep Romeo with her, yet dreading the peril he ran if he delayed too long, Juliet one moment implored him to stay, and the next urged him to depart. [Pg 231]

“Oh, now be gone; more light and light it grows,” she sighed at last; and Romeo echoed despairingly:

“More light and light; more dark and dark our woes!”

At this moment the nurse came hastily to warn Juliet that her mother was approaching, and now indeed Romeo must take his last farewell. As Juliet looked down to him from the balcony it seemed to her that Romeo’s face, in the gray light of dawn, looked pale as one in the bottom of a tomb, and even his cheering words that spoke of a future meeting failed to bring comfort to her breaking heart.

But she had no time to brood over this sorrow, for she was now called to face another and almost more terrible trial.

Lady Capulet had come to her daughter’s room at this unusual hour to bring news of great importance. The County Paris had renewed his suit to Juliet’s father. All was arranged; the marriage was fixed to take place in three days’ time, on the following Thursday. It did not occur to the parents that Juliet would have any voice in the matter; or, rather, Lady Capulet thought it would be joyful tidings to her, and would help to console her for the death of her cousin Tybalt. She was, therefore, somewhat astonished to find the way in which her news was received. In answer to her intelligence that early next Thursday the gallant, young, and noble gentleman, the

County Paris, at Saint Peter's Church, would happily make Juliet a joyful bride, her daughter exclaimed with fire:

"Now, by Saint Peter's Church and Peter too, he shall not make me there a joyful bride!" [Pg 232]

Juliet went on to say that she would not marry in this haste, and when she did marry it would be Romeo, their enemy, rather than Paris.

Then in came Capulet, her father, and, deaf to all Juliet's pleadings, he swore in a furious rage that she *should* marry Paris; and if she did not, she might beg, starve, die in the streets, for he would not own her as a daughter.

Juliet appealed to her mother, but Lady Capulet was really angry with her, or perhaps she did not dare to go against her husband; at any rate, she took his side in the matter, and harshly refused to listen to anything Juliet might say.

"Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee," were her final cruel words, as she followed her husband from the room.

Cut to the heart, stunned with misery, Juliet turned to her last hope. Her old nurse was still beside her; she, at least, knew that what her parents demanded was impossible; she knew that Juliet could not marry Paris, for she was already married to Romeo. Perhaps she could suggest some way of escape.

"Comfort me, counsel me," implored the distracted young girl. "What say'st thou? Hast thou not a word of joy? Some comfort, nurse."

And this is the comfort and counsel the old nurse gave. Romeo was banished, she said; she would wager anything he would never dare to come back to challenge her, or, if he did, it would have to be by stealth. Then, since the case stood as it did, she thought the best thing would be for Juliet to marry the County Paris. Oh, he was a lovely gentleman! Romeo was nothing to him! [Pg 233] Indeed, she thought Juliet very happy in her second match, for it far excelled her first; or, if it did not, her first was dead, or he might just as well be dead as living, when banished from Juliet.

So spoke the selfish, base-minded old woman. Juliet looked at her fixedly.

"Do you speak this from your heart?" she asked solemnly.

"And from my soul too," returned the old woman, "or evil befall them."

"Amen!" said Juliet.

"What?"

"Well, you have comforted me marvellous much," said Juliet, speaking with strange calm. "Go in, and tell my lady that, having displeased my father, I have gone to Friar Laurence's cell to make confession and to be absolved."

"Marry I will, and this is wisely done," said the old nurse, pottering away to fulfil her errand.

Then, for a moment, Juliet's self-restraint gave way.

"Oh, most wicked fiend!" she cried, in just indignation. "Is it more sin to wish me to be thus forsworn, or to dispraise my lord with that same tongue with which she has praised him as above compare so many thousand times! Go, counsellor; thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain. I will go to the Friar to ask his remedy. If everything else fail, I have power myself to die."

The good Friar did not fail the young girl in her need, as the old nurse had done. But the way of [Pg 234] escape he suggested was such a terrible one that none but the bravest and most faithful heart could ever have consented to it. Juliet's position, however, was so desperate, and she was so determined to be true to Romeo, that she would have died rather than have married Paris; and now she declared she was ready to go down to the gates of death itself if only she might live a true wife to Romeo.

Seeing her resolution, Friar Laurence went on to describe his plan. The marriage was to take place two days hence, on the Thursday. On the Wednesday night Juliet, when she went to bed, was to drink off the contents of a phial, which the Friar would give her. This was a very strong sleeping draught, which would make her lie exactly like dead, pale as ashes, stiff and cold, for forty-two hours, after which she would awaken as if from a pleasant sleep. On the Thursday morning, when they came to rouse her for the marriage, they would find her apparently dead, and then—according to the custom of the country—in her best robes, uncovered on the bier, she would be borne to the ancient vault of the Capulets.

In the meantime, before she awoke, news would be sent to Romeo to tell him everything. He would come back to Verona, and he and Friar Laurence would watch beside Juliet in the vault until she awoke, and that very same night Romeo should convey her away to Mantua.

This was the desperate plan which the Friar suggested, and which Juliet's love for her husband gave her strength to accept and carry out. With unflinching courage she seized the little phial, while Friar Laurence went immediately to despatch a speedy messenger to Mantua with letters to Romeo. [Pg 235]

All through the night before the marriage there was bustle and stir in the household of the Capulets. Great preparations were being made for the festivities, and Capulet himself was up all night, urging forward the servants, and hurrying them here and there about their different tasks. As the moments sped by, he became more and more excited, and when the musicians arrived to serenade the bride on her wedding morning, he shouted to the nurse to go and waken Juliet at

once, and get her dressed.

“Hie, make haste!” he said. “I’ll go and chat with Paris. Make haste, make haste! The bridegroom, he is come already! Make haste, I say!”

So the nurse went to Juliet’s chamber....

How calm and restful was everything here! What a contrast to the rush and noisy confusion outside the closed door! Not a sound broke the stillness, not a rustle of movement showed that any living creature was an inmate of the room. Behind those drawn curtains the bride slept well.

But she must rouse herself now; the time for slumber is past. She must shake off the heaviness from her dreaming eyes; she must leave this peaceful haven of her childhood; her happy girlish days are over and done with. The wedding feast is set, the guests are assembling, the bridegroom is waiting. Wake, Juliet, awaken!...

Shout, nurse, wail for sorrow, and wring your hands. Call louder, the bride does not hear you. Weep, mother, for the child whom you turned from when living; mourn, father, for the daughter you rejected and disowned.

There in her bridal robes lies the bride upon her bed, pale as ashes, stiff and cold. The snowy [Pg 236] whiteness of her wedding raiment is not more white than her face; her closed eyes smile back no greeting to the rising sun. The little phial has done its work. Here at the door stands the bridegroom, but to the mourners in that desolate chamber it seems that a mightier than he has stepped before him and claimed the bride, and the name of that bridegroom is Death.

The Palace of Dim Night

Friar Laurence had done his best for the young lovers, and he carried out his scheme with speed and vigilance. But an unfortunate accident prevented the letters he wrote to Romeo ever reaching their destination. The friar to whom he entrusted them went to find a brother friar of their order to go with him. This man was occupied in visiting the sick; the plague was then raging in Verona, and the searchers of the town, finding Friar John and his companion, and suspecting they were both in a house where the pestilence was, sealed up the doors, and refused to let them forth. Thus Friar John never got to Mantua at all, and he was even unable to forward the letter to Romeo or to return it to Friar Laurence, so fearful was everyone of infection.

On his release, two days later, he hurried back to the cell of Friar Laurence, and the latter learnt with dismay how his plan had failed. There was now only one thing to be done: he must go to the vault alone, to be there when Juliet awakened, for in three hours’ time the power of the sleeping potion would be exhausted. [Pg 237]

Though Friar Laurence’s message never got to Romeo, other tidings of sadder import reached him. When Romeo had started for Mantua, he left his servant, Balthasar, to follow him later with all news. Balthasar, of course, like all Verona, had heard of the tragedy at the Capulets’ house, and never doubted of the truth of Juliet’s death. At the moment he reached Mantua, it happened that Romeo was in the highest spirits; an unaccustomed lightness of heart seemed that day to have taken possession of him. As he strolled through the streets of Mantua just before Balthasar’s arrival, Romeo was musing happily over a dream of good omen that he had had the night before.

“My dream foretells some joyful news at hand,” he thought.“ I dreamt my lady came and found me dead—strange dream that gives a dead man leave to think!—and breathed such life with kisses on my lips that I revived, and was an emperor. Ah me! how sweet is love itself, when but love’s shadows are so rich in joy!”

At that moment Balthasar appeared, just as he had come off his journey. Romeo’s heart leapt up anew at the sight of him.

“News from Verona!” he cried. “How now, Balthasar? Do you not bring me letters from the Friar? How doth my lady? Is my father well? How fares my Juliet? I ask that again, for nothing can be ill if she be well.”

Balthasar bowed his head, and spoke sadly and solemnly.

“Then she is well, and nothing can be ill. Her body sleeps in Capulet’s monument, and her [Pg 238] immortal part with angels lives. I saw her laid low in her kindred’s vault, and took post at once to tell it you. Oh, pardon me for bringing this ill news, since you left it for my office, sir.”

Stunned by the blow. Romeo made no loud outcry; those who are stricken to the heart have no power to bewail their misery.

“Is it even so? Then I defy you, stars!” was all he said, when he heard the fatal tidings. The boyish turbulence, the violent outpourings of grief, the noisy despair that had followed his former woes found no voice in his present calamity. His was the calmness of one who knows that for him all hope is over. “You know my lodging; get me ink and paper,” he said to Balthasar. “And hire post-horses. I will hence to-night.”

“I do beseech you, sir, have patience,” said the serving-man. “Your looks are wild and pale, and import some misadventure.”

“Tush! You are deceived,” said Romeo. “Leave me, and do the thing I bid you do. Have you no letters to me from the Friar?”

“No, my good lord.”

“No matter. Get you gone, and hire those horses. I’ll be with you directly.”

Romeo’s resolution was taken. Juliet was dead. Well, he would die too. Now for the means. Then Romeo remembered that near the very spot where he was standing dwelt an old apothecary —a meagre wretch, wasted with misery and famine, whose sordid little shop contained a few musty odds and ends of rubbish, thinly scattered to make up a show. Noting this penury when he [Pg 239] had first seen him, Romeo had said to himself: “Now, if a man needed a poison whose sale would be instant death in Mantua, here lives a caitiff wretch who would sell it him.” That thought had only been the forerunner of his present need, and now he found that, won over by the handsome bribe offered, the starving apothecary could indeed supply him with a fatal drug of deadly power.

The hour of awakening had not yet come, and Juliet still slept peacefully in her strange abode of death.

To the churchyard at night came the gallant County Paris, to lay flowers at the tomb of the young bride who had been so untimely snatched away. His little page kept watch at a distance, while Paris laid the flowers with loving words at the door of the tomb.

> “Sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I strew,—
> O woe! thy canopy is dust and stones;—
> Which with sweet water nightly I will dew,
> Or, wanting that, with tears distilled by moans;
> The obsequies that I for thee will keep
> Nightly shall be to strew thy grave and weep.”

Warned by a whistle from the page, Paris retired into the shadow, as other footsteps were heard approaching. Romeo, accompanied by Balthasar, bearing a torch and some tools for opening the vault, now came near, and Paris could hear the instructions Romeo gave his servant.

“Give me the mattock and the wrenching iron. Hold, take this letter. Early in the morning see you deliver it to my lord and father. Give me the light. I charge you on your life, whatever you [Pg 240] hear or see, stand quite aloof, and do not interrupt me in what I am doing. The reason I descend into this abode of death is partly to behold my lady’s face, but chiefly to take from her dead finger a precious ring. Therefore, hence, begone! But if you jealously return to pry into what I further intend to do, by heaven, I will tear you joint from joint!”

“I will begone, sir, and not trouble you,” replied Balthasar; but, all the same, he intended to hide himself somewhere near, for he feared the looks of Romeo, and doubted his intention.

When the serving-man had retired, Romeo took up the tools, and began to wrench open the door of the tomb. But now Paris came forward to interfere.

“This is that banished, haughty Montague,” he said to himself, “who murdered my love’s cousin, out of grief for whom it is supposed she died. Now he has come here to do some villainous shame to the dead bodies. I will seize him. Stop thy unhallowed toil, vile Montague! Can vengeance be pursued further than death? Villain, I seize thee! Obey, and go with me, for thou must die.”

“I must indeed, and therefore came I hither,” said Romeo. “Good, gentle youth, do not tempt a desperate man. Fly hence and leave me; think on those who are dead. I beseech thee, youth, do not put another sin on my head by urging me to fury. Oh, begone! By heaven, I love thee better than myself. Stay not; begone!”

“I defy all thy entreaties,” cried Paris hotly, “and seize thee here for a felon.” [Pg 241]

“Wilt thou provoke me? Then have at thee, boy!” said Romeo, compelled to draw in self-defence.

They fought, and Paris was wounded.

“Oh, I am slain!”

“Oh, I am slain!” he moaned. “If thou be merciful, open the tomb, lay me with Juliet.” [Pg 242]

“In faith, I will. Let me see this face,” said Romeo, and he took up the torch to look at the dead man. “Mercutio’s kinsman, noble County Paris! What was it my man said when my troubled soul paid no heed to him as we rode hither? I think he told me Paris should have married Juliet. Said he not so? Or did I dream it so? Or am I mad, hearing him talk of Juliet, to think it was so?—Oh, give me thy hand, one writ with me in sour misfortune’s book! I’ll bury thee in a triumphant grave.”

Taking up the dead body of the gallant youth, Romeo laid it gently inside the tomb. Then all other thoughts faded from his mind, for there, uncovered on the bier, clad in her wedding-robes, radiant in all her beauty, lay the young wife from whom he had only parted a few days before.

“O my love! my wife!” he sighed. “Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath, hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.... Ah, dear Juliet! why art thou yet so fair?... I will stay here with thee, and never from this palace of dim night depart again. Oh, here will I set up my everlasting rest, and shake the yoke of inauspicious stars from this world-wearied flesh! Eyes, look your last! Arms, take your last embrace!... Here’s to my love! O true apothecary, thy drugs are quick! Thus with a kiss I die.”

At the further end of the churchyard, Friar Laurence, with a lantern, crowbar, and spade, was picking his way through the crowded ranks of graves, when he stumbled across a friend. This was Balthasar, who told him that Romeo had gone to the Capulets’ vault, but from fear of his master, [Pg 243] did not dare accompany the Friar there. Dreading some fresh misfortune, Friar Laurence hurried onwards. At the entrance to the vault he was horrified to see fresh stains of blood, and on entering it he found, to his dismay, Romeo lying there beside the bier of Juliet, and Paris newly slain. But there was no time to spare for lament or wonder; Juliet was awakening.

“O comforting Friar, where is my lord?” she asked, opening her sweet eyes, and glancing about a little fearfully at her dreary surroundings. “I remember well where I should be, and there I am. Where is my Romeo?”

At this moment a noise was heard outside. Paris’s little page had warned the night-watchmen of Verona, and they were now approaching. Friar Laurence implored Juliet to leave the place at once. A greater power than theirs had thwarted their plans; her husband lay dead beside her, and Paris, too, was slain. The Friar said he would place Juliet in safety among a sisterhood of holy nuns, only let her come at once; he dared stay no longer.

“Go, get thee hence, for I will not go,” replied Juliet firmly; and seeing it was useless to attempt to argue with her, Friar Laurence slipped away.

Left alone, for one brief terrified moment Juliet glanced around her, but when her gaze fell on her dead husband all doubt and hesitation fled for ever.

"What's here? A cup, closed in my true love's hand?" she said, bending over him tenderly. "Poison, I see, has been his untimely end. O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop to help me [Pg 244] to follow thee? I will kiss thy lips; haply some poison yet hangs on them." She leant forward and kissed him, and in the same moment caught sight of the dagger in Romeo's belt. "Thy lips are warm."

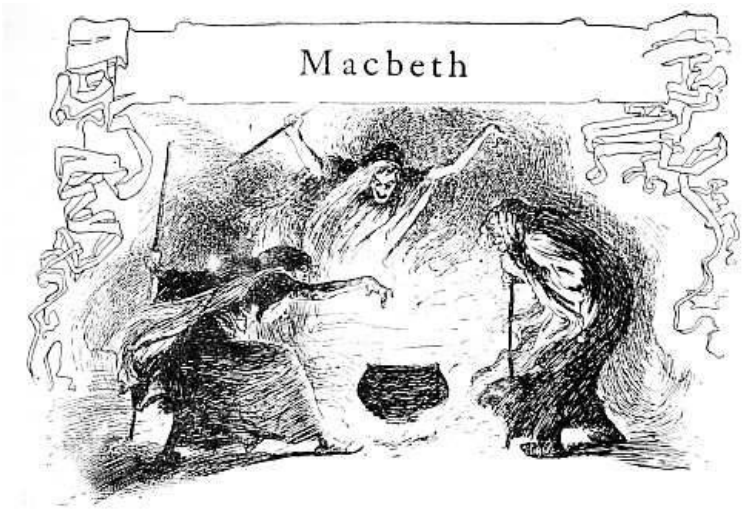
"Lead, boy! Which way?" said the voice of a watchman outside.

"Yea, noise! Then I'll be brief," said Juliet, snatching the dagger. "O happy dagger, this is thy sheath; there rest and let me die!" And she fell back dead on Romeo's body.

When the watchmen, followed by the Prince of Verona and the parents of the ill-fated lovers, entered the vault, there was nothing to be done. All was over now—the joy and the sorrow, the hatred and the strife. Revenge was silenced; henceforth the voice of dissension was mute. In the presence of those unseeing witnesses the bitter enemies were reconciled.

In this "palace of dim night," this dark abode of death, nothing was left now but peace and the abiding memory of undying love.

[Pg 245]



The Weird Sisters

itchcraft is now a thing of the past, as far as England is concerned, unless there still lingers in some very remote corners a belief in the power for evil of some poor old body, whose only claim for such distinction is, perhaps, her loneliness and ugliness. But in ancient days, and even into the last century, such a belief was a very usual thing. "Wise women," as they were often called, who pretended they had the power of foretelling the future, were by no means uncommon, and even learned people and those in high positions were not ashamed to consult them with regard to coming events. In Scotland this belief lingered much longer than in England, and even to this day, in remote parts [Pg 246] of the Highlands, there are some who claim they have the gift of "second sight"—that is, that they can see in advance events that will happen several years hence.

The time when the present story occurred was hundreds of years ago, in the year 1039, before William the Conqueror had come to Britain, and when England and Scotland were entirely separate kingdoms.

The throne of Scotland was then occupied by a King called Duncan. The country at all times was much at the mercy of Northern invaders, and just at that period it was suffering from the inroads of the Norwegian hosts, who, secretly aided by the traitor Thane of Cawdor, had obtained a footing in the eastern county of Fife. But their brief victory was changed to defeat by the valour of the Scotch Generals, Macbeth and Banquo. Sweyn, King of Norway, was forced to sue for a truce, and had even to pay a fine of ten thousand dollars to obtain leave to bury his men who had fallen in the fight.

News was brought to King Duncan of the victory that had been gained by the valour of Macbeth, and, pronouncing the doom of instant death on the traitor Thane of Cawdor, he ordered that his title should be bestowed as a reward on Macbeth.

It was a wild night, on a desolate heath near Forres. The setting sun, low down on the horizon, cast a blood-red glow over the withered bracken and a group of blasted fir-trees. The thunder rolled overhead, the wind howled in long moaning gusts, the lightning flashed in jagged streaks. But to the three strange figures that approached from different quarters, and met in the centre of [Pg 247] this lonely heath, such wild weather was of no import, or, rather, it suited well with their grim

and sinister mood. Children of the night, their deeds were those of darkness. The wholesome sunlight and the breath of day made them shrink and cower in secret lurking-places, but when midnight veiled the sky they stole out to their unholy revels, or on the wings of the tempest they rode forth, bringing death or disaster to all who crossed their track.

"Where hast thou been, sister?" asked the first witch.

And the second replied: "Killing swine."

"Sister, where thou?" asked the third witch.

"A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap, and munched, and munched, and munched," said the first witch. "'Give me,' quoth I. 'Aroint thee, witch!' the pampered creature cried. Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master of the *Tiger*; but in a sieve I'll thither sail, and, like a rat without a tail, I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do," ended the witch spitefully.

"I'll give thee a wind," said the second witch.

"Thou art kind."

"And I another," said the third witch.

"I myself have all the other," continued the first witch, gloating over the revenge she intended to take on the husband of the woman who had repulsed her, and she continued in a sort of chant:

"And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
In the shipman's card.
I will drain him dry as hay;
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;
He shall live a man forbid:
Weary seven-nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine:
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.
Look what I have."

[Pg 248]

"Show me, show me!" cried the second witch eagerly.

"Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wrecked as homeward he did come."

At this moment across the heath came the roll of a drum and the tramp of marching feet.

"A drum, a drum! Macbeth doth come!" cried the third witch.

Then the three fearsome creatures, linking hands, solemnly performed a wild dance, waving their skinny arms in strange gestures, and uttering a discordant wail:

"The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about;
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again to make up nine.
Peace! The charm's wound up."

Macbeth and Banquo, marching across the heath on their way home, after the campaign with the Norwegians, were startled at the sight of these three uncanny figures barring their path.

"What are these, so withered and so wild in their attire, that look not like the inhabitants of earth, and yet are on it?" said Banquo. "Are you alive? Or are you anything that man may question?"

[Pg 249]

"Speak, if you can; what are you?" said Macbeth.

And the three witches answered by saluting him, each in turn:

"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!"

"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!"

"All hail, Macbeth! Thou shalt be King hereafter."

"Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear things that do sound so fair?" said Banquo, for Macbeth stood as if rapt in a dream, amazed at what he heard.

Then Banquo asked the witches, if indeed they could look into the future, to say something to him, who neither begged nor feared their favours nor their hate.

The witches thereupon replied:

"Hail!" "Hail!" "Hail!"

"Lesser than Macbeth and greater!"

"Not so happy, yet much happier!"

"Thou shalt beget Kings, though thou be none. So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!"

“Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!”

Macbeth would fain have questioned these mysterious creatures further, but not a word more would they speak. By the death of a relative, he was certainly Thane of Glamis, but, as far as he knew, the Thane of Cawdor lived, an honourable gentleman, for Macbeth had not yet heard of his treachery, and how his title was forfeited. And to be King stood not within the prospect of belief, no more than to be Thane of Cawdor. But when Macbeth again charged the witches to speak, they vanished, seeming almost to melt like bubbles into the misty twilight from which they had emerged. [Pg 250]

The two victorious generals stood and looked at each other, mute for awhile with awe and wonder. They had fought with armed hosts on the field of battle, but here was a mystery which might amaze the stoutest heart. The poison was already beginning to work. Deeply ambitious at heart, though lacking in resolution to cut his way ruthlessly to the highest goal, the witches’ words had found a ready welcome in Macbeth’s secret desires. But not yet could he openly avow them.

“Your children shall be Kings,” he said to Banquo; and back came the answer which perhaps he was longing to hear:

“You shall be King!”

“And Thane of Cawdor, too, went it not so?” he asked, with a half-assumed air of incredulity.

“To the self-same tune and words,” said Banquo.

The mysterious greeting of the witches now received strange confirmation, for messengers arrived from King Duncan, bringing news that the Thane of Cawdor had been condemned to death for treason, and that his title and estate were conferred on Macbeth. Such an instant proof of the witches’ powers of divination could not fail to fill Macbeth’s mind with strange imaginings.

“Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor!” he murmured to himself. “The greatest is behind.” Then he spoke to Banquo apart: “Do you not hope your children shall be Kings, when those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me promised no less to them?”

But Banquo’s nature was less easily carried away than Macbeth’s. He warned him that it was dangerous to put any trust in doers of evil; often to win people to their harm they would tell truth in trifles, in order to betray them in matters of the deepest consequence. [Pg 251]

Macbeth scarcely paid any attention to what Banquo said. His thoughts were fixed now on one idea. The witches had foretold truly that he should be Thane of Cawdor when there seemed no likelihood of such an event taking place. Why, then, should they not have spoken equal truth when they foretold a higher honour?

A dreadful idea was already beginning to take shape in Macbeth’s mind. At first he shrank from it in horror, but again and again it came back with renewed force. At last he tried resolutely to thrust it from him.

“If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me, without my stir,” he said to himself. Then, with the feeling that he would leave events to work out as fate chose, he added: “Come what come may, time and the hour runs through the roughest day.”

But even yet he could not put the matter from him, and determine to think no more about it, as a wise man would have done. He wanted to reflect over what had passed, and discuss it again with Banquo.

“Let us go to the King,” he said to Banquo; for the messengers had come to summon him to Duncan, in order to receive his thanks for the victory. “We will think over what has chanced, and later on, having in the meanwhile pondered it, let us speak our hearts freely to each other.”

“Very gladly,” agreed Banquo.

“Till then, enough,” said Macbeth. “Come, friends;” and away he went with Banquo and the other lords to receive his new honours from the King’s hands. [Pg 252]

At the Castle of Macbeth

King Duncan received Macbeth and Banquo most graciously, and at the same time as he conferred the new dignity on Macbeth he took the opportunity of announcing that his own eldest son, Malcolm, should succeed himself as King of Scotland, and should be named hereafter Prince of Cumberland. In those days of strife and bloodshed it was by no means an assured fact that the crown should descend peaceably from father to son. When the rightful heir was young or feeble, some more powerful relative often stepped forward and seized the sceptre for himself. Macbeth’s wife was a near kinswoman of the King—according to some of the old chroniclers, she had even a better claim to the throne than Duncan himself. Macbeth may have been hoping that after the King’s death, if it came about by natural means, the crown might pass to himself. But this public proclamation of the young Prince as the heir was an obstacle in his path which would prove a stumbling-block to his ambition, unless he overleaped it. Once more, stronger than ever, rose the evil suggestion in his mind. He knew well the dark deed to which it was leading, but he was already almost determined to go through with it, cost what it might.

Macbeth’s character was well understood by his wife. He wished to be great, was not without ambition, but his nature was not yet sufficiently hardened to snatch what he wanted by the shortest way. The great things he wanted he would have been glad to get by rightful means; he

did not wish to play falsely, but he was quite content to win wrongly. Accustomed to rely on the stern judgment of his wife, he now wrote to her a full account of the meeting with the witches, and left the matter to her firmer will to puzzle out. [Pg 253]

If there were any hesitation in Macbeth's mind, there was none at all in Lady Macbeth's. Her husband was already Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor; well, he should reach the highest honour prophesied. So resolved was she on this point, and so swift was her mind to plot evil, that when a messenger arrived to say that King Duncan was then on his way to the castle, and would be there that night, she almost betrayed the treason in her heart by the startled exclamation, "Thou art mad to say it!" It seemed as though fate itself were delivering the unsuspecting victim straight into her hands.

"The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements," she muttered to herself; and with terrible decision she began to stifle all thoughts of womanly weakness or pity, and to nerve herself with unflinching cruelty for the deed that lay before her.

A few minutes in advance of the King came Macbeth, and was received with the warmest greeting from his wife.

"My dearest love," he said, "Duncan comes here to-night."

"And when goes hence?" asked Lady Macbeth, in a voice of dreadful import.

"To-morrow—as he purposes," faltered Macbeth, avoiding his wife's direct gaze.

"Oh, never shall sun that morrow see!" cried Lady Macbeth. "Your face, my Thane, is as a book, where men may read strange matters. To beguile the time, look like the time; bear welcome in your hand, your eye, your tongue; look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it. He who is coming must be provided for, and you shall put this night's great business into my despatch." [Pg 254]

"We will speak further," said Macbeth, still irresolute.

"Only look up clear," said Lady Macbeth; "to alter favour ever is to fear. Leave all the rest to me."

The counsel Lady Macbeth gave her husband she was quite ready to carry out herself. King Duncan was welcomed with smiling courtesy, and the gentle old King was charmed by the grace and kind attention of his hostess.

The castle itself was pleasantly situated; the air was fresh and sweet, and so mild that the guests of summer, the temple-haunting martins, built in every nook and coign of vantage. In truth, everything around seemed to breathe peace and innocent security.

But the hearts of the master and mistress of this castle were far from the loyalty they paraded to their royal guest, though the unbending will of Lady Macbeth was lacking to her husband. Torn with conflicting thoughts, he stole away from the chamber where King Duncan was supping, in order to ponder alone over the problem whether or not he should commit this crime. There were many reasons that cried out against it. First, Macbeth was the kinsman and subject of Duncan, both strong reasons against the deed. Then, he was the host of Duncan, and as such should have barred the door against his murderer, not borne the knife himself. Duncan had shown himself so meek in his high office that all his virtues would plead in his behalf, and fill the land with horror and pity at his fate. Macbeth had no spur to urge him onward except his vaulting ambition, which might overleap its aim and fail, after all. [Pg 255]

Missing her husband from the supper-room, Lady Macbeth followed him into the deserted hall, and when he said to her, "We will proceed no further in this business," she overwhelmed him with the bitterest contempt. She taunted him with his pitiful lack of resolution, and derided him for his cowardly want of valour—"Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,' like the poor cat in the adage," as she expressed it. When Macbeth suggested that they might fail, she laughed the idea to scorn. "We fail!" she cried. "But screw your courage to the sticking-place, and we'll not fail." Then she sketched out the plan of how they might proceed. When Duncan was asleep, she would drug with wine the two soldiers who kept watch at his door, and what then would prevent her and her husband doing anything they liked to the unguarded King? And, finally, what would prevent their laying the blame on the two drowsy officers, who would thus bear the guilt of the murder?

Fired with admiration for his wife's undaunted courage, Macbeth made no further demur, and the murder of their guest, the King, was agreed on.

That night was dark and wild, one of the roughest that had ever been known. The moon went down at twelve o'clock, and after that all was black, not a star visible. The wind moaned and wailed round the turrets of the castle, chimneys were blown down, strange screams were heard, which seemed to foretell coming woe; the owl, the fatal bellman of death, shrieked the livelong night. [Pg 256]

The inmates of the castle were disturbed and uneasy; it was late before they sought their rooms, for there was feasting and revelry because of the King's arrival; and, then, to many of them, sleep was impossible, because of the raging of the storm outside. But of what was happening in their midst they had no suspicion.

At the appointed hour, Macbeth, trembling with terror at his own deed, crept into Duncan's room, and killed the King. He looked so calm and peaceful as he lay there wrapt in slumber that

sudden remorse filled the heart of the murderer, and he stood fixed in horror, gazing at what he had done. In a neighbouring room two of the King's followers stirred and called out in their sleep. One laughed, and one cried "Murder!" so that they woke each other; and Macbeth stood and heard them. But with a muttered prayer they turned again to sleep, and presently Macbeth recovered sufficiently to creep back to his wife to tell her that the deed was done.

But though he had nerved himself to strike the blow, all Macbeth's courage again ebbed away. He shuddered with horror when he looked at the blood on his hands, and it was all his wife could do to rouse him from the sort of stupor that seemed to have seized him.

"These deeds must not be thought of in this way; it will make us mad," she said, when Macbeth was telling her what had happened in the chamber of the King. [Pg 257]

"Infirm of purpose! Give *me* the daggers."

"Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more!'" continued Macbeth, still in the same dazed fashion: "'Macbeth doth murder sleep'—the innocent sleep, balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, chief nourisher in life's feast——" [Pg 258] [Pg 259]

"What do you mean?" interrupted his wife.

"Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' to all the house; 'Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more.'"

"Who was it that thus cried?" said Lady Macbeth impatiently. "Why, worthy Thane, you weaken your strength by thinking so foolishly of things. Go, get some water, and wash this witness from your hands. Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there.—And smear the sleepy grooms with blood."

"I'll go no more," said Macbeth. "I am afraid to think what I have done; look on it again I dare not."

"Infirm of purpose! Give *me* the daggers!" cried Lady Macbeth contemptuously. "The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil." And, seizing the daggers from her husband's nerveless grasp, she carried them back into King Duncan's room, and placed them in the hands of the drowsy attendants, to make it appear as if it were they who had murdered the King.

Before Lady Macbeth could rejoin her husband, there came a knocking at the outer gate, and she hurried him away to put on night apparel, in order to divert suspicion from themselves if they were summoned.

The new-comer was a Scotch lord called Macduff, whom the King had appointed to call on him early in the morning. He was admitted into Duncan's room, when, of course, the crime was at once discovered. All was now horror and confusion. Macbeth feigned as much dismay as everyone else showed. The whole castle was aroused; the alarum bell pealed out. Macduff shouted for Banquo, and for the two young Princes, Malcolm and Donalbain. Lady Macbeth came running in, as if just disturbed from sleep. [Pg 260]

Fearing what the two grooms might say when they recovered from their drugged sleep, Macbeth took the opportunity in the uproar to slay them both, pretending that he was carried away by the fury of the moment at seeing the evidence of their villainy, the daggers in their hands.

But the suspicions of the two young Princes were aroused; they dreaded that the treachery begun was not yet ended, and they felt no safety in their present abode. So when Macbeth summoned a meeting in the hall of the castle to decide what was to be the future course of action, they secretly stole away, for better security resolving to separate, Malcolm, the elder son, going to England, and Donalbain, the younger, to Ireland.

The Guest at the Banquet

Macbeth had all his promised honours now—King, Cawdor, Glamis—everything that the weird women had prophesied. But Macbeth was not satisfied. There was one danger ever present in his path. Banquo, his ancient comrade in arms, distrusted Macbeth; he suspected him of playing most foully to win his present high honours. Macbeth, for his part, feared Banquo, because of his noble nature, valour, and wisdom in judgment. Outwardly he treated him with flattering civility, but inwardly he was resolved to rid himself of this dangerous companion. It was nothing to be King unless he could reign in safety. Moreover, when the weird sisters gave the name of King to Macbeth, they had, prophet-like, hailed Banquo father to a line of Kings. They placed a fruitless crown on Macbeth's head, and a barren sceptre in his grip, if no son of his succeeded. If this were so, it was for Banquo's children he had defiled his mind and murdered the good King Duncan—only for them! Macbeth resolved to go a step further in the path of crime, and to kill both Banquo and his young son Fleance. [Pg 261]

There was to be a great feast one night at the palace. Banquo was especially invited to be present, both by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and he promised to be back in time for the banquet, though he had to ride out that afternoon on a matter of business. Macbeth inquired if he had to ride far, and Banquo answered that it would take all the time between then and supper—possibly he might even have to borrow an hour or two from the darkness, unless his horse went very well.

"Fail not our feast," said Macbeth.

"My lord, I will not," said Banquo.

"We hear our cruel cousins are bestowed in England and Ireland, not confessing their murder of their father," continued Macbeth, who now pretended to believe that King Duncan's own sons had killed him. "But more of that to-morrow. Hie you to horse! Adieu till you return at night." [Pg 262]

Then, in a voice of feigned carelessness, he asked Banquo if Fleance were going with him that afternoon.

Banquo replied that he was, and that they ought to start at once, and with a few final words of civil farewell Macbeth at last let him depart.

Directly he had gone, Macbeth gave an order to an attendant, and two men of grim and sinister aspect were secretly ushered into his presence. These were two murderers whom he had hired to assassinate Banquo. When he had got their consent to the cruel deed, Macbeth told them that within the next hour he would instruct them where to plant themselves, and let them know the exact hour, for the deed must be done that night, and at some distance from the palace. He also gave them strict injunctions that the work was to be done thoroughly, and that the young boy Fleance was to be slain with his father, for his absence was just as material to Macbeth as was Banquo's.

The murderers promised to obey his directions, and he dismissed them.

If Macbeth were troubled in mind and ill at ease, his wife was no happier. She had reached the height of her ambition: her husband was King of Scotland. But the royal crown that glittered on her brow brought no charm with it to soothe the restless trouble at her heart.

> "Nought's had, all's spent,
> When our desire is got without content;
> 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
> Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy."

That was the secret of their misery; Macbeth and Lady Macbeth had got their heart's desire, and in the unworthy getting of it they found it brought them no content or peace of mind. Sick at heart, weary, dissatisfied, it would have been hard to find a sadder pair that day in Scotland than the King and Queen in their royal robes, on the eve of their grand state banquet. [Pg 263]

But true to her old undaunted spirit, even in the midst of her own depression, Lady Macbeth tried to rouse her husband from his despondent gloom.

“How now, my lord?” she said. “Why do you keep alone, making companions of sorriest fancies? Things without all remedy should be without regard; what’s done is done.”

“We have but scotched the snake, not killed it,” returned Macbeth, whose mind was always brooding on the possible dangers ahead. All day he was thinking over the past, or plotting fresh wickedness to secure his own safety, and by night he was haunted by the most terrible dreams. In this constant state of unrest he could even think with envy of the quiet repose of the man he had killed. “Better be with the dead, whom we to gain our peace have sent to peace, than to live on in the restless torture of the mind. Duncan is in his grave; after life’s fitful fever he sleeps well. Treason has done its worst; nor steel, nor poison, malice domestic, foreign levy—nothing can touch him further.”

“Come, my gentle lord,” said Lady Macbeth, “smooth your rugged looks; be bright and jovial among your guests to-night.”

“So I shall, love, and so I pray be you,” said Macbeth. “Oh, my mind is full of scorpions, dear wife! You know that Banquo and his son Fleance live.” [Pg 264]

“But they will not live for ever,” said Lady Macbeth.

“There’s comfort yet; they can be assailed,” said Macbeth; and then, in dark, mysterious words, he gave his wife to understand that a deed of dreadful note was to be done that night, though he refused to tell her more precisely what it was. “Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed,” he ended. “Thou marvellest at my words, but hold thee still: things bad begun make themselves strong by evil.”

In the great hall of the palace the banquet was spread. The King and Queen entered, with the Thanes of Lennox and Ross and many other noblemen of Scotland. Macbeth bade them be seated, and gave to one and all a hearty welcome. As the guests took their places at table, the arras hanging over a side-doorway was pushed apart, and a grim face peered in. Leaving the stool (for there were no chairs in those days) which he was about to occupy at the side of the table, in the midst of the guests, Macbeth went to speak to the intruder. It was one of the hired assassins, and he brought the news that Banquo was safely slain.

Macbeth was greatly pleased to hear this, but in another moment all his fear and discontent rushed back, for the young boy Fleance had escaped. The child of Banquo that was to be King hereafter! But Macbeth tried to console himself with the thought that, as he expressed it, “the grown serpent” was disposed of, and for the present, at least, the young snake had no teeth to bite.

Macbeth stood so wrapt in gloomy musing that Lady Macbeth was forced to recall him to a [Pg 265] sense of his duties as host. Poor lady, she had a hard task that night. Not only had she to conceal her own unhappiness, but she had to support the flagging spirits of her husband, and try to screen his strange behaviour, while she scattered smiles and flattering words in all directions. Macbeth roused himself by fits and starts, but his gaiety was forced, and his wife dreaded that every moment he would betray himself. However, at Lady Macbeth’s rebuke, he tried to shake off his gloom, and, approaching the table, he made an effort to speak cheerfully to the guests.

“May it please your highness sit,” said the Thane of Lennox.

The seat which Macbeth had been about to occupy when he went to speak to the murderer had remained empty, but now, unnoticed by all the other guests, a figure glided in and took possession of it.

If only Banquo were present, Macbeth went on to say, their honour would be complete, and he hoped it was his own fault, and no mischance, that had kept him away.

The Thane of Ross replied that Banquo deserved blame for not keeping his promise, and again asked Macbeth to favour them with his company.

“The table’s full,” said Macbeth.

“Here is a place reserved, sir,” said Lennox.

“Where?”

“Here, my good lord,” said Lennox, pointing to the seat Macbeth had first chosen. “What is it that moves your Highness?” he added in alarm, for Macbeth stood gazing in horror at what seemed to the others nothing but an empty stool. [Pg 266]

Well might the guilty King tremble and grow pale, for in the place that seemed vacant to everyone else he saw sitting the blood-stained figure of the murdered Banquo.

“Thou canst not say I did it; never shake thy gory locks at me!” he cried, recoiling in horror.

“Gentlemen, rise; his Highness is not well,” said the Thane of Ross.

But with eager words Lady Macbeth tried to calm the startled guests, assuring them that it was only a momentary fit of illness, such as Macbeth had been accustomed to from his youth. “Eat, and regard him not,” she implored them, and then, in a stern undertone, she tried to rouse her husband from his fit of dazed terror. But Macbeth was heedless of her entreaties. With starting eyes he watched the ghastly figure which his guilty brain alone could see, and it was only when the vision melted away that he recovered from the sort of stupor into which he had fallen. Then, for a brief moment, he spoke cheerfully, and, calling for wine, he drank to the health of all present.

“And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss,” he added boldly. “Would he were here! To all, and him, we drink!”

The words were scarcely uttered, when once more the vision of the murdered man rose before Macbeth. With a scream of terror he again recoiled, pouring forth a torrent of entreaties and defiance. Lady Macbeth once more tried to smooth matters over, but her husband’s frenzied ravings could not be so lightly covered, and, dreading the suspicions that his wild words must give rise to, she hastily dismissed the guests on the plea of his sudden illness. [Pg 267]

When everyone had gone, and the husband and wife were left alone, she was too worn out and unhappy to utter any further reproaches or questions. Haggard and miserable, the guilty pair stood there in the deserted hall, amid the broken fragments of the disordered feast and the dying torches that flickered in the first gray twilight of dawn. Ashes of splendour, loneliness, despair—it seemed like the emblem of their own ruined lives.

Macbeth was quiet enough now; he seemed possessed with a sort of sullen desperation. He had waded so deep in blood, it would be as tedious to go back as to go forward, and he determined that any cause that hindered his own good should be ruthlessly swept aside. It was he, not Lady Macbeth, who was the leader now. Banquo’s murder he had arranged alone, and he asked no counsel from his wife about a fresh deed of iniquity he was already planning.

But in his guilty superstition he resolved to go early the next day to seek the weird sisters, to learn from them, if possible, what secrets fate still held in store.

The Witches’ Cavern

Macbeth had gained his throne by treachery, and he had no confidence in the loyalty of his subjects. He feared lest they should plot together to bring back the sons of Duncan, and he had secret spies in the households of all the great nobles. The one he feared most, next to Banquo, was Macduff, Thane of Fife, and when the latter refused to obey the tyrant’s bidding to attend the great feast, Macbeth knew that he was likely to prove a dangerous enemy, and resolved to [Pg 268] get rid of him without delay. But before he could lay hands on him, Macduff fled the country, leaving his wife and children in his castle in Fife, and going himself to the Court of the English King to beg his help in placing Malcolm on the throne.

It was the day after the banquet at Macbeth’s palace. In a gloomy cavern, far removed from the haunts of men, the three witches were busy brewing a hideous compound for some dark and evil purpose. In the middle of the cavern was a boiling cauldron, and as the witches circled round it in a grotesque dance, each in turn flung in some horrible ingredient. The flames crackled, clouds of hissing steam arose from the cauldron, and as they danced the witches croaked a discordant chant:

> “Double, double, toil and trouble;
> Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.”

The charm was just completed to their satisfaction, when there came a knocking at the entrance of the cavern. The second witch looked up with a cunning gleam in her sunken eyes.

> “By the pricking of my thumbs,
> Something wicked this way comes.
> Open, locks,
> Whoever knocks!”

The door swung open by itself, and Macbeth entered. In spite of his curiosity, he stood almost appalled at the weird scene before him. The darkness of the cavern was fitfully lighted by the leaping flames of the fire, and the evil faces that peered back at him from the shadowy gloom might well bring discomfort to a guilty soul. [Pg 269]

“How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags? What is it you do?” he demanded.

“A deed without a name,” answered the witches in chorus.

“I conjure you, by that which you profess, however you come to know it, answer me to what I ask you.”

“Speak!” “Demand!” “We’ll answer,” said the witches. “Say if you would rather hear it from our mouths or from our masters?”

“Call them; let me see them.”

The first witch flung some additional horrible charms into the cauldron, and then the three chanted together:

> “Come, high or low;
> Thyself and office deftly show!”

There was a flash of light, a roll of thunder, and in the midst of a cloud of blue steam there rose from the cauldron the Apparition of an armed Head.

“Tell me, thou unknown power——” began Macbeth.

“He knows thy thought,” said the first witch; “hear his speech, but say thou nought.”

"Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! beware Macduff;
Beware the Thane of Fife! Dismiss me. Enough."

"Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution, thanks," said Macbeth, as the Apparition sank from view. "Thou hast spoken my fear aright; but one word more——"

"He will not be commanded," said the witch. "Here is another, more potent than the first."

There was another roll of thunder, and a second Apparition arose from the cauldron, a blood-stained Child. [Pg 270]

"Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!"

"Had I three ears, I'd hear thee."

"Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
The power of man, for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth."

"Then live, Macduff; what need I fear of thee?" cried Macbeth. "But yet I'll make assurance double sure; thou shalt not live; that I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies, and sleep in spite of thunder."

There was a third roll of thunder, and a third Apparition rose—a Child crowned, with a tree in its hand.

"What is this that rises like the issue of a King, and wears upon his baby brow the round of sovereignty?"

"Listen, but do not speak to it," commanded the witches; and the Apparition spoke on:

"Be lion-mettled, proud; and take no care
Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:
Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him."

"That will never be!" cried Macbeth, in delighted relief, as the vision of the baby King sank back into the cauldron. As he truly said, who could remove the forest, and bid the trees unfix their earth-bound roots? All the bodements were good. Fate seemed bright before him. But there was still one thing his heart throbbed to know.

"Tell me, if your art can tell so much," he begged the witches, "shall Banquo's issue ever reign in this kingdom?"

"Seek to know no more," came the solemn warning. [Pg 271]

'What is this that rises like the issue of a King?'

"I *will* be satisfied. Deny me this, and an eternal curse fall on you! Let me know! Why does that cauldron sink, and what noise is that?" For there was the sound of trumpets. [Pg 272] [Pg 273]

"Show!... Show!... Show!...
Show his eyes, and grieve his heart;
Come like shadows, so depart!"

Then in the dusk of the cavern shone a strange luminous glow, and slowly in procession passed a line of eight Kings; the last carried a mirror in his hand, and was followed by Banquo's ghost.

Horrible sight! Then, after all, the witches had spoken truly, and it was Banquo's children who should fill the throne of Scotland for untold generations. For in the mirror held by the eighth King were reflected many more, and some of them carried twofold orbs and treble sceptres.

"What, is this so?" demanded Macbeth, and the first witch answered:

"Ay, sir, all this is so; but why
Stands Macbeth thus amazedly?
Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites,
And show the best of our delights;
I'll charm the air to give a sound,
While you perform your antic round,
That this great King may kindly say,
Our duties did his welcome pay."

Then a strain of weird music was heard, and in a sort of wild, mocking dance the witches vanished, the cauldron sank into the earth, and Macbeth was left standing alone in the gloomy cavern. [Pg 274]

Birnam Wood

When Macbeth learnt that Macduff had escaped from his power and fled to England, he took a fiendish revenge: he gave orders that his castle in Fife should be surprised and seized, and his wife and children slain. Macbeth's barbarous commands were executed, and the Thane of Fife's wife, children, servants, and every unfortunate soul in the castle, were ruthlessly slaughtered.

Scotland had long been groaning under the heavy yoke of the tyrant, and at this cruel deed it broke into open rebellion. Macduff returned from England, bringing the young Prince Malcolm with him, and many noblemen flocked to their standard. Macduff, burning with revenge for the loss of all his dear ones, swore that if ever the tyrant came within reach of his sword he should never escape alive.

In the troubles that now gathered thick and fast around him, Macbeth had no longer the counsel of his devoted wife to strengthen him. The punishment of her evil deeds had fallen upon Lady Macbeth. Her stern spirit was broken, for she was a prey to all the tortures of unavailing remorse. Her sleep was troubled, and in her dreams she acted over and over again the scene that had taken place on the night of Duncan's murder. The doctor called in to attend her could not explain the cause of the illness that seemed consuming her, but her waiting gentlewoman told him that at night Lady Macbeth would rise in her sleep, and speak strange words and act in a strange manner. The doctor resolved to watch, himself, to see what happened. For two nights all was quiet, but on the third night, as he was speaking to the gentlewoman, Lady Macbeth entered, [Pg 275] clad in a night-mantle, and carrying a lighted taper. Her eyes were open, but she evidently saw nothing; she was walking in her sleep. Setting down the taper, she began to rub her hands, as if she were washing them, speaking the while in a low voice. From her broken phrases it was easy to guess the scene of guilt that was haunting her brain. Mixed with words about Duncan's murder came reproaches to her husband for his lack of courage, and then references to other crimes—the murder of Banquo, and the death of the Thane of Fife's wife. And all the time Lady Macbeth kept rubbing and rubbing her hands; but it was of no use—nothing would ever make them clean again.

"Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand," she moaned, as if her heart were breaking.

"What a sigh is there!" said the doctor. "The heart is sorely charged."

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

"This disease is beyond my practice," said the doctor: "yet I have known those that have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds."

"Wash your hands; put on your nightgown, look not so pale!" muttered Lady Macbeth. "I tell you yet again, Banquo is buried; he cannot come out of his grave. To bed, to bed! There's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed!" And, with a gesture as if she were dragging some invisible [Pg 276] person reluctantly after her, Lady Macbeth took up her taper and slowly retreated.

The strain of this unceasing remorse by day and night was too much even for Lady Macbeth's dauntless courage, and the days of her life were soon to be numbered.

Macbeth himself was bordering on a state of frenzy. Some said he was mad; others, who hated him less, called it valiant fury. Whichever it might be, certain it was that his excitement was beyond control, and that he could not direct his cause in a reasonable manner. Sick at heart, void of all hope, he yet summoned all his courage, and resolved to fight stubbornly to the end, like some savage animal brought to bay.

The English troops, led by Malcolm and Macduff, were close at hand, and the Scottish nobles with their followers were to meet them near Birnam Wood. From here the combined forces were to march on Dunsinane Castle, where Macbeth now was, and which he had strongly fortified.

Rumours of the enemy's might filled the air, but Macbeth, trying to reassure himself with the witches' prophecy, bade his people bring him no more reports.

"Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane, I cannot quail with fear," he declared. "What's the boy Malcolm? Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know all mortal consequences have said to me thus: 'Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman shall e'er have power upon thee.'"

So, when a white-faced, trembling messenger brought the news that ten thousand English [Pg 277]

soldiers were marching on Dunsinane, Macbeth silenced him with curses and abuse.

But his momentary rage over, he fell again into dejection.

“I am sick at heart,” he said; “I have lived long enough, my way of life has fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf; and that which should accompany old age, such as honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have; but in their stead, curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath which the poor heart would fain deny, but dare not.”

Then, shaking off his despondency in a fresh outburst of fury, he rallied his men, determined to make a most stubborn resistance, no matter what forces were brought against him. “I will not be afraid of death and bane, till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane,” he cried, once more falling back for comfort on the witches’ prophecy.

News again came to Macbeth of the near approach of the English, and that the Scottish nobles were flocking to the standard of the young Prince. But he refused to be daunted.

“Hang out our banners on the outward walls,” he shouted. “The cry is still, ‘They come.’ Our castle’s strength will laugh a siege to scorn; here let them lie till famine and the ague eat them up.”

In the midst of his warlike commands, a cry of women was heard within the castle, and the news was told Macbeth that the Queen was dead. For a moment he was stunned. This, then, was the end of all their plotting and ambition! But now there was no time even to spend in grief. [Pg 278]

“She should have died hereafter,” he said, with a bitter reflection on the vanity of human life. “There would have been time for such a word. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time, and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

But his musing was interrupted; a messenger came hurrying up, his face full of terror.

“Thou comest to use thy tongue; thy story quickly.”

The man sank on his knee before Macbeth.

“Gracious my lord, I should report that which I say I saw, but know not how to do it.”

“Well, say, sir,” said Macbeth impatiently.

“As I stood watching upon the hill, I looked towards Birnam, and anon, methought, the wood began to move.”

“Liar and slave!” cried Macbeth, livid with fury, and striking the man to the ground.

“Let me endure your wrath if it be not so,” persisted the messenger. “Within these three miles you may see it coming; I say, a moving grove.”

“If thou speak false, upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive till famine cling thee,” said Macbeth. “If thy speech be true, I care not if thou dost as much for me.”

His resolution faltered, and he began to doubt the falseness of the fiends that lied like truth. “Fear not till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane,” they had said. And now a wood was coming to Dunsinane! [Pg 279]

“Arm, arm, and out!” thundered Macbeth.—“If this which he avouches be true, there is no flying hence nor tarrying here,” he thought, sick at heart. “I begin to be aweary of the sun, and wish the estate of the world were now undone.” Then, with a sudden return of fury, “Ring the alarum-bell! Blow, wind! come, wrack! At least we’ll die with harness on our back!”

The strange occurrence reported by the messenger was indeed true, but the explanation was simple. When the English and Scotch troops met near Birnam Wood, in order the better to conceal the soldiers as they marched to Dunsinane, Malcolm commanded that every man should hew down a leafy bough, and bear it before him, thereby making it impossible that the number of their host could be discovered. From a distance this mass of waving green boughs looked exactly as if Birnam Wood were advancing on Dunsinane.

The first of the witches’ safeguards had failed Macbeth, but he fell back with desperate reliance on the other. Besides, in any case, it was now too late to retreat; he must fight the matter out to the end, and either conquer or be lost for ever.

“They have tied me to a stake,” he cried. “I cannot fly, but, bear-like, I must fight the course. What’s he that was not born of woman? Such a one am I to fear, or none.”

In his furious fighting on the battle-field he presently encountered one of the English leaders, whom he promptly slew. Macbeth laughed in triumph, for he felt himself secure; he feared no weapon brandished by any man born of woman. [Pg 280]

But the hour of fate was at hand. Macduff, scorning to strike the wretched peasants, hired to fight, sought everywhere for Macbeth, determined either to slay the tyrant or sheathe his sword unused. And at last he found him.

But Macbeth seemed to shrink from the furious challenge.

“Of all men else I have avoided thee,” he said. “But get thee back; my soul is too much charged with blood of thine already.”

“I have no words; my voice is in my sword,” returned Macduff.

They fought, but for awhile neither got the better. Then Macbeth told Macduff that he was losing labour, for it was as easy for his keen sword to hurt the air as to wound him. He bore a charmed life, which could not yield to one of woman born.

“Despair thy charm!” cried Macduff. And the next moment Macbeth knew that the witches had doubly deceived him, for his second hope had failed—Macduff proclaimed that his birth had been different from that of ordinary mortals, so that in a way he might be said never to have been born.

“Accursed be the tongue that tells me so!” exclaimed Macbeth, “for it hath cowed my better part of man. And be those juggling fiends no more believed, that palter with us in a double sense; that keep the word of promise to the ear, and break it to our hope. I’ll not fight with thee!”

“Then yield thee, coward!” taunted Macduff, “and live to be the show and gaze of the time; we’ll have thee, as our rarer monsters are, painted upon a pole, and underwrit, ‘Here you may see the tyrant.’” [Pg 281]

His words goaded Macbeth’s failing nerve to fresh fury. Desperate and despairing, he flung his final challenge at his foe.

“I will not yield to kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet, and to be baited with the rabble’s curse! Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane, and thou opposed, being of no woman born, yet I will try the last. Before my body I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff, and cursed be him that first cries, ‘Hold, enough!’”

“Lay on, Macduff!”

The fight was over, and as the victorious generals gathered on the field of battle, with drums beating and flags flying, Macduff approached, bearing the head of the slain Macbeth, and saluted the young Prince Malcolm as King of Scotland. [Pg 282]

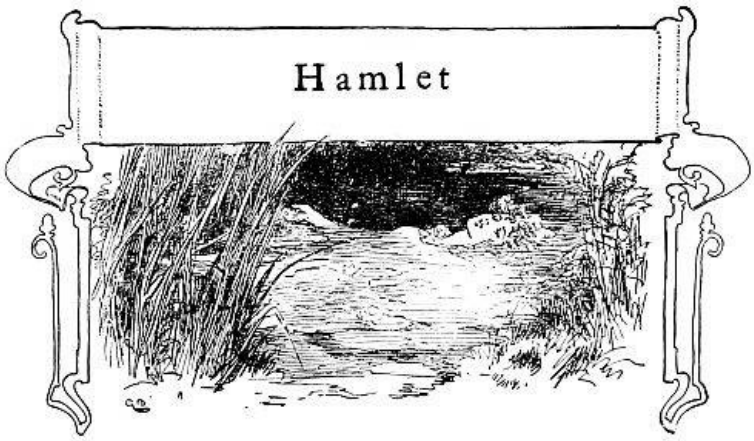
“Hail, King! For so thou art. Behold where stands the usurper’s cursed head; the land is free. Hail, King of Scotland!”

And the trumpets sounded, and a universal shout rent the air:

“Hail, King of Scotland!”

“The wood began to move.”

[Pg 283]



A Vision at Midnight

Great was the sorrow in Denmark when the good King Hamlet suddenly died in a mysterious manner. The rightful heir, the young Prince Hamlet, was at that time absent in Germany, studying at the University of Wittenberg, and before he could reach home, his uncle Claudius, brother to the late King, had seized the throne. More than this: within two months after the death of her husband, Claudius had persuaded the widowed Queen Gertrude to marry himself.

Hamlet, called back to Denmark by the death of his father, met on his return this second terrible shock of the hasty marriage of his mother. To one of his noble nature such an action seemed almost incredible. For not only had Queen Gertrude been apparently devoted to her first [Pg 284] husband, but the two brothers were so absolutely different, both in appearance and character, that it was difficult to imagine how anyone who had known the noble King Hamlet could descend to the base and contemptible Claudius.

King Claudius now usurped all the rights of sovereignty, and by being very suave and gracious to those who surrounded him he hoped to become popular. He would fain have banished all remembrance of the late King, though he was glib enough in uttering hypocritical words of sorrow. By pressing on the festivities of his marriage with Gertrude, he hoped to get rid of all signs of mourning. But the young Prince Hamlet refused to lay aside his suits of woe. Among the gay throng that crowded the Court of the new monarch he moved, a figure apart, clad in the deepest black, and with his brow clouded with melancholy. His mother, Queen Gertrude, tried some feeble attempts at consolation, but her commonplace, conventional remarks only showed how shallow was her own nature, and how far she was from understanding her son's depth of feeling. She begged him to put off his sombre raiment, and look with a friendly eye on his uncle.

"Do not for ever with thy veiled lids seek for thy noble father in the dust," she urged him. "Thou knowest it is common; all that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity."

"Ay, madam, it is common," replied Hamlet.

"If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?" asked the Queen.

"'Seems' madam! Nay, it *is*; I know not 'seems,'" said Hamlet, with noble indignation. And then [Pg 285] he went on to say that it was not his inky cloak, nor the customary suits of solemn black, nor sighs, nor tears, nor a dejected visage, together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief, that could denote him truly. "These indeed 'seem,' for they are actions that a man might play. But I have that within which passeth show; these but the trappings and the suits of woe."

Then King Claudius took up the theme, and delivered a homily to Hamlet on the duty of remembering that the death of fathers was a very common event, and one over which it was very wrong to sorrow much. All fathers died, one after another; it was a law of nature, and it was therefore a fault against heaven, and most absurd in reason, to lament over something which must certainly happen. To a son who had loved his father, as Hamlet had loved his, such cold-blooded moralising was nothing short of torture, and when Claudius went on to bid him throw to earth his unprevailing woe, and think of himself as of a father, the young Prince shuddered with horror at the suggestion. "For let the world take note, you are the most immediate to our throne," added Claudius pompously, looking round at the assembled courtiers. They all bowed subserviently at this announcement, and none of them dared so much as to hint that the son of their late King was their rightful ruler.

When he found how events were going, Hamlet no longer cared to remain in his own country, and would have preferred to return to his studies at Wittenberg; but when his mother joined her entreaties to his uncle's, in urging him to stay in Denmark, Hamlet consented to do so. [Pg 286]

In spite of the forced joviality which the new King tried to impose on his subjects, there was a feeling of uneasiness abroad. First, there were rumours of war. The late King had been a valiant soldier, and had fought victoriously with the ambitious neighbouring State of Norway. King Fortinbras of Norway, out of pride, had challenged King Hamlet, but had met with defeat. Fortinbras himself was slain, and some of his possessions were forfeited to Denmark. On the

death of Hamlet, young Fortinbras, thinking that perhaps the country would be in an unsettled state, or holding a poor opinion of the worth of its new ruler, resolved to try to get back some of the lands his father had lost. He therefore collected a band of reckless followers, ready for any desperate enterprise, and prepared to invade the country. News of this reaching Denmark, warlike preparations were at once set on foot; day and night there was toiling of shipwrights and casting of cannon, and strict watch was kept in all directions against the possible invaders.

But it was not alone the thought of the invasion that disturbed the minds of the Danish officers. A strange occurrence had lately happened, and they feared it boded no good to the country. As the Gentlemen of the Guard, Marcellus and Bernardo, kept their watch on the platform of the castle at Elsinore the Ghost of the late King appeared to them. It looked exactly the same as they had known him in real life, clad in the very armour he had on when he had fought against Fortinbras of Norway. For two nights running this figure had appeared before them, passing by them three times with slow and stately march, while they, turned almost to jelly with fear, stood [Pg 287] dumb, and did not speak to it. In deep secrecy they imparted the news to Horatio, a fellow-student and great friend of the young Prince, and on the third night he kept watch with them. Everything happened exactly as they had said, and at the accustomed hour the apparition again appeared. Horatio spoke to it, imploring it, if possible, to tell the reason of its coming. At first the Ghost would not answer, but it was just lifting its head as if about to speak, when a cock crew; then, starting like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons, it faded from their sight.

By Horatio's advice, they agreed to tell young Hamlet what they had seen; the spirit dumb to them might speak to him. Hamlet heard their tale with astonishment. He resolved to watch, himself, that night, and if the apparition again assumed his father's person, to speak to it, though all the spirits of evil should bid him hold his peace. He begged the officers to keep silence about what they had already seen, and about whatsoever else might happen, and promised to visit them on the platform between eleven and twelve o'clock that night.

At the appointed hour Hamlet was on the spot, and a few minutes after the clock had struck twelve the Ghost appeared. Deeply amazed, but resolute to know the cause why his father's spirit could not rest, but thus revisited the earth, Hamlet implored the Ghost to speak and tell him the meaning.

"Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?" he entreated.

The apparition made no answer, but beckoned to Hamlet to follow it, as if it wished to speak to him alone.

"Look, with what courteous action it waves you to more retired ground. But do not go with it," [Pg 288] said Marcellus.

"No, by no means," said Horatio.

"It will not speak; then I will follow it," said Hamlet.

"Do not, my lord," entreated Horatio.

"Why, what should be the fear?" said Hamlet. "I do not set my life at a pin's fee; and for my soul, what can it do to that, being a thing immortal as itself? It waves me forth again. I'll follow it."

Again Hamlet's companions did their utmost to hinder him, even seizing hold of him to prevent his going, for they feared lest the mysterious visitant should lure him on to his own destruction. But Hamlet shook off their detaining hands, and, bidding the Ghost go before, he boldly followed.

Having led the young Prince to a lonely part of the ramparts, the Ghost at last consented to speak. He told Hamlet that he was indeed the spirit of his father, doomed for a certain term to walk the night, and by day to suffer various penalties, till the sins committed in his life had been atoned for. He then went on to exhort Hamlet that, if ever he had loved his father, he should revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

"Murder!" gasped Hamlet.

"Murder most foul, as in the best it is; but this most foul, strange, and unnatural," returned the Ghost solemnly. "Now, Hamlet, hear. 'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, a serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark is by a forged account of my death rankly deceived. But know, thou noble youth, the serpent that stung thy father's life now wears his crown." [Pg 289]

"O my prophetic soul! My uncle!" exclaimed Hamlet.

"Ay!" answered the Ghost; and then he broke into rage against the wicked Claudius, who, after murdering his brother, had, with his subtle craft and traitorous gifts, contrived to win the affections of the widowed Queen. "O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!" lamented the Ghost, for he could not help knowing how infinitely beneath him, even in natural gifts, was his contemptible brother.

"Sleeping within my orchard, my custom always of the afternoon," he continued, "thy uncle stole on me, with juice of henbane in a vial, which he poured into my ears."

“Sleeping within my orchard.”

The effect of this poison was instant and horrible death, and again the Ghost urged Hamlet to avenge his murder. But he commanded his son that, whatever he did against his uncle, he was to contrive no harm against his mother. [Pg 290]

“Leave her to heaven, and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge, to prick and sting,” he concluded. “Fare thee well! The glow-worm shows the matin to be near, and begins to pale his uneffectual fire. Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me.”

“Remember thee! Ay, thou poor Ghost, while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe,” cried Hamlet, as the vision faded away, and far across the sea a faint lightening of the eastern horizon showed that the dawn would soon appear. “Remember thee! Yea, from the table of my memory I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records, all saws of books that youth and observation copied there, and thy commandment all alone shall live within the book and volume of my brain, unmixed with baser matter; yes, by heaven!—O villain, villain, smiling, cursed villain! My tables—meet it is I set it down, that one may smile and smile, and be a villain—at least, I’m sure it may be so in Denmark. So, uncle, there you are,” putting his tablets away. “Now to my word. It is ‘Adieu, adieu! Remember me!’ I have sworn it!”

Horatio and Marcellus now came hurrying up, much alarmed for the safety of their young lord. They found him in a strange mood. The news he had heard from the Ghost had been such a shock to Hamlet that for the moment he seemed quite unstrung, and, not having yet made up his mind how to act, he did not feel inclined to confide to his companions what he had just been told. He therefore put off their questionings with flippant speeches, and dismissed them in a somewhat summary fashion.

“How is it, my noble lord?” cried Marcellus. [Pg 291]

“What news, my lord?” asked Horatio.

“Oh, wonderful!” said Hamlet.

“Good my lord, tell it,” said Horatio.

“No; you will reveal it.”

“Not I, my lord, by heaven!” said Horatio, and Marcellus added: “Nor I, my lord.”

“How say you then? Would heart of man once think it——But you’ll be secret?”

“Ay, by heaven, my lord!” cried Horatio and Marcellus together.

Hamlet lowered his voice to a tone of mysterious importance:

“There’s ne’er a villain dwelling in all Denmark but he’s an—arrant knave.”

“There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave to tell us this,” said Horatio, hurt at Hamlet’s lack of confidence.

“Why, right; you are in the right,” said Hamlet. “And so, without more circumstance at all, I hold it fit that we shake hands and part, you as your business and desire shall point you—for every man hath business and desire, such as it is—and, for my own poor part, look you, I’ll go pray.”

“These are but wild and whirling words, my lord,” said Horatio, justly aggrieved.

“I am sorry they offend you, heartily—yes, faith, heartily!”

“There’s no offence, my lord,” said Horatio, rather stiffly.

“Yes, by St. Patrick, but there is, Horatio, and much offence, too,” returned Hamlet, but it was of the wrong done by his uncle he was thinking. “Touching this vision here, it is an honest ghost, that let me tell you. For your desire to know what is between us, overmaster it as you may. And [Pg 292]

now, good friends, as you are friends, scholars, and soldiers, give me one poor request."

"What is it, my lord? We will," said Horatio.

"Never make known what you have seen to-night."

"My lord, we will not."

"Nay, but swear it; swear by my sword."

And from underneath the ground sounded a solemn voice, "Swear!"

Twice again they shifted their places, and each time from beneath the ground came the hollow voice, "Swear!"

"O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!" marvelled Horatio.

"And therefore as a stranger give it welcome," said Hamlet. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

Then he made them swear that never, however strange or odd he bore himself, as he perchance hereafter should think meet to put on an antic disposition—that never at such times, seeing him, were they by word or sign to show that they knew anything, or with meaning nods and smiles pretend they could explain his strange behaviour if they chose.

"Swear!" said the Ghost beneath.

"Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!" said Hamlet, and his companions took the oath demanded of them. "So, gentlemen, with all my love I do commend me to you; and what so poor a man as Hamlet is, may do to express his love and friending to you, God willing, shall not lack. Let us go [Pg 293] in together; and still your fingers on your lips, I pray. The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!—Nay, come, let us go together."

Ophelia

The Lord Chamberlain to the Court of Denmark was an old man called Polonius, an ancient gray-bearded councillor, whose brain was stuffed with saws and proverbial sayings, and who had a very high opinion of his own sagacity. Polonius was ready to lay down the law on every occasion, and could always explain everything completely to his own satisfaction; the worldly wisdom of what he said was sometimes excellent, but his prosy moralising was often a severe tax on the patience of his hearers; in fact, he was not unfrequently what might be called "a tedious old bore."

Polonius had two children—a handsome, fiery-natured son called Laertes, and a gentle, beautiful young daughter called Ophelia.

Like most young gallants in days of old, Laertes wished to see something of the world abroad, and directly the coronation was over, he begged permission to return to France, whence he had come to Denmark to show his duty to the new King. Hearing that Polonius had granted leave, though unwillingly, Claudius graciously gave his own consent, and Laertes prepared to depart at once.

Between Ophelia and the young Prince Hamlet a tender affection had grown up. As children, no doubt, they had been companions, for the boy Prince had no brothers or sisters of his own, [Pg 294] though at school he had two friends of whom he was very fond, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. As Hamlet and Ophelia grew older this feeling became stronger. Their intimacy was watched with favour by Queen Gertrude, who dearly loved the gentle maiden, and wished nothing better than that she should become the wife of her son. So far, no definite engagement of marriage had taken place, but Hamlet was deeply attached to the young girl, and showed his affection by many gifts and words of love. As for Ophelia, her whole being was wrapt up in Hamlet. And small wonder, for peerless in grace and beauty, gallant in bearing as noble in nature, the young Prince shone forth far beyond any of his companions. As soldier, courtier, scholar, he was alike distinguished—ready in wit, skilled in manly exercises, highly accomplished, deeply thoughtful, studious in learning, a prince of courtesy, and an affectionate comrade. What marvel, then, that he had won for himself the absorbing love of a simple maiden like Ophelia, and the whole-hearted devotion of a loyal friend like Horatio?

Ophelia, in the quiet simplicity of her nature, accepted Hamlet's love without question; but Laertes, with his larger experience of the world, was by no means confident that Hamlet intended anything serious, and on the eve of his departure for France he warned his sister not to place too much reliance on the young Prince's favour. He bade her think of it as a fashion and a toy to amuse the passing hour—something sweet, but not lasting.

"No more but so?" said Ophelia wistfully.

"Think it no more," counselled Laertes firmly. "Perhaps he loves you now, sincerely enough, [Pg 295] but you must fear, weighing his greatness, his will is not his own; for he himself is subject to his birth. He may not, as unvalued persons do, choose for himself, for on his choice depends the safety and health of this whole State."

Then, sensibly enough, Laertes pointed out that even if Hamlet truly loved her, reasons of state might prevent his ever marrying her, and therefore he begged his sister to be careful about bestowing her love too unguardedly on the Prince.

Poor Ophelia's heart sank lower and lower at her brother's words, but she meekly promised to

remember his counsel. Then Polonius came in and gave some excellent parting words of advice to his son.

“Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well what I have said to you,” said Laertes, as he took his leave.

“What is it, Ophelia, he hath said to you?” asked Polonius.

“So please you, something touching the lord Hamlet.”

“Marry, well bethought,” said the old man; and then in his turn he proceeded to lecture his daughter on somewhat the same lines as Laertes had done.

In reply to his questions, Ophelia told him that Hamlet had lately made her many offerings of affection, and spoken many words of love. But, like Laertes, Polonius would not believe that Hamlet intended them seriously, or, at any rate, he pretended to think it only a passing fancy of the Prince’s. He ordered his daughter, therefore, to be more chary in seeing Hamlet—in fact, to avoid him as much as possible.

“I shall obey, my lord,” answered Ophelia dutifully. [Pg 296]

It never seemed to occur to her to question her father’s will. She could love faithfully, but she could not struggle against opposition. So when the tempest came, she bent her head before it, like a frail reed, and was swept resistlessly away.

“Sweet Bells jangled, out of Tune and Harsh”

In accordance with her father’s injunctions, Ophelia now began to keep aloof from Hamlet; she sent no answers to his letters, and refused to see him. In the deeply-absorbing subject which had occupied Hamlet’s brain since the visit of the Ghost, it may be doubted whether he felt to the full this altered behaviour; but when all joy on earth seemed failing him, and nothing true or steadfast seemed left, it was perhaps an added pang that even the woman he loved should choose this moment to withdraw her sympathy and companionship. Hamlet had sworn to his father’s spirit henceforth to banish from his mind the remembrance of everything but revenge. His love for Ophelia, therefore, must take a secondary place; but he could not give it up so easily, though he made an attempt to do so. There was a constant struggle going on in his mind; his was the misery of one who has a harder task imposed on him than he has strength to carry out. He knew his duty, but he could not do it. He pondered and pondered over the matter, he reflected deeply over the problems and difficulties of life; he could think, and suffer, and plan, but he could not act. Time passed on, and still he had taken no decisive step. Day after day he saw the false, [Pg 297] fawning smile of the traitor who had stolen his father’s crown. He knew himself to be thrust out of his own lawful place, a poor dependent on the will of the usurper, instead of enjoying his lawful rights as his father’s successor. But there was something in the sweet nobility of Hamlet which wrought its own downfall. A coarser, blunter nature that went straight to its mark, and either did not see, or did not trouble itself, about any side-issues, would have won its object; but Hamlet’s delicate, highly-strung spirit was not of the kind to command worldly success.

The perpetual trouble and perplexity in which he was plunged, and the bitter sense of his own irresolution, wrought a great change in the young Prince. Utterly out of sympathy with the whole Court of Denmark, and the better to conceal the workings of his mind, he adopted a strange mode of behaviour. He enjoyed the freedom this gave him of dispensing with the hypocrisy which was so prevalent at Court, and he took a half-bitter amusement in playing the part of one whose wits are wandering, and who is therefore privileged to indulge in wild and random speech. But at any instant he could lay aside this garb of eccentricity. With his old friends he was still the warm-hearted comrade, and to those in a lower position he was invariably a Prince of royal courtesy and kindness.

The King and Queen were much concerned at this change in Hamlet, and could not imagine what caused it, unless it were his father’s death. They sent in haste for two favourite friends of his boyhood to see if they could cheer him up with their company, and privately glean if there [Pg 298] were anything afflicting him unknown to them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern promised to do their best, and the Queen ordered them to be at once conducted to Hamlet.

In the meanwhile, old Polonius had solved the problem of Hamlet’s madness entirely to his own satisfaction, and he now came in triumph to impart his discovery to the King and Queen. It was, of course, quite impossible for him to tell his tale in a few words, but after an immense deal of beating round the bush, at last he came to the point. Briefly, it amounted to this: Hamlet had become mad because Ophelia had rejected his love. Oh, Polonius was quite certain about it, there was no doubt of the fact; and he carefully traced in detail all the various stages of Hamlet’s malady, which, it need scarcely be said, only existed in the old Chamberlain’s imagination. Polonius further produced as evidence a wild sort of letter that Hamlet had written to Ophelia, and was quite offended when the King and Queen seemed to hesitate a little in accepting his explanation of the problem.

“Hath there been such a time, I would fain know that, that I have positively said ‘’Tis so’ when it proved otherwise?”

“Not that I know,” said the King.

“Take this from this,” said Polonius, pointing to his head and shoulders, “if this be otherwise. If circumstances lead me, I will find where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed within the centre.”

“How may we try it further?” asked the King.

Polonius replied that Hamlet often walked for hours together in the lobby where they then were, and suggested that at such a time Ophelia should be sent to speak to him; he and the King, [Pg 299] secretly hidden behind the arras, would watch the interview.

“If he love her not, and be not fallen from his reason because of it, let me be no assistant for a State, but keep a farm and carters,” concluded Polonius complacently.

“We will try it,” said the King.

“But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading,” said the Queen, as Hamlet himself entered the lobby at that moment, his eyes fixed on the open book he held in his hand.

“Away, I do beseech you—both away!” cried Polonius eagerly. “I will speak to him.—How does my good Lord Hamlet?” he added suavely, as Hamlet approached.

“Well, God have mercy!” said Hamlet, in a voice of vacant indifference.

“Do you know me, my lord?” said Polonius, still in the same coaxing tone.

The young Prince lifted his listless eyes from his book and surveyed the old man.

“Excellent well; you are a fishmonger.”

“Not I, my lord,” said Polonius, rather taken aback.

“Then I would you were so honest a man.”

“Honest, my lord?”

“Ay, sir! To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.”

“That’s very true, my lord,” Polonius was forced to agree. He had not come off very well in this first encounter of wits, but he resolved to make a further attempt. Hamlet had now returned to his book. “What do you read, my lord?” [Pg 300]

“Words—words—words,” said the young Prince wearily.

“What is the matter, my lord?”

“Between who?”

“I mean, the matter that you read, my lord?”

“Slanders, sir,” said Hamlet, looking full at him, and pretending to point to a passage in the book, “for the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak limbs; all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for yourself, sir, should be as old as I am—if like a crab you could go backward.”

“Though this be madness, yet there is method in it,” said Polonius aside. “Will you walk out of the air, my lord?”

“Into my grave.”

“Indeed, that is out of the air,” remarked Polonius struck by the wisdom of Hamlet’s replies. “Well, I will leave him, and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter. My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.”

“You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal,” said Hamlet, bowing low with exaggerated courtesy; then, as he turned away, the satire in his voice changed to a note of hopeless despair—“except my life—except my life—except my life,” he ended, with almost a groan.

“Fare you well, my lord,” said Polonius; and as he fussily took himself off, Hamlet muttered under his breath, “Those tedious old fools!” [Pg 301]

Hamlet, for his own purpose, had chosen to amuse himself at the expense of the pompous old Chamberlain, but directly Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appeared he was again himself, and the warm-hearted friend of old days. He greeted them with the utmost cordiality, and nothing could have exceeded the gracious charm of his manner. If only they had met him with the same frank candour, all would have been well; but his quick penetration soon discovered from their expression that there was something in the background, and he presently made them confess that their visit to Elsinore had not been prompted solely by the desire to see Hamlet, but that they had been sent for by the King and Queen. When Hamlet won from them reluctantly this admission, his trust in them fled, and he determined to be on his guard with them. He told them he could tell why they had been sent for, and thus they need not fear betraying any secret of the King and Queen.

“I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises,” he said, “and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave, o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—no, nor [Pg 302] woman either, though by your smiling you seem to say so.”

“My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts,” said Rosencrantz.

“Why did you laugh, then, when I said ‘Man delights not me’?”

Rosencrantz answered that he was only thinking, if Hamlet delighted not in man, what sorry entertainment the band of players would receive, whom they had overtaken on the way to Elsinore.

Hamlet replied that they would all be welcome, and asked what players they were.

“Even those you were wont to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city,” answered Rosencrantz.

Hamlet’s interest was at once aroused, and he was discussing the subject of the players, and the reason why they were forced to travel, instead of keeping to their old position in the city, when a flourish of trumpets announced they had arrived. Before Rosencrantz and Guildenstern left him, Hamlet spoke a parting word to them.

“Gentlemen, you are welcome,” he said courteously. “Your hands, come then”—for they would merely have bowed respectfully. “You are welcome; but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.”

“In what, my dear lord?” asked Guildenstern.

“I am but mad north-north-west,” said Hamlet gravely: “when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.”

Hamlet’s speech may or may not have puzzled the young men to whom it was addressed, but, all the same, it was excellent good sense, and meant that he was in full possession of his [Pg 303] faculties. His metaphor was taken from the old sport of hawking; the word “handsaw” is a local corruption for “heron.” The heron, when pursued, flew with the wind; therefore when the wind was from the north it flew towards the south; as the sun is in this quarter during the morning (when the sport generally took place), it would be difficult to distinguish the two birds when looking towards this dazzling light. On the other hand, when the wind was southerly, the heron flew towards the north, and, with his back to the sun, the spectator could easily tell which was the hawk and which was the heron.

By his speech, therefore, Hamlet meant to imply that his intelligence was just as keen as that of other people.

Old Polonius now entered in a state of great excitement to announce the arrival of the players. “The best actors in the world,” as he expressed it, “either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited; Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men.”

“You are welcome, masters—welcome all,” said the young Prince, with his ready courtesy. “I am glad to see you well. Welcome, good friends.”

And for each one he had some kindly word of greeting and remembrance. Then he bade them give at once a specimen of their powers; and as a proof of the breadth of Hamlet’s nature, and the wideness of his sympathies, may be noted the fact that he was as much at home in discussing stage matters with the players as in musing over deep philosophies of life by himself. He recalled [Pg 304] to their memory a play which had formerly struck his fancy, though it had never been acted, or, if it were, not above once, for it was too refined for the taste of the million—“caviare to the general,” as Hamlet expressed it. Hamlet himself recited a speech from this play with excellent taste and elocution, and the chief player continued the touching passage with much pathos.

Noting the effect that the player’s mimic passion had on the spectators, a sudden idea came to Hamlet, and when the other actors were dismissed, in the charge of the fussy Polonius, he kept back the first player to speak a few words to him.

“We’ll have a play to-morrow,” he said. “Dost thou hear me, old friend: can you play the Murder of Gonzago?”

“Ay, my lord.”

“We’ll have it to-morrow night. You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in it, could you not?”

“Ay, my lord.”

“Very well. Follow that lord, and, look you, mock him not,” said Hamlet, sending him to rejoin his companions.

Left alone, a bitter feeling of disgust at his own weakness and irresolution seized Hamlet. The sight of this actor’s passion and despair over the fate of an entirely imaginary person made him realise his own lack of duty with regard to his father. Here was a King who had been most cruelly murdered, and his son did nothing to avenge his loss, but, like John-a-dreams, idle of his cause—a [Pg 305] dull, spiritless rascal—he simply wasted his time in brooding, and said nothing. His wrath against his uncle blazed up again with sudden fury, and all his thoughts turned to vengeance. But he checked his exclamations to plan practical measures.

“About, my brain! Hum!—I have heard that guilty creatures, sitting at a play, have by the very cunning of the scene been struck so to the soul that presently they have proclaimed their ill deeds; for murder, though it have no tongue, will speak in most miraculous fashion. I’ll have these players play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle; I’ll observe his

looks; I'll tent him to the quick; if he but blench, I know my course. The spirit that I have seen may be the devil; and the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape. I'll have grounds more relative than this," concluded Hamlet, touching the tablets on which he had inscribed the message from the Ghost. "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

"The Mouse-trap"

Next day, in accordance with their scheme, the King and Polonius hid themselves behind the arras, to listen to the interview between Hamlet and Ophelia. Hamlet, as usual, was meditating deeply on the problems of life, when Ophelia approached, and offered to restore to him some gifts which he had given her in happier days.

In the sudden tragedy which had overwhelmed Hamlet's whole being, his love for Ophelia [Pg 306] seemed something very far away, but the old tenderness was always struggling to assert itself. He tried, however, to force it down, and even assumed an air of harsh indifference which almost broke Ophelia's heart. In apparently wild and rambling words, but really deeply penetrated with pity, he gave her to understand that all thoughts of marriage between them must now be over, and bade the young girl get to a nunnery, and that quickly, too. The hollowness and hypocrisy that he saw all around him goaded his spirit almost beyond endurance, and now another blow to his belief in human nature was to be struck.

When Polonius hid himself behind the arras it is doubtful whether Ophelia knew he was there, or, in the excitement of the moment, she may possibly have forgotten the fact. Anyhow, when Hamlet suddenly asked her, "Where's your father?" she answered, "At home, my lord." But her reply filled Hamlet with fresh scorn for the apparent insincerity of this innocent young girl. He had seen the arras stir, and Polonius's old gray head peep out; he naturally thought that Ophelia was in league with the rest of the world to spy upon him and deceive him.

"Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house," he said, in clear, cutting accents, when he heard Ophelia's response. "Farewell!"

"Oh, help him, you sweet heavens!" murmured Ophelia.

It seemed quite evident to her that the unfortunate young Prince had lost his reason.

"If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry," cried Hamlet wildly: "be thou as [Pg 307] chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery. Go; farewell!"

"O heavenly powers, restore him!" prayed Ophelia again.

"I have heard of your paintings, too, well enough," continued Hamlet, with increasing violence. "God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another; you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures. Go to, I'll no more on it; it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages; those that are married already—all but one"—here he looked darkly towards the arras, where he knew the King was concealed with Polonius—"shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go!"

And with a furious gesture of dismissal Hamlet hurried from the room.

"Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" sighed Ophelia piteously. "The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword; the expectancy and rose of the fair state, the glass of fashion, and the mould of form, the observed of all observers quite, quite down! And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, that sucked the honey of his music vows, now see that noble and most sovereign reason, like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh! Oh, woe is me, to have seen what I have seen, see what I see!"

While Ophelia was musing thus sadly, the King and Polonius stepped from their hiding-place. The King was not at all satisfied that Polonius was right in his surmise that Hamlet had lost his reason because of Ophelia's rejected love. [Pg 308]

"Love! His affections do not tend that way," he said decidedly. "Nor was what he spoke, though it lacked form a little, like madness. There is something in his soul over which his melancholy sits brooding, and I fear the result will be some danger. To prevent this, I have determined that he shall depart with speed for England, to demand there our neglected tribute. Haply the sea and the sight of foreign countries will expel this settled matter in his heart, about which his brains, always beating, makes him thus unlike himself."

Polonius agreed that it would be a good plan to send Hamlet to England, though he would not give up his idea that the origin and commencement of Hamlet's grief sprang from neglected love. He further suggested that after the play the Queen should have an interview alone with Hamlet, and try to get from him the cause of his grief, and that Polonius himself should be placed where he could hear their conference.

"If the Queen cannot discover the cause, send him to England, or confine him where your wisdom shall think best," he concluded.

"It shall be so," declared the King. "Madness in great ones must not go unwatched."

The play on which so much depended was now to be performed. Hamlet had inserted some speeches of his own, and before the performance began he gave some excellent advice to the players on the art of acting. While they were making ready, Hamlet had a few private words with

Horatio. In the midst of the trouble and turmoil of his own soul, his fretted spirit turned with deep affection to the quiet strength of this faithful friend. [Pg 309]

“Give me that man that is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him in my heart’s core—ay, in my heart of heart, as I do thee,” he said tenderly to Horatio.

He had already confided to him what the Ghost had related, and now he told him that he had laid a trap to discover if what it said were true; one scene in the play was to represent closely the circumstances of his father’s death, and he begged Horatio, when that act came, to observe the King with all the power of his soul. If his guilt did not reveal itself at one speech, then the Ghost must have spoken falsely, and Hamlet’s own imagination was black and wicked.

“Give him heedful note,” he said, “for I will rivet my eyes to his face, and afterwards we will compare our impressions in judging his appearance.”

“Well, my lord, if he steal anything whilst this play is playing, and escape detection, I will pay the theft,” said Horatio, meaning by this that his watch would never waver.

“They are coming to the play; I must be idle. Get you a place,” said Hamlet.

The music of the Danish royal march was heard, there was a flourish of trumpets, and, attended by the full Court, the King and Queen entered the great hall of the castle. Old Polonius marshalled them, bowing backwards before them; Ophelia followed in the train of the Queen; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with other attendant lords, were there, and guards carried torches to light up the scene. The King and Queen took their seats on thrones provided for them [Pg 310] at one side of the stage; Ophelia sat in a chair opposite; Horatio took up his stand at the back of Ophelia’s chair, where, unnoticed himself, he could watch the King’s face; and Hamlet, who on their entrance had immediately assumed his air of madness, flung himself on the ground at Ophelia’s feet.

The play began. First the scene was given in dumb show. It represented a King and Queen who were apparently very affectionate together. Presently the King lay down on a bank of flowers, and the Queen, seeing him asleep, left him. Soon another man came in, who took off the King’s crown, kissed it, poured poison into the sleeper’s ear, and went off. The Queen returned, found the King dead, and showed passionate signs of grief. The poisoner came back, seemed to lament with her; the body of the dead King was carried away. Then the poisoner wooed the Queen with gifts. She seemed for a while loath and unwilling, but in the end accepted his love.

Claudius at the sight of this scene betrayed many signs of secret uneasiness, but he made no open remark, and the other spectators were too intent on the play to notice him. Only Horatio, from his place opposite, kept careful watch, and Hamlet, lying on the ground, quivering with excitement, never took his eyes from the guilty man’s face. The Queen and Ophelia looked on with rather languid interest.

“What means this, my lord?” asked Ophelia, when the dumb show had come to an end.

“Marry, this is miching mallecho; it means mischief,” said Hamlet. [Pg 311]

“Belike this show imports the argument of the play,” said Ophelia, which indeed proved to be the case.

Now the real players came on, who had to speak, and the action followed the same lines as the dumb show, the player Queen pouring forth boundless expressions of devotion to her husband.

“Madam, how like you this play?” asked Hamlet presently, when a pause occurred.

“The lady doth protest too much, methinks,” said the Queen.

“Oh, but she’ll keep her word,” said Hamlet, with biting sarcasm.

“Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in it?” asked the King uneasily.

“No, no; they do but jest—*poison in jest*; no offence in the world,” returned Hamlet, looking at him with strange malice in his eyes.

The King winced, but tried to appear unconcerned.

“What do you call the play?”

“‘The Mouse-trap.’ Marry, how? Tropically,” continued Hamlet, still in the same wild manner. “This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna; Gonzago is the Duke’s name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon. ’Tis a knavish piece of work; but what of that? Your Majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not; let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.”

The King grew more and more disturbed; he cast uneasy glances at the play, made a half-movement to rise, and checked himself. As the play went on, Hamlet could scarcely control his excitement. The players were now reciting the speeches he had written; the young Prince [Pg 312] muttered the words with them in a rapid undertone. When one of the characters poured the poison into the player King’s ear, Hamlet burst out again into fierce speech, his voice rising shriller and higher.

“He poisons him in the garden for his estate. His name’s Gonzago. The story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.”

Hamlet, in his excitement, had dragged himself across the floor till he was at the foot of the throne. The King, seeing the mimic representation of his own crime, started up in guilty terror.

“The King rises!” exclaimed Ophelia.

“What! Frighted with false fire!” shouted Hamlet in bitter derision, and with a harsh cry of triumph he sprang to his feet, and flung himself into the throne which the King had left vacant.

All was now confusion; the King and Queen hurriedly retired; their courtiers thronged after them, and Hamlet and Horatio were left alone in the deserted hall. Hamlet broke into a wild snatch of song:

> “Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
> The hart ungallèd play;
> For some must watch, while some must sleep,
> So runs the world away.”

“O good Horatio, I’ll take the Ghost’s word for a thousand pounds. Didst perceive?”

“Very well, my lord.”

“Upon the talk of the poisoning?”

“I did very well note him.” [Pg 313]

It was not likely that Hamlet’s behaviour would be let pass without remark, and presently the two obsequious courtiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, came to summon him to the presence of the Queen. They brought word that the King was in his own room, marvellously upset with rage, and that the Queen, in great affliction of spirit, had sent them to say to Hamlet that his behaviour had struck her into amazement and astonishment, and that she desired to speak with him in her room before he went to bed.

Hamlet replied he would obey, but on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s further attempting to discover from him the cause of his strange behaviour, he retorted by asking the two young men what they meant by treating him in the way they did, which was as if they were trying to drive him into some snare.

“O my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly,” answered Guildenstern.

“I do not well understand that,” said Hamlet; and it may be doubted if the speaker himself knew what he meant by his silly words.

But the young Prince determined to give the couple a lesson, and show them he was not quite the witless creature they seemed to imagine. A few minutes before he had called for music, and ordered some recorders to be brought. The recorder was a small musical instrument something like a flute. On the attendant’s bringing them, Hamlet took one and held it out to Guildenstern.

“Will you play upon this pipe?” he asked him courteously.

“My lord, I cannot.” [Pg 314]

“I pray you,” he begged.

“Believe me, I cannot.”

“I do beseech you.”

“I know no touch of it, my lord.”

“’Tis as easy as lying,” said Hamlet. “Govern these holes with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.”

“But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony; I have not the skill,” declared Guildenstern.

“Why, look you, how unworthy a thing you would make of me!” said Hamlet, his persuasive voice changing to sudden sternness. “You would play upon *me*; you would seem to know *my* stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice in this little organ, yet you cannot make it speak. Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?—Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.”

The pipe snapped in his slender fingers, as he tossed it contemptuously away, and the two young men stood crestfallen and abashed before his noble scorn.

It was no repentant and shamefaced son that entered the Queen’s room that night. Hamlet had steeled his heart to do what he considered his duty, and tell his mother the truth. He would speak daggers, though he used none; he would reveal to her the true character of the man she had taken for her second husband. When, therefore, the Queen, in accordance with Polonius’s advice, [Pg 315] began to take him roundly to task for his strange behaviour, he retorted in such a strange, and even menacing, manner that she was quite alarmed, and shouted for help. Polonius, hidden behind the arras, echoed her cry. Hamlet, thinking it was the King, and that the hour for vengeance had come, drew his sword.

“How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!” he exclaimed, and made a pass through the arras.

“How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!”

There was a cry from behind, “O, I am slain!” and the fall of a heavy body. [Pg 316]

“O me, what hast thou done?” exclaimed the Queen.

“Nay, I know not. Is it—the King?” said Hamlet, in a harsh whisper.

“Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this!” moaned the Queen, wringing her hands in dismay.

“A bloody deed! Almost as bad, good mother, as kill a King and marry with his brother,” said Hamlet solemnly.

“As kill a King?” echoed the Queen, astounded.

“Ay, lady, it was my word.”

Hamlet lifted the arras, and found that, after all, it was not the guilty murderer whom he had hoped to punish, but the meddlesome old Chamberlain, who had fallen a victim to his sudden impulse. His task of vengeance had still to be accomplished.

“Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell,” said the young Prince, gazing at him sorrowfully. “I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune! Thou find’st to be too busy is some danger.”

Thus the officious old man’s prying ways met their punishment. And Hamlet’s lack of resolution, too, brought its penalty; for if he had had strength of will to carry out what he believed to be his duty, he would not have thus trusted to the blind impulse of the moment, and a comparatively innocent life would not have been sacrificed.

But he had matters too important waiting to spare much time for regret. Letting the arras fall [Pg 317] on the henceforth silent prattler, Hamlet turned to his mother. In the most forcible manner he pointed out to the Queen how blameworthy had been her conduct. In vivid language he sketched a portrait of her two husbands, showing how noble had been the one brother, and how contemptible was the other. What strange delusion could have cheated the Queen, after knowing her first husband, to have married such a wretched being as Claudius?

“O Hamlet, speak no more!” implored the Queen. “These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears; no more, sweet Hamlet.”

“A murderer and a villain!” continued Hamlet, with increasing scorn and vehemence; “a slave that is not the twentieth part the tithe of your former lord; a buffoon king; a cutpurse of the empire and the sceptre, who from the shelf the precious diadem stole, and put it in his pocket!”

“No more!” besought the Queen.

“A king of shreds and patches——”

Hamlet’s torrent of wrath died on his lips. Before him stood once more the spirit of his father, gazing at him with calm, rebuking eyes.

“Save me, and hover o’er me with your wings, you heavenly guards!” murmured the young Prince, in an awestruck whisper. “What would your gracious figure?”

The vision, apparent to Hamlet, was not visible to the Queen. She only saw the sudden change

that had come to her son, and the rapt look on his face.

“Alas, he’s mad!” she sighed.

“Do you not come your tardy son to chide?” continued Hamlet, still in the same hushed voice, “who, lost in time and passion, lets go by the important acting of thy dread command? Oh, say!” [Pg 318]

The Ghost replied that his visit was indeed to whet his son’s almost blunted purpose. But now he bade Hamlet note how startled and amazed the Queen was, and told him to speak to her and soothe her.

“How is it with you, lady?” said Hamlet absently.

“Alas! how is it with you?” retorted the Queen, for to her it seemed that Hamlet was looking at vacancy, and holding converse with the empty air. “Whereon do you look?”

“On him—on him! Look you, how pale he glares!... Do you see nothing there?”

“Nothing at all; yet all that is, I see.”

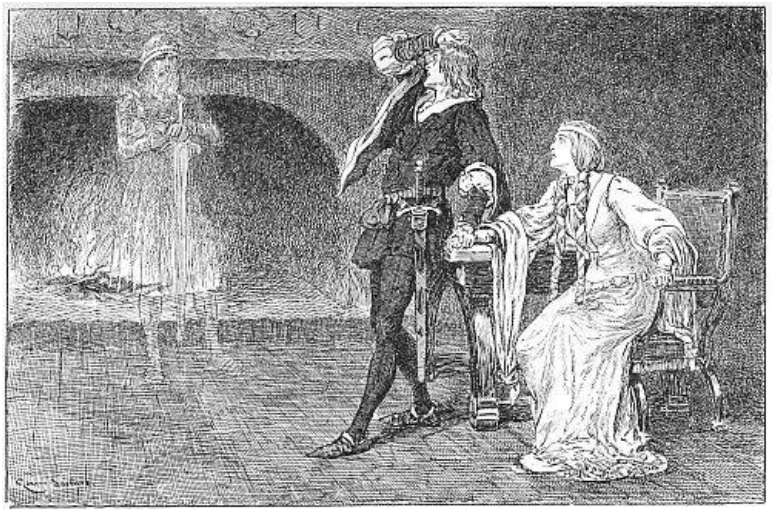
“Nor did you nothing hear?”

“No, nothing but ourselves.”

“Why, look you there! Look how it steals away! My father, in his habit as he lived! Look where he goes, even now, out at the portal.”

The Queen saw nothing of the figure gliding away, and told Hamlet that it must be the coinage of his brain, the sort of delusion which madness was very cunning in.

“Madness!” echoed Hamlet; and he bade his mother note that his pulse beat as calmly as her own, and that it was not madness which he uttered. Bring him to the test, he said, and he would re-word the matter, which madness could not do. In short, his words were so convincing that the Queen could no longer refuse to believe them. Before they parted, she promised to adopt a very different mode of behaviour from her usual pleasure-loving frivolity, and not to allow herself to be persuaded by the crafty Claudius that anything her son might say or do arose from madness. [Pg 319]



“Do you not come your tardy son to chide?”

“I must to England; you know that?” asked Hamlet. [Pg 320]
[Pg 321]

“Alack, I had forgotten; it is so arranged,” said the Queen.

“There are letters sealed,” said Hamlet, “and my two schoolfellows, whom I will trust as I will adders fanged—they bear the mandate. Let the knavery work; for ’tis sport to have the engineer hoist with his own petard, and it shall go hard but I will delve one yard below their mines, and blow them at the moon.”

“Rosemary for Remembrance”

Hamlet’s suspicions with regard to fresh villainy on the part of the King were justified. Claudius dared not do any harm to the young Prince in his own country, for he was greatly beloved by the people. On the plea, therefore, that it was for the benefit of his health, he was despatched to England, but letters were given to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who accompanied him, commanding that on his arrival the Prince should be instantly beheaded.

Suspecting treachery, Hamlet managed to get possession of these letters, and in their place he put others, written by himself, in which the English Government was begged, as a favour to Denmark, to put the bearers to death. Thus Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fell victims to their own treachery, and met the fate to which they were shamelessly conducting their old schoolfellow. [Pg 322]

The day after the changing of the letters their ship was chased by pirates. Finding they were too slow of sail to escape, they made a valiant resistance. In the grapple Hamlet boarded the pirates’ vessel. At that very instant the ships got clear, so he alone became their prisoner. They treated him well, knowing who he was, and expecting to get a good reward, and not long after he

had left Denmark Hamlet again set foot in his own country. He did not at first announce his return to the King and Queen, but sent a message privately to Horatio, who at once hastened to him.

During his absence from Denmark a sad thing had happened. Poor Ophelia, overwhelmed by all the sorrows that had fallen on her, had lost her reason. Hamlet's strange behaviour had been the first shock, and on her father's sudden death, and Hamlet's departure for England, the slender strength snapped utterly, and the young girl was carried away in the full flood of calamity.

Ever sweet and gentle, as she had been all her life, Ophelia was so still; there was no violence or malice in her malady. She was indeed distracted with grief, and spoke strange words, but when allowed her own way she went harmlessly about, only decking herself with flowers, and singing sweet and touching snatches of quaint old songs.

The King and Queen were deeply grieved at this new misfortune that had fallen on their young favourite, for the Queen, at least, loved her tenderly. They had also grounds for uneasiness concerning themselves; disquieting rumours began to be current. Rather foolishly, they had tried to hush up the cause of Polonius's death, and had had him hurriedly interred, without proper rites or ceremony. His son Laertes had come secretly from France, and tittle-tattlers were not [Pg 323] lacking to pour into his ears malicious reports of his father's death. Finally, there was an attempt at insurrection. Laertes went to the palace, followed by a riotous mob, shouting, "Laertes shall be King! Laertes King!" They broke down the doors, overcame the guard, and Laertes forced his way into the presence of the King and Queen.

"O thou vile King, give me my father!" he demanded, with menacing gesture.

"Calmly, good Laertes," implored the Queen, while the King, with all the subtle art in which he was so skilled, tried to soothe the infuriated young man, and asked him why he was so incensed.

"How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with," cried Laertes fiercely, flinging off all semblance of allegiance. "Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged most thoroughly for my father."

"Who shall stay you?" asked the King mildly.

"My will, not all the world!" retorted Laertes roughly. "And for my means, I'll husband them so well, they shall go far with little."

The King was just explaining that he was in no sense guilty of Polonius's death, when there was a stir at the door, and the next moment Ophelia entered. At the sight of the beautiful young maiden, in her simple white robe, her long yellow locks floating free on her shoulders, her sweet blue eyes opened wide in vacant gaze, a sudden check came to the young man's violence.

"O rose of May! Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!" he murmured, with tenderest pity. "Oh [Pg 324] heavens! is it possible a young maid's wits should be as mortal as an old man's life?"

Ophelia carried flowers in her hand, and she came in singing and talking to herself.

> "They bore him barefaced on the bier;
> Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny;
> And in his grave rain'd many a tear:—

"Fare you well, my dove."

"Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge, it could not move thus," said Laertes.

Ophelia now began to distribute the flowers she held in her hand. First she gave some to her brother.

"There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts."

"A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted," said Laertes.

"There's fennel for you, and columbines," said Ophelia to the King, (fennel is an emblem of flattery, and columbines of thanklessness). "There's rue for you," to the Queen, "and here's some for me; we may call it herb of grace on Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy; I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died; they say he made a good end,—

> For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy."

"Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself, she turns to favour and to prettiness," said Laertes, as smiling, and kissing her hand, the poor wit-bereft maiden went singing on her way.

His desire for vengeance was redoubled, and he resolved that his sister's madness should be [Pg 325] dearly paid for. He therefore lent a ready ear when the King declared that the blame of everything that had happened was due to Hamlet, explaining that he had been unable to punish him up to the present, owing to the intense love borne him by his mother, and all the people. Even as they were talking arrived a letter from Hamlet himself; it ran thus:

> "High and Mighty,
>
> "You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes: when I shall, first asking your pardon thereunto, recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.

Hamlet's return happened most aptly, and the King immediately suggested a plan whereby Laertes could gratify his vengeance without fear of being found out. While Laertes had been in France, he had been greatly talked about for his skill in fencing, and a Norman gentleman who had come to the Danish Court brought a marvellous report of his prowess in the use of the rapier. This account filled Hamlet with envy; he was himself a master in the art of fencing, and he longed for Laertes to come back and try a match with him. The King now proposed that Laertes should challenge Hamlet to a trial of skill.

"He, being heedless, most generous and free from all contriving, will not look closely at the foils," continued the King cunningly, "so that with ease, or with a little shuffling, you may choose a sword unbated, and in a pass of practice requite him for your father." [Pg 326]

Laertes not only consented to this dastardly scheme,—he went a step further, and declared that he would anoint the point of the rapier with some poison so mortal that no remedy in all the world could save from death the thing that was but scratched with it. He would touch the point of this sword with this poison, so that if he wounded Hamlet ever so slightly it would be death. In addition to this, in case Hamlet should escape unhurt from the fencing, the King said he would have a chalice near with poisoned wine, so that if he grew thirsty, and called for drink, he would meet his death in that manner.

Their further plotting was interrupted by the Queen, who came hurrying in with further tidings of woe. Ophelia was drowned.

"Drowned! Oh, where?" cried Laertes.

"There is a willow grows aslant a brook that shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream," began the Queen; and she told how Ophelia, having woven many fantastic garlands of wild flowers, had clambered into this tree, to hang her wreaths on the drooping boughs, when a branch broke, and Ophelia and her trophies fell into the brook. There for awhile her clothes bore her up, and she floated down the current, still singing snatches of old tunes; but before she could be rescued, the weight of her garments, heavy with the water, dragged her down to death.

Laertes could not restrain his tears when he heard of the loss of his dear sister, but the King guessed that his rage would soon start up with fresh fury, and he resolved not to lose sight of the young man till his scheme of vengeance was accomplished. [Pg 327]

The King's Wager

In the churchyard at Elsinore two men were digging a grave. As they worked they talked, and the elder one expounded the law to his young assistant. The former asked if the person for whom they were digging the grave was to be buried in Christian burial.

"I tell thee she is," said the second man, "and therefore make her grave straight; the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial."

"How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence?" argued the first grave-digger.

"Why, 'tis found so," answered the second.

"Here lies the point," persisted the first, who dearly loved an argument. "If I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, and to perform; argal, she drowned herself unwittingly."

"Nay, but hear you, good man delver——"

"Give me leave," interposed the other, with his air of superiority. "Here lies the water—good; here stands the man—good; if the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes—mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself; argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life."

"But is this law?" asked the second rustic, rubbing his bewildered pate.

"Ay, marry, is it; crowner's quest law," returned the other decisively.

Having sufficiently impressed his companion by his display of superior knowledge, the first grave-digger despatched him for "a stoup of liquor," and continued his toil alone, singing to himself as he did so. [Pg 328]

Two newcomers had in the meanwhile entered the churchyard. These were Hamlet and Horatio. Hamlet was struck by the utter insensibility of the man, who callously pursued his mournful task, and shovelled earth and human bones alike aside with the most complete indifference. To Hamlet the sight of these poor human remains awakened many reflections, and, in his usual fashion, he began to ponder over them, and speculate what had formerly been the destiny—possibly a brilliant and distinguished one—of the skulls which were now knocked about so disrespectfully. Presently he spoke to the man, and asked whose grave he was digging, and with the exercise of much patient good-humour was at last able to extract the information that it was for "one that was a woman, but, rest her soul, she's dead."

"How long have you been a grave-digger?" was his next question.

"Of all the days in the year, I came to it that day that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras."

“How long is that since?”

“Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that,” was the civil answer. “It was the very day young Hamlet was born—he that is mad, and sent into England.”

“Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?” inquired Hamlet.

“Why, because he was mad; he shall recover his wits there; or if he do not, it’s no great matter there.” [Pg 329]

“Why?”

“It will not be seen in him there, there the men are as mad as he.”

“How came he mad?”

“Very strangely, they say.”

“How ‘strangely’?”

“Faith, e’en with losing his wits.”

“Upon what ground?”

“Why, here in Denmark,” said the rustic, misunderstanding the question. “I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.”

He next threw up with his spade a skull, which he said had been that of Yorick, the King’s jester.

“Let me see,” said Hamlet, taking it gently into his hands. “Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio—a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times. Here hung the lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your jibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? quite chap-fallen? Now get you to my lady’s chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that.”

Hamlet’s meditations were interrupted by the arrival of the funeral procession, which now entered the churchyard. After the bier walked Laertes, as chief mourner, and the King and Queen followed, with their attendants. Hamlet and Horatio, who had retired on the approach of the mourners, did not at first know who was about to be buried, but when the bier was lowered into [Pg 330] the grave, Hamlet knew from the words spoken by Laertes that it was no other than the fair Ophelia.

“Sweets to the sweet: farewell!” said the Queen, scattering flowers. “I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife; I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid, and not have strewed thy grave.”

“Hold off the earth awhile, till I have caught her once more in my arms,” cried Laertes; and, leaping into the grave, he shouted wildly to them to pile their dust on the living and the dead.

“What is he whose grief bears such an emphasis?” cried Hamlet, coming forward. “This is I, Hamlet the Dane.” And he, too, leaped into the grave.

At the sight of the young Prince, all Laertes’s wrath blazed up in full fury. He sprang on him, and grappled with him, almost throttling him. Hamlet, thus attacked, bade Laertes hold off his hand, for though not hot-tempered and rash, yet he had something dangerous in him which it would be wise to fear. The attendants parted the incensed young men, and they came out of the grave, but they still regarded each other with looks of defiance.

“Why, I will fight with him upon this theme, until my eyelids will no longer wag,” said Hamlet.

“O my son, what theme?” asked the Queen.

“I loved Ophelia,” said Hamlet; “forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum.”

In Laertes’s own style of exaggeration, Hamlet hurled forth a fiery challenge, and then, with sudden self-contempt, he ended in half-sad irony:

“Nay, an thou’lt mouth, I’ll rant as well as thou.” [Pg 331]

The next day Hamlet and Horatio were walking in the hall of the castle, when a very elegant and affected young Danish nobleman approached, and, with many bows and flourishes, delivered his message, which was a challenge from Laertes to a fencing match. The King had laid a heavy wager on Hamlet—six Barbary horses against six French rapiers and poniards, that in a dozen passes Laertes would not exceed Hamlet three hits.

“Sir, I will walk here in the hall,” answered Hamlet; “if it please his Majesty, it is the breathing-time of day with me. Let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing; if the King hold his purpose, I will win for him if I can; if not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.”

“You will lose this wager, my lord,” said Horatio, when young Osric, with a final sweeping bow of his plumed cap, had retired.

“I do not think so,” said Hamlet. “Since he went into France I have been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds.—But thou wouldst not think how ill all’s here about my heart; but it is no matter.”

“Nay, good my lord——”

“It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman.”

“If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will go and tell them you are not fit.”

“Not a whit; we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is it to leave betimes? Let be.” [Pg 332]

Now entered the King and Queen, Laertes, Osric, and other lords; attendants with foils and gauntlets; and servants carrying a table with flagons of wine on it.

“Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me,” said the King, putting Laertes’s hand into Hamlet’s.

With his customary sweetness of disposition, Hamlet courteously apologised to Laertes for any wrong he might have done him, saying that it was only due to the excitement of the moment. Laertes accepted his offered friendship, but with little grace. Then the foils were brought, and while Hamlet, utterly unsuspicious, made his choice, Laertes, with some shuffling, managed to secure the foil he wanted, with the button off, and anointed its point with venom.

The King ordered the goblets of wine to be set in readiness, and commanded that if Hamlet gave the first or second hit a salute should be fired from the guns on the battlements. Then, with hypocritical friendliness, he pretended, in honour of Hamlet, to drop a pearl of great value into the goblet, but it was in reality some deadly poison.

At first the fencers seemed pretty evenly matched, but Hamlet secured the first hit. The King drank to his health, the trumpets sounded, and cannon were fired outside. The King sent a little page with the cup of wine to Hamlet, but the Prince said he would play the next bout first, and bade the boy set it by awhile. Again they played.

“Another hit! What say you?” Hamlet appealed to the judges.

“A touch, a touch, I do confess,” agreed Laertes. [Pg 333]

“Our son shall win,” said the deceitful King.

“The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet,” said his mother.

“Gertrude, do not drink,” said the King, but it was too late; before Claudius could prevent her, she had lifted to her lips the cup of poisoned wine, which the little page had placed on a table beside her.

The third bout of fencing began, and this time it was more vigorous than before, for Hamlet reproached Laertes for not putting forth his full powers. A feeling of shame had doubtless hitherto restrained Laertes, and he felt that what he was going to do was almost against his conscience. Nevertheless, he now thrust in good earnest. He wounded Hamlet, but in the scuffle his rapier flew out of his hand. Hamlet tossed his own weapon to Laertes, and picked up the poisoned one which had fallen to the ground. The struggle was resumed, and this time Hamlet wounded Laertes. The match begun in play was becoming serious.

“Part them; they are incensed!” cried the King.

“Nay, come again,” said Hamlet.

“Look to the Queen there, ho!” called out Osric, for at that moment she fell back, half unconscious.

“They bleed on both sides. How is it, my lord?” asked Horatio of Hamlet.

“How is it, Laertes?” asked Osric.

“Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric; I am justly punished with mine own treachery.”

“How does the Queen?” asked Hamlet.

“She swoons to see them bleed,” said the King, anxious to cover up the cause of her death.

“No, no, the drink, the drink!” gasped the Queen, “O my dear Hamlet—the drink, the drink! I am poisoned!” [Pg 334]

“O, villainy! Ho! let the door be locked! Treachery! Seek it out,” cried Hamlet.

Laertes, on the point of death, confessed the whole plot, and Hamlet, stung at last to vengeance, stabbed the wicked King with Laertes’s poisoned weapon, which he held in his hand.

“He is justly served,” said Laertes. “Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee, nor thine on me.”

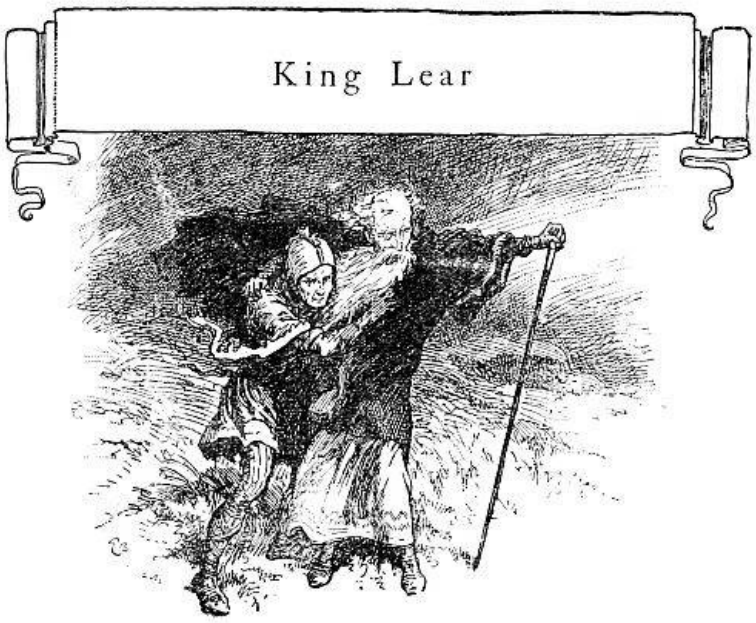
“Heaven make thee free of it!” said Hamlet, as the young man fell back motionless. “I follow thee. I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu!”

Horatio, feeling that he no longer cared to live, seized the cup, and would have drunk off what was left of the poisoned wine, but with a last effort of failing strength, Hamlet wrenched the cup out of his hands, and dashed it to the ground.

Far off in the distance was heard the music of a triumphant march, and learning that it was the youthful Fortinbras, returning with conquest from Poland, Hamlet prophesied that he would be elected as the new King, and gave his dying voice for him as his successor. Then murmuring, “The rest is silence,” the young Prince sank quietly back, with a smile of unearthly radiance on his face, and at last the storm-tossed spirit was at peace.

“Now cracks a noble heart,” said Horatio in loving farewell. “Good-night, sweet Prince; and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!”

[Pg 335]



The Dowerless Daughter

Long ago in Britain there lived a certain King called Lear, who had three daughters—Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. The King dearly loved all his daughters, but in especial the youngest one, Cordelia. His eldest daughter, Goneril, was married to the Duke of Albany; Regan was married to the Duke of Cornwall; and the Princes of France and Burgundy were rival suitors for the hand of Cordelia.

When King Lear grew old, wishing to shake off all cares and business, he decided to divide his [Pg 336] kingdom among his children, leaving the largest portion to the one who loved him the most. He therefore bade each one in turn say how much she loved him, and he hoped, and fully expected, that his favourite, Cordelia, would prove that her affection was the greatest.

Goneril, the eldest, was told to speak first. She at once replied, with great glibness, that she loved her father more than words could express—dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty; beyond what could be valued, rich or rare; no less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour; as much as child ever loved; a love that made breath poor, and speech powerless; beyond all manner of so much, she loved him.

Cordelia, hearing this fluent harangue, was quite astounded, for she knew her sister’s cold and heartless nature. “What shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent,” she said to herself, for she did not choose to compete with loud and empty protestations of this kind.

King Lear, however, was greatly pleased, and awarded to his son-in-law Albany, as Goneril’s dowry, an ample third of his kingdom. Then came Regan’s turn. She declared that everything her sister had said she felt exactly in the same manner, only in a larger measure; and she professed that she was an enemy to every joy excepting her father’s love. Lear thereupon awarded her another third of his kingdom, equal in size to Goneril’s.

Lastly he turned to Cordelia, and asked her what she could say to win a third portion of his possessions, richer than her sisters’.

Cordelia, disgusted at their false hypocrisy, answered simply: [Pg 337]

“Nothing.”

“Nothing!” echoed Lear.

“Nothing,” repeated Cordelia.

“Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again,” commanded the frowning King.

Cordelia answered quietly that she loved her father as a child ought to do—she obeyed, honoured, and loved him as a father. If her sisters pretended that he was everything in the world to them, why had they husbands? Haply, when she herself wedded, half her love and duty would go to her husband; she would never marry if, like her sisters, all her love was still to remain with her father.

“Goes thy heart with this?” asked Lear.

“Ay, good my lord,” said Cordelia.

“So young and so untender?”

“So young, my lord, and true,” was the steadfast answer.

“Let it be so; thy truth, then, be thy dower,” cried Lear, his rage bursting forth in full fury.

Always rash and headstrong, even in his best days, old age and infirmities had rendered him still more unruly and wayward, and his fits of unreasoning anger were often beyond control. In the most violent language, he now denounced Cordelia, utterly disowning her as a daughter, and ordering her out of his sight. He sent to summon the two Princes who had made application for her hand, and in the meanwhile divided the remaining portion of his kingdom between Albany and Cornwall, investing them jointly with all the powers of majesty, and declaring that his youngest daughter’s pride, which she called candour, should be her only dower. King Lear [Pg 338] reserved to himself a hundred knights, and retained the name and dignity of a King; but everything else—the sway, the revenue, and the government—he said should belong to his sons-in-law. And to confirm this, he took off his crown, and handed it to them to divide between them.

At this flagrant injustice of the old King, an honest and loyal courtier, the Earl of Kent, ventured to remonstrate, and, braving his master’s anger, he pointed out the rash folly of what he was doing, and begged him to reverse his doom. He declared boldly that he would answer for it, on his life if necessary, that Cordelia did not love her father the least of his children.

“Kent, on thy life, no more!” threatened the King.

“My life I never held but as a pawn to wage against thy enemies,” returned Kent fearlessly; “nor fear to lose it, thy safety being the motive.”

The King, deeply incensed, ordered Kent immediately to quit the kingdom; five days were allowed for making preparations; on the sixth he was to depart. If on the tenth day following he were found in the dominions, that moment would be his death.

Nothing daunted, the gallant nobleman bade farewell to the King, and, turning to Cordelia, he gave her a tender word of blessing.

“The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid, that justly think’st, and hast most rightly said!”

As for Goneril and Regan, he hoped that their lavish speeches would be approved by their deeds, so that good effects might spring from words of love. And so the faithful courtier was driven away in mad folly by the master whom he had served so loyally. [Pg 339]

The Princes of France and Burgundy, who had been summoned, now made their appearance. King Lear first addressed Burgundy, asking him what dowry he required with his youngest daughter. Burgundy replied that he craved no more than what King Lear had already offered with her, and he supposed King Lear would not tender less.

Lear replied that when Cordelia was dear to him he held her at that value, but now her price was fallen. If Burgundy liked to take her, just as she was, with only the King’s displeasure added, she was his.

“There she stands. Take her or leave her,” he ended curtly.

Burgundy was not inclined to take Cordelia on these terms, and tried civilly to express his refusal. Lear then turned to the King of France, but to him he said he would not do him so much wrong as to offer him a thing which Lear himself hated—a wretch whom nature was almost ashamed to acknowledge as hers.

“There she stands” [Pg 340]

The King of France replied that it was very strange that she who had been the object of Lear’s praise, the comfort of his age—his best, his dearest—should in a trice of time so absolutely forfeit his favour. Surely she must have committed some terrible offence to lose his affection, and this, without a miracle, he would never believe of her.

The King’s manly and chivalrous words fell like balm on the poor young girl’s wounded heart, and she begged her father to tell him that it was no base or unworthy action on her part that had deprived her of his grace and favour, but only the want of a glib tongue and an ever-avaricious eye.

“Better thou hadst not been born than not to have pleased me better,” was Lear’s resentful answer to this appeal.

“My lord of Burgundy, what say you to the lady?” said France. “Love’s not love when it is mixed with considerations that have nothing to do with the main point. Will you have her? She is herself a dowry.”

“Royal Lear, give but that portion which you yourself proposed, and here I take Cordelia by the hand, Duchess of Burgundy.”

“Nothing; I have sworn; I am firm,” said the old King obstinately.

“I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father that you must lose a husband,” said Burgundy to Cordelia.

“Peace be with Burgundy!” said Cordelia with dignity. “Since respects of fortune are his love, I shall not be his wife.”

The King of France stepped forward and took the maiden by the hand.

“Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor; most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised! Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon; if it be lawful, I take up what’s cast away. Thy dowerless daughter, King, thrown to me by hazard, is Queen of us, of ours, and of our France; not [Pg 341] all the Dukes of watery Burgundy can buy this unprized, precious maid of me. Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind; thou losest here, a better home to find.”

“Thou hast her, France; let her be thine,” said Lear, “for I have no such daughter, nor shall ever see that face of hers again. Therefore be gone without my grace, my love, my blessing.”

And the offended old King swept away with his train, not deigning to bestow another glance upon his daughter.

“Bid farewell to your sisters,” said the King of France again.

Cordelia, in taking leave of Goneril and Regan, begged them to treat their father well, for too truly she mistrusted their selfishness and hardness of heart. Regan told her haughtily not to prescribe their duties to them; and Goneril bade her study to content her husband, who had only received her out of charity.

”Come, my fair Cordelia,” said the King of France; and, secure in her true lover’s tender protection, the young girl passed from the home that had so cruelly spurned her.

Goneril and Regan

What Cordelia had feared with respect to her sisters speedily came to pass. When the kingdom was safely in their possession, their true natures became apparent, and they showed themselves for what they really were—false, cruel, and utterly heartless women. The arrangement had been that King Lear, with a hundred knights, was to stay a month at each daughter’s in turn, but [Pg 342] before his term of residence at his eldest son-in-law’s, the Duke of Albany, had come to an end, Goneril contrived, by her outrageous behaviour, to drive him from the palace. She pretended that his knights brought disorder into her household; and although her father had presented her with half his kingdom as a dowry, she grudged even the small expenditure of maintaining this paltry band of followers. She ordered her steward Oswald and her servants to treat him with open negligence and disrespect, in the hope of bringing about a quarrel; if it were to her father’s distaste, she said brutally, he could go to her sister’s; she knew that Regan was of the same mind with herself in the resolve, as they expressed it, “not to be overruled.”

“Idle old man,” remarked Goneril contemptuously, “who would like still to manage the authorities that he has given away.”

Lear, always fiery-tempered and impetuous, was certainly not one to submit tamely to such insulting treatment, and, almost out of his mind at the base ingratitude of Goneril and the insolence of her domestics, he ordered his horses to be got ready, and prepared to depart to his second daughter. He now began to repent of his harshness to Cordelia, and to realise how foolish he had been in parting so rashly with his authority.

But the poor, headstrong old King had one friend near him of whom he did not know. The faithful Earl of Kent loved his master in spite of his faults, and determined not to forsake him in the evil days which he knew must be at hand. In the guise of a poor man, Kent came to the palace [Pg 343] of the Duke of Albany, and persuaded King Lear to take him into his service.

One other devoted follower was also left to the King—his faithful Fool, or jester. The loving loyalty of this man never failed, and his deep attachment to his royal master was touching to see. In the midst of the vexations which fretted his impatient spirit, the old King turned for refreshment to the quaint sayings of this humble friend; had he but known it, the intelligence of this poor Fool far surpassed in wisdom his own mad folly.

Cordelia’s departure had been a great grief to this affectionate creature, and after she went to France he pined and pined away, and kept sadly aloof from his master. But King Lear, missing his favourite, sent for him, and the poor Fool came in answer to the summons, glib of tongue, but with eyes that looked sorrowful enough under his cap and bells. His speech was ready, as usual, but his wit was tinged with bitter philosophy, and his sayings conveyed many a sharp home-truth to the misguided monarch. The King suffered him to speak what he would have allowed no one else to utter, and the Fool, in half-mocking words, pointed out with blunt plainness the folly of the King in giving away his possessions. Later on, when Goneril appeared, and with her lying statements and heartless insolence almost goaded Lear to madness, the poor Fool tried, by every means in his power, to divert the King’s mind; he desperately interposed after some of Goneril’s most biting speeches, trying to take off their edge by a little twist of humour, and to distract the King’s attention from his daughter’s cruelty by bringing reproof upon himself by his own impertinent sallies. Poor faithful heart! He might as well have tried to divert a thunderbolt with a [Pg 344] harlequin’s wand. In the storm that was now to burst over them, the poor thrall could do nothing to save his master, but at least he could cling to him with unswerving fidelity, and share his wanderings and misery.

The Duke of Albany, less hard-hearted than his wife, tried to soften her harsh severity, but his attempts were useless. She declined to listen to any reasoning, called his mildness “want of wisdom,” and, acting on her own authority, suddenly dismissed fifty of her father’s knights, on the frivolous and altogether false pretext that they conducted themselves in a riotous fashion in her house, and that it was dangerous for the lives of herself and her husband for Lear to keep such a large guard about him.

Lear, furious with rage, declared his intention of leaving Albany's palace immediately, and started with the Fool for Regan's house, sending Kent on in advance with letters to announce his coming. Goneril, however, to secure her sister on her side, also sent letters to her by the steward Oswald, the man who had already incurred King Lear's wrath by his insolence. The two messengers happening to meet on the way, outside the castle of the Earl of Gloucester, where Regan and her husband were then staying, Kent fell on the saucy knave, and gave him a thoroughly well-deserved thrashing. Oswald's loud and cowardly cries raised the household, and by order of the Duke of Cornwall, Kent was seized and placed in the stocks, in spite of his protest that he was the messenger of the King, and as such ought to be treated with respect. He took his punishment with much philosophy, and when the kindly Earl of Gloucester expressed his pity, [Pg 345] and said he would entreat the Duke of Cornwall for him, Kent answered with sturdy fortitude: "Pray do not, sir; I have watched and travelled hard; some time I shall sleep out, the rest I'll whistle." And, as a matter of fact, the stout-hearted champion presently went calmly to sleep in his uncomfortable resting-place.

When King Lear, with the Fool and a gentleman attendant, arrived at the Earl of Gloucester's castle, the first thing he saw was his messenger sitting in the stocks. He asked indignantly who had dared to do such a deed, and was told that it was his daughter and his son-in-law. The King could scarcely think such a thing was possible, and demanded to see Regan and the Duke of Cornwall. They returned for answer that they could not be spoken with. King Lear's fiery temper was already blazing at this insulting reception. He sent a peremptory summons that Regan and her husband should come forth and hear him, or else he would go and batter with drums at their chamber door; and the Earl of Gloucester, always ready to make peace, at last persuaded his guests to appear.

After a stiff greeting from the Duke of Cornwall and his wife, Kent was set at liberty, and King Lear began to relate the unkind treatment of Goneril, thinking to receive some affection and sympathy from this daughter, although the eldest one had behaved so badly.

Regan, however, took her sister's part, and coldly replied that she could not think that her sister would have failed the least in her duty; if she restrained the riots of his followers, she was not to blame. Her father was old, he should be ruled and led by some discretion better than his [Pg 346] own. Therefore she prayed him to return to Goneril and say he had wronged her.

"Ask her forgiveness?" demanded King Lear. "Mark how this becomes the house." He fell on his knees and continued in bitter mockery: "'Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; age is unnecessary; on my knees I beg that you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.'"

Regan was annoyed at the old man's raillery, and again bade him return to her sister.

"Never, Regan," said King Lear, rising; and in angry words he called down the vengeance of heaven on his eldest daughter for her black ingratitude.

"So you will wish on me when the rash mood is on," said Regan.

"No, Regan, you will never have my curse," said the old man, and with piteous words of misplaced affection he tried to convince himself that this daughter would never have treated him as the other one had done.

While they were speaking, the sound of a trumpet was heard, and, to the horror and dismay of King Lear, Goneril herself appeared.

"O Regan, wilt thou take her by the hand?" he asked reproachfully.

"Why not by the hand, sir?" demanded Goneril arrogantly. "How have I offended? All is not offence that indiscretion finds and dotage terms so."

Lear's self-control was rapidly leaving him, and he could scarcely answer calmly when Regan again advised him to return and sojourn with her sister for the remainder of the month, dismissing half his train, and then to go back to her. Lear indignantly refused to return with Goneril, but, making one last effort to subdue his rising violence, he said he would not trouble Goneril; they need never see each other again; but he could stay with Regan, he and his hundred knights. [Pg 347]

“You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!”

To this Regan answered coldly that she had not expected him so soon, and was not provided for his fit welcome. She again counselled him to listen to her sister. Fifty followers? What should he need of more? Indeed, why so many? How, in one house, could many people under two commands dwell peaceably? It was hard, almost impossible. [Pg 348] [Pg 349]

“Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance from those that she calls servants, or from mine?” put in Goneril.

“Why not, my lord?” echoed Regan. “If you will come to me—for now I spy a danger—I entreat you to bring but five-and-twenty; to no more will I give place or notice.”

Seeing that Regan was about to treat him worse, if anything, than Goneril, King Lear said he would return to his eldest daughter with the fifty knights to which she had reduced him. But now Goneril began to draw back. Why did he need five-and-twenty, ten, or even five followers, in a house where twice as many had orders to attend on him?

“What need of one?” added Regan.

“O, reason not the need,” exclaimed Lear, justly indignant at this sordid argument from those to whom he had given his entire possessions. “Our basest beggars are in the poorest thing superfluous. But for true need—you heavens, give me that patience, patience I need! You see me here, you gods, a poor old man, as full of grief as age; wretched in both.... You think I’ll weep? No, I’ll not weep. I have full cause of weeping; but this heart shall break into a hundred thousand flaws before I’ll weep.... O Fool, I shall go mad!” [Pg 350]

And, hurling forth threats of revenge, King Lear hurried from the castle, followed by his faithful companions, the Fool and the Earl of Kent. Darkness was coming on; it was a wild night of storm; the wind howled and raged; for miles around on the desolate heath there was not even a bush for shelter. But the heart-broken father’s only thought was to fly from the cruel daughters who had so shamefully treated him.

The Earl of Gloucester came in much concern to tell Goneril and Regan that the King was leaving the castle, but they bade him with cold brutality not to persuade him to stay, but to shut his doors. Regan remarked that to wilful men the injuries they brought on themselves must be their own schoolmasters; Lear was attended with a desperate train, and it was wise to be cautious.

“Shut up your doors, my lord,” agreed Cornwall; “it’s a wild night; my Regan counsels well. Come in, out of the storm.”

Night and Storm

Out into the night and storm hurried King Lear, but little he heeded the darkness or the raging of the elements, for now he was mad—really mad. Amid the howling of the blast, cataracts of rain, the rattle of thunder, and blinding flashes of lightning, the old man wandered, bareheaded, tearing his white locks, and shouting incoherent exclamations to the whirlwind. [Pg 351]

“Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!... Spit, fire! Spout, rain! Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters. I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness. I never gave you kingdom, called you children; you owe me nothing; then let fall your horrible pleasure. Here I stand, your slave, a poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man.”

“Blow, winds! Rage! Blow!”

Then, his mood altering, he called them the servile ministers of two pernicious daughters, who had joined with them in battle against an old white head. [Pg 352]

So he went on, raving wildly, while all the time the faithful Fool clung to him, half supporting his tottering steps, and still striving with his jests to divert the mind of his heart-broken master.

Meanwhile, friends of the King were working on his behalf. Information had reached the Earl of Kent that there was secret division between Albany and Cornwall, though the face of it was hidden with mutual cunning. Word had been carried to France of the harsh way in which both these sons-in-law had behaved to the old King, and Cordelia was on her way to rescue her father, and had already landed with an army at Dover. The Earl of Gloucester also, disgusted with the brutal behaviour of Regan and her husband, was now on the watch to protect the old man. After King Lear had been driven out into the storm, Gloucester overheard a plot to put him to death. He at once made arrangements to secure his safety, and, setting out in search of the fugitives, he found them in a wretched little hovel on the heath, where they had gone for shelter. The poor old man’s wits were now entirely gone, and his distracted brain could do nothing but brood over the heartless cruelty of his daughters, which had brought him to this condition. But he was tenderly humoured and watched over by the few followers still left to him, and now by their loyalty he was safely conveyed out of reach of his enemies. Gloucester told Kent there was a litter waiting ready, and bade him take up his master in his arms at once, and carry him to it, and then drive instantly [Pg 353] to Dover, where he should receive both welcome and protection. If he delayed in the slightest degree, the King’s life, and Kent’s, and all who offered to defend him, would assuredly be lost.

Thanks to the devotion of his faithful friends, the poor old King was safely conveyed to Dover, but a terrible fate rewarded the loyalty of the Earl of Gloucester. Finding out the part he had played in the escape of King Lear, the Duke of Cornwall, with savage barbarity, had both the eyes of the nobleman put out, and then Regan pitilessly bade her servants thrust him forth from his own castle.

A just punishment, however, overtook the brutal Earl. One of his own servants, indignant at his cruelty, refused to perform his bidding. Cornwall, enraged, fell upon the man, and they fought. Regan, coming to her husband’s assistance, stabbed the servant from behind, but not before the man contrived to wound the Earl so seriously that he soon after died of the injury.

King Lear reached Dover safely, and Cordelia was prepared with the most tender affection to welcome her old father. But remorse for the injustice with which he had treated this daughter, and robbed her of her rights, to bestow them on her worthless sisters, so stung King Lear’s mind that shame kept him from seeing Cordelia, and he contrived to make his escape from the French camp. Cordelia sent out in search of him, and he was presently found wandering about on the cliffs, all decked out with wild flowers, but still in his madness assuming the majesty of a King. He was taken back to the camp, and placed in the care of a skilful doctor, who said that the chief thing needed to cure his shattered senses was complete repose. The poor old King was put to [Pg 354] bed, and everything was done to aid his recovery; in the tent where he lay attendants watched so

that nothing should disturb him, and soft music was played. He had a long, refreshing sleep, and when the moment of awakening came, to the great joy of Cordelia and those who had followed him so faithfully, it was evident that his reason was restored.

The first sight on which his eyes opened was the loving face of Cordelia. For a moment the King thought it must be some spirit from heaven, and could scarcely believe that it was indeed his own daughter, in flesh and blood. He thought that his wits must still be wandering.

“Where have I been? Where am I?” he murmured, looking round with dazed eyes, while the spectators watched with mute anxiety, to see what turn his malady would take. “I should die with pity to see another thus. I know not what to say. I will not swear these are my hands; let’s see. I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured of my condition!”

“Oh, look upon me, sir!” entreated Cordelia, with her soft voice. “And hold your hands in benediction over me. No, sir, you must not kneel.”

“Pray do not mock me,” said Lear in trembling accents. “I am a very foolish, fond old man, fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less; and, to deal plainly, I fear I am not in my perfect mind. Methinks I should know you, and know this man”—he looked round in piteous appeal—“yet I am doubtful, for I am ignorant what place this is.... Pray do not mock me, for, as I am a man, I think this lady to be my child Cordelia.” [Pg 355]

“And so I am, I am,” cried Cordelia, the tears raining from her tender eyes.

“Are your tears wet?” said Lear, touching her cheeks softly, like a child. “Yes, faith! I pray, weep not. If you have poison for me, I will drink it. I know you do not love me, for your sisters have, as I do remember, done me wrong. You have some cause; they have not.”

“No cause, no cause,” said Cordelia.

“Am I in France?” asked Lear.

“In your own kingdom, sir,” said Kent respectfully.

“Do not abuse me,” pleaded the once haughty King.

The good doctor now interposed; he bade Cordelia be comforted: the madness was cured, but there was danger in letting the King brood over what had passed. He must not be troubled with further talking until his shaken senses were more securely settled.

“Will it please your highness walk?” asked Cordelia, with her sweet grace of manner.

“You must bear with me,” said the old man humbly. “Pray you, now, forget and forgive. I am old and foolish.”

And so, subdued in mind and crushed in spirit, clinging to the child whom he had spurned, the once fiery and impetuous monarch was tenderly led away by his loving daughter.

It would be pleasant if the story could end here, and if we could leave the tempest-tossed old King in the cherished keeping of the gentle Cordelia. But a sadder fate for both was at hand. The King of France had been suddenly called back to his own land by business which imported so much fear and danger to the State that his personal return was absolutely necessary. In his absence the French forces were attacked by the British troops of Goneril and Regan, under the command of a treacherous son of the loyal Earl of Gloucester, called Edmund. Unfortunately, on this occasion the British won the battle, and Cordelia and King Lear were both captured. [Pg 356]

Edmund ordered them away to prison, whither King Lear went joyously enough, for he was quite happy at being again with his daughter. As soon as they had gone, Edmund despatched an officer to the prison with secret instructions, which he ordered him to carry out at once.

Scarcely had this been done when a flourish of trumpets announced the approach of the Duke of Albany, Goneril, and Regan. The Duke of Albany, always of a milder and more merciful nature, had for some time been dissatisfied with the treatment to which the poor old King had been subjected. He was indignant at the Duke of Cornwall’s barbarity in putting out the eyes of Gloucester, and was glad to hear that he had met his just punishment at the hands of the servant whom he had killed for daring to remonstrate with him.

Albany now demanded that Lear should be handed over to his keeping—a request which Edmund refused to comply with, giving as pretext that the question of Cordelia and her father required a fitter place for discussion. The Duke of Albany ordered Edmund to obey, saying that he regarded him only as a subject in this war, and not as his brother, whereupon Regan interposed, and declared that she had invested Edmund with full authority, therefore he was quite the equal of Albany; moreover, she intended to marry him. [Pg 357]

An angry discussion now arose between the two sisters. Goneril also had taken a fancy to this Edmund, and had not scrupled to lay a plot to get her husband killed, so that she might marry him. Knowing Regan’s designs, she had added to her crimes by secretly poisoning her sister, in order to get her out of the way, and even while they were disputing, the drug began to take effect, and in a few minutes Regan was dead.

Goneril’s husband, however, had discovered the plot against himself, and now he publicly denounced his wife. In ungovernable fury at the failure of her schemes, and refusing to give any answer to the Duke of Albany’s accusations, Goneril hurried away, and took her own life.

Thus miserably perished these two hard-hearted and wicked women.

Edmund in the meanwhile, wounded to death by his own brave half-brother Edgar, who had appeared as champion to punish Edmund for his many horrible acts of treachery and wickedness, now confessed that he and Goneril had given private instructions that Cordelia was to be hanged in prison, and had intended to lay the blame on her own despair, which had caused her to do this desperate deed.

Messengers were sent in haste to arrest this fatal order, but, alas! it was too late. As Edmund was borne away, King Lear entered, bearing the dead body of Cordelia in his arms. The old man's reason was again tottering on the brink of madness, and the spectators could only listen in [Pg 358] pitying sorrow to his frenzied grief over his murdered child. One moment he mourned her as dead; the next he tried to persuade himself she was still living. He called for a looking-glass, to see if her breath would mist or stain it, a proof that she lived; and held a feather to her lips, and thought it stirred. The Earl of Kent came and knelt before him, but the King turned from him impatiently, and bent again over Cordelia, where she lay on the ground.

"Cordelia, Cordelia! Stay a little!" he implored in piteous accents. "Ha! What is it thou sayest?" He leant his ear to listen, and with eager self-deception tried to explain his failure to hear a sound. "Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman." Then, with a sudden change, he drew himself up, and, looking round, cried exultingly: "I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee!"

"'Tis true, my lords, he did," said an officer who was standing by.

"Did I not, fellow?" said the King proudly. "I have seen the time, with my good biting falchion, I would have made them skip. I am old now, and these same crosses spoil me.—Who are you? Mine eyes are not of the best; I'll tell you in a minute. Are you not Kent?"

"The same—your servant Kent."

But the King's last gleam of reason was going, and Kent in vain tried to make him realise the fact of his own loyal fidelity, and that the cruel Goneril and Regan were dead. The King's thoughts were again with his beloved child.

"And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life!" he wailed in heart-broken accents. "Why should a [Pg 359] dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more—never, never, never, never, never! Pray, you, undo this button." He made a choking movement at the cloak at his throat, and someone stepped forward and gently unclasped it for him. "Thank you, sir. Do you see this? Look on her—look, her lips—look there, look there!" and with a strange cry of mingled joy and anguish King Lear fell dead on the body of his dear child Cordelia.

And so, with all his faults and follies, which had assuredly wrought out their own bitter retribution, the fiery-hearted King passed into the realm of eternal rest.

“Honest Iago”

Brave, generous, of a free and open nature, Othello the Moor had won high honour in the state of Venice, for, although dark in colouring and of an alien race, he was one of her most renowned generals, and time after time had carried her arms to victory. When, therefore, alarming news reached Venice that the Turkish hordes were again threatening to invade some of her most valued territories, it was to the Moorish warrior Othello that the Venetian senators turned at once to avert the threatened danger.

Othello’s frank, valiant nature had won him many friends, but close at hand, where he little suspected it, was one subtle and dangerous enemy. Iago, one of his under-officers, hated him [Pg 361] with a deadly venom. Iago was a brave soldier, but a man of utterly unscrupulous character. He had been with Othello through several campaigns, and when a chance for promotion came had hoped, through high personal influence, to obtain the envied position of Othello’s lieutenant. In his own opinion, Iago thoroughly merited this post, but when suit was made to Othello he evaded the petitioners, and finally put an end to their hopes by saying that he had already chosen his officer.

“And what was he?” demanded Iago disdainfully. “Forsooth, a great arithmetician—one Michael Cassio, a Florentine that never set a squadron in the field, nor knows the division of a battle more than a spinster, unless by bookish theory; mere prattle without practice is all his soldiership. But he, in good time, must be his lieutenant, and I—God bless the mark!—his Moorship’s ancient.”

Burning for revenge, Iago, instead of declining the inferior position of “ancient,” or ensign-bearer, accepted it, but only to serve his own purpose. “In following Othello, I follow but myself,” he declared. “Heaven is my judge, not for love and duty, but seeming so, for my peculiar end.” For Iago prided himself on the skill with which he could conceal his real feelings, and under a mask of the bluntest honesty he began to work out a scheme of diabolical cunning.

There was a certain senator of Venice at that time called Brabantio, who had an only daughter, named Desdemona. Brabantio was very fond of Othello, and often invited him to his house, and questioned him concerning the story of his life—the battles, sieges, fortunes, through which he [Pg 362] had passed. Othello recounted all his adventures from year to year, from his boyish days to the moment when he was speaking; he told of disastrous chances, of moving accidents by flood and field; of hair-breadth escapes; of being taken by the foe and sold into slavery; of his redemption from captivity; and then of his travels in all sorts of wild and extraordinary places. He described the vast caves and barren deserts that he had seen; rough quarries, rocks, and hills, whose heads touched heaven; cannibals that eat each other, and queer tribes of savages whose heads grow beneath their shoulders.

Desdemona, the gentle daughter of Brabantio, dearly loved to hear these thrilling stories, and was quite fascinated by the valorous soldier who had passed through such strange experiences. Hastily despatching her household affairs, she would come again and again to listen greedily to Othello, often weeping for pity when she heard of some distressful stroke he had suffered in his youth. His story being done, she would sigh, and swear, “in faith, ’twas strange—’twas passing strange; ’twas pitiful—’twas wondrous pitiful!” She wished she had not heard it, and yet she wished that heaven had made her such a man; and she bade Othello, if he had a friend who loved her, that he would but teach him how to tell his story, and that would woo her. Upon this hint, Othello spoke. Desdemona loved him for the dangers he had passed, and Othello loved Desdemona because she pitied him.

This was the simple explanation of what her father, furious with rage, put down to witchcraft, [Pg 363] for he could not believe that his timid daughter could really have fallen in love with such an alarming person as the swarthy Moor. But, as Desdemona said, she saw Othello’s visage in his mind, and the valour and nobility of his nature made her forget the darkness of his complexion. Knowing her father’s violent, unreasonable disposition, and fearing that he would never give his consent, Desdemona quietly left her home one night without consulting him, and was married to

Othello.

Now was Iago's opportunity. Finding out by some means what was taking place, he informed a rejected suitor of Desdemona's called Roderigo, a brainless Venetian youth, and together they went to Brabantio's house, and in high glee roused him, and told the news that Othello had stolen away his daughter. Having raised the alarm, and set them on the trail where they would be likely to find Othello, Iago thought it discreet to retire, for he did not wish it to appear as if he had anything to do with the matter. To Othello, he afterwards laid all the blame on Roderigo, declaring that several times he was so enraged with him that he could almost have killed him for the abusive way in which he had spoken of Othello.

Brabantio immediately called up his servants, and set out to look for the culprits; but before he found them the mischief was done—Othello and Desdemona were securely married.

In the Council Chamber at Venice, though it was night time, the Duke and senators were holding an important meeting. News had come that a fleet of Turkish galleys was bearing down [Pg 364] on Cyprus; and though the rumours were conflicting as to the number of the fleet and its present position, there was no doubt that the danger was imminent, and that preparations for defence must at once be set on foot. Messengers were sent to summon both Othello and Brabantio. As it happened, the latter was already on his way to appeal to the Duke to punish Othello, and happening to fall in with Othello, the two arrived at the same moment.

"Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you against the public enemy," said the Duke. Then, turning to Brabantio, he added courteously: "I did not see you; welcome, gentle signor; we lacked your counsel and your help to-night."

"So did I yours," replied Brabantio; and he proceeded to pour forth his complaint, saying that it was not anything he had heard of business which had called him from his bed, nor did the public anxiety make any impression on him, for his own private grief was of so overbearing a nature that it swallowed up all other concerns.

The Duke, much concerned, asked what was the matter, whereupon Brabantio in the bitterest terms accused Othello of having bewitched his daughter, for, he said, it was quite against nature that she could have fallen in love with him if she had been in her proper senses. The Duke asked Othello what he could say in answer to the charge. Then Othello, in a manly but modest fashion, gave a straightforward account of what had really happened, and so convincing were his words that the Duke was quite won over to his side, and at the end exclaimed heartily, "I think this tale would win my daughter too!" He tried to persuade Brabantio to make the best of the matter, but [Pg 365] the old senator was relentless. All that he would do was to transfer the blame to his daughter, when Desdemona, on being sent for, confirmed everything Othello had said. Her father bade her say to whom in all the assembled company she owed most obedience. Desdemona, with modesty but decision, replied that she saw a divided duty—that she was indebted to her father for life and education, and that she loved and respected him as a daughter; but even as her own mother had left her father, preferring Brabantio, so Desdemona claimed that she had as much right to leave her father and follow her husband Othello.

Brabantio was quite unmoved by this argument.

"God be with you! I have done," he said roughly, and in a few heartless words he handed over his daughter to Othello. "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see; she has deceived her father, and may thee," was his final cruel taunt.

"My life upon her faith!" cried Othello indignantly, as he clasped his weeping young wife in his arms.

The next question to decide was where Desdemona should stay during her husband's absence. She begged so earnestly to be allowed to accompany him to the war that Othello joined his voice to hers, and the Duke gave them leave to settle the matter as they chose. Othello was obliged to start that very night, and Desdemona was to follow later under the escort of his officer, "honest Iago," to whose care Othello especially committed her, and whose wife Emilia he begged might attend on her.

If Othello had but known it, "honest Iago" at that very moment was already weaving his plans [Pg 366] of villainy, and was sneering inwardly at his General's open and trustful nature, which made him so easy to be deceived. The sweetest revenge which occurred to Iago was to bring discord between Othello and the beautiful young wife whom he loved so devotedly. Iago therefore determined to set cunningly to work to implant a feeling of jealousy in Othello's mind. Like many warm-hearted and affectionate people, Othello was extremely passionate and impulsive. Once his feelings were aroused, he rushed forward blindly in the direction in which a clever villain might lure him, and being so absolutely truthful and candid himself, he was utterly unsuspicious of falsehood in others.

Iago's weapon was not far to seek, and he had, moreover, the satisfaction of feeling that he would enjoy a double revenge, for it was Michael Cassio, Othello's new lieutenant, on whom he fixed as a fitting tool. Cassio was young, handsome, attractive, a general favourite, especially with women, where his graceful manners always won him favour. He was already greatly liked by Desdemona, for when Othello came to woo her, Cassio was his frequent companion, and often carried messages between them. What, then, more natural than that a young girl like Desdemona should presently grow tired of her elderly and war-beaten husband, and turn for amusement to this charming young gallant? Such, at least, was Iago's reasoning, and such was the poison which

he intended to pour into the ear of the guileless Othello. [Pg 367]

Well met at Cyprus

On the way to Cyprus a terrible tempest sprang up, which scattered Othello's convoy, and drove his own ship out of its course, so that, after all, Desdemona got to the island before her husband. Cassio, Othello's lieutenant, had already arrived, and had been sounding the praises of his General's wife to the islanders, and when news came that Desdemona's ship had also safely reached port, he was ready with a rapturous greeting for the young bride.

"O, behold, the riches of the ship is come on shore!" he cried, as Desdemona approached, with Emilia, Iago, Roderigo, and their attendants. "Hail to thee, lady! The grace of heaven, before, behind thee, and on every hand, enwheel thee round!"

"I thank thee, valiant Cassio," replied Desdemona. "What tidings can you tell me of my lord?"

Cassio answered that Othello was not yet arrived, and for anything he knew he was well, and would be there shortly; and even as he spoke, the guns on the citadel thundered a greeting to a friendly sail.

Like a spider who has woven its web, Iago watched his victims; he gloated over the idle chatter between Cassio and Desdemona, and marked, as they laughed and talked together, how the young man smiled and bowed, and often kissed his fingers with an air of gallantry.

"Ay, smile upon her, do," he sneered to himself; "if such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenancy, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft.... Very good; well kissed! an excellent courtesy! 'tis so, indeed!" [Pg 368]

"Ay, smile upon her!"

So he went on, taking malicious pleasure in the young man's little affected airs, which would the more readily lend colour to any suggestions Iago chose to bring against him.

Othello, meanwhile, had landed. His joy at again meeting his wife was so intense that he could scarcely express it.

"If it were possible now to die, 'twere now to be most happy," he exclaimed, for he feared that unknown fate would never again hold in store for him another moment of such absolute content. "Come, let us to the castle. News, friends!" he went on, turning to the others. "Our wars are done, the Turks are drowned. How does my old acquaintance of this isle?... Come, Desdemona, once more, well met at Cyprus!"

In honour of the good tidings of the destruction of the Turkish fleet, and of the marriage of their new Governor, Othello, a public rejoicing was proclaimed in Cyprus, and during the space of six hours the whole island was to be given up to feasting and revelry.

Cassio was appointed to watch that evening as Captain of the Guard, and Iago saw here an excellent opportunity to take the first step in his scheme of revenge, by bringing some disgrace on the young lieutenant. He knew that a very little wine, such as would have no effect on another man, made Cassio excited and quarrelsome. He determined to [Pg 369] lure him on to drink more than was good for him, after which Roderigo was to find some occasion to irritate Cassio, either by speaking too loud, or sneering at his discipline, or by any other means he pleased. Cassio, being rash, and very sudden in anger, would probably strike Roderigo, which, if possible, he was to be provoked into doing, for out of this Iago would incite the islanders to mutiny, and get Cassio dismissed from his post.

When, therefore, Cassio entered the hall of the castle to take up his duties for the night, Iago met him with a great appearance of friendliness, and cordially pressed him to join in the entertainment he had provided for some guests,—Montano, the former Governor of Cyprus, and some other gentlemen, who would fain drink a measure to the health of Othello. Knowing his own weakness, Cassio at first refused.

"Not to-night, good Iago," he said. "I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking; I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment."

"O, they are our friends! But one cup!" pleaded Iago. "I will drink it for you."

Cassio answered that he had drunk only one cup that night, and even of that the wine was diluted, and yet he already felt the effects. He was unfortunate in this peculiarity, and dared not task his weakness with any more.

"What, man! 'Tis a night of revels; the gallants desire it," urged the tempter.

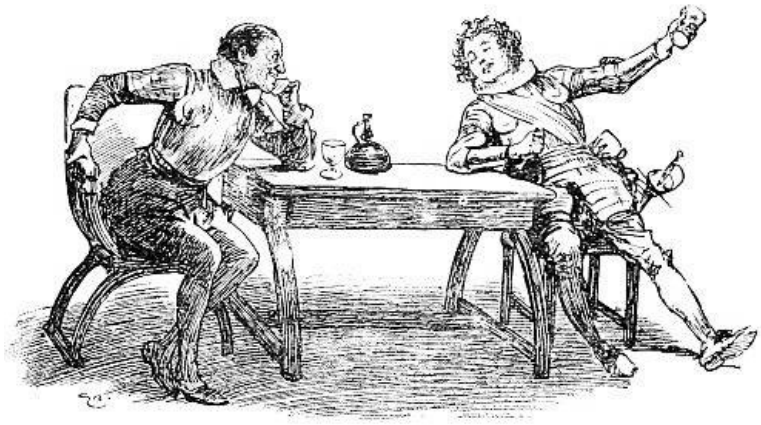
"Where are they?" asked Cassio, his resolution beginning to falter. [Pg 370]

"Here, at the door; I pray you, call them in."

"I'll do it, but it mislikes me," said Cassio, and he reluctantly went in search of Iago's guests. When he presently returned with three or four noisy gallants who had themselves been feasting too lavishly, they had already persuaded him to drink another cup with them.

Iago now did his best to lure them on by calling for more wine, and trolling out a jovial song:

“And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink;
A soldier’s a man;
A life’s but a span;
Why then let a soldier drink-drink!”



“An excellent song!”

“An excellent song!” pronounced Cassio, whereupon Iago sang another, which he found even “more exquisite” than the first. So merrily went the minutes that it was not until much later that the new lieutenant remembered his neglected duties, by which time his senses were quite confused by what he had drunk. [Pg 371]

When he left, Iago took occasion to spread a bad impression of him by saying what a pity it was that such a good soldier should be spoilt by the persistent habit of drink—in fact, that he never went sober to bed. This, of course, was an absolute falsehood, but the gentlemen of Cyprus believed what Iago said. Montano remarked it was a pity Othello were not told of it; perhaps he did not know, or perhaps his good nature prized the virtue in Cassio, and overlooked the evil. It was a great pity that the noble Moor should hazard such an important place as second in command to one with such an incurable fault. It would be right to say so to Othello.

“Not I, for this fair island,” said the hypocritical Iago. “I love Cassio well, and would do much to cure him of this, evil.—But hark! What noise?” for there was a cry without: “Help! help!”

The next instant Cassio entered violently, driving Roderigo in front of him and beating him. Montano interfered to protect Roderigo, whereupon Cassio turned on him, and both drawing their weapons, Montano was presently wounded. Iago, meanwhile, had sent Roderigo to run and cry a mutiny, and make as much disturbance as possible, while Iago himself had the alarum-bell set pealing, and shouted noisily in all directions, contriving largely to increase the confusion, under pretence of restoring order.

Othello was speedily on the scene, and with prompt decision at once silenced the uproar. Then he asked for an explanation, which no one seemed willing to give.

“Honest Iago, that lookest dead with grieving, speak: who began this? On thy love, I charge thee.” [Pg 372]

Iago mumbled some confused excuses, which were certainly not intended to deceive the General. Cassio, on being appealed to, now completely sobered by the shock, answered simply, “I pray you, pardon me; I cannot speak.” Montano declared that he was too much injured to say anything; Othello’s officer, Iago, could tell him everything; he was not conscious of having done or said anything amiss.

Othello now began to lose patience, and knowing the serious danger of such a disturbance in the present unsettled condition of the island, he curtly commanded Iago to let him know how the brawl began, and who set it on.

With feigned reluctance, but with much secret satisfaction, Iago gave an account of what had happened, taking care to heighten his own ignorance of the affair, and ostentatiously pretending to try to shield Cassio from blame.

Othello’s sentence was short and sharp.

“I know, Iago, thy honesty and love do mince this matter, making it light to Cassio.—Cassio, I love thee, but never more be officer of mine.”

When Othello and the others had retired, Iago, seeing Cassio standing as if dazed, went up and asked him if he were hurt.

“Ay, past all surgery,” was the mournful response.

“Marry, Heaven forbid!” said Iago, startled.

“Reputation, reputation, reputation!” groaned Cassio. “O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!” [Pg 373]

“As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound,” scoffed Iago. “There is more sense in that than in ‘*reputation*.’” And he tried to cheer up Cassio by telling him there

were ways in which he could recover the General's favour,—only sue to him, and he would soon be won round.

"I would rather sue to be despised than deceive so good a commander with so slight, so drunken, so indiscreet an officer," returned the contrite Cassio.

"You or any man may be drunk once in his life, man," urged Iago. "I'll tell you what you shall do." And he went on to say that the General's wife was now the General, meaning by this that Othello would do anything that Desdemona wanted. Iago advised Cassio to appeal to Desdemona. She was so good and kind that she always did more than she was asked. If Desdemona pleaded with Othello on his behalf, Iago was ready to wager anything that Cassio would soon be in higher favour than ever.

Cassio was grateful to Iago for his counsel, which the latter protested he only offered in love and honest kindness, and Cassio resolved early the next morning to beseech Desdemona to undertake his cause.

Iago was delighted to find his plot working so smoothly. He knew that the more earnestly Desdemona appealed on behalf of Cassio, the more fuel there would be to feed Othello's jealousy.

Thus, out of the gentle lady's own sweetness and goodness Iago made the net that was to enmesh them all. [Pg 374]

The Handkerchief

In accordance with his resolve, Cassio appealed the next morning to Desdemona, who with all the warmth of her affectionate nature undertook his defence, and merrily promised to give her husband no peace until he had pardoned the offender. Othello approaching at that moment, Desdemona begged Cassio to remain and hear her speak, but the young lieutenant was too much ashamed to face his General, and left in some haste. Iago seized this chance to implant the first seeds of suspicion in Othello, by exclaiming, as if without thinking, "Ha! I like not that."

"What dost thou say?" asked Othello.

"Nothing, my lord; or if—I know not what," said Iago, craftily pretending as if he wished to withdraw his words.

"Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?"

"Cassio, my lord!" with an air of great surprise. "No, sure, I cannot think it, that he would steal away so guilty-like, seeing you coming."

"I do believe it was he," persisted Othello.

"How now, my lord; I have been talking with a suitor here, a man that languishes in your displeasure," said Desdemona, coming to meet her husband.

"Who is it you mean?"

"Why, your lieutenant, Cassio," answered Desdemona; and then, with simple eloquence, she began to plead for the culprit. But Iago's remark had ruffled Othello's temper.

"Went he hence now?" he asked abruptly. [Pg 375]

"Ay, truly; so humbled that he hath left part of his grief with me, to suffer with him. Good love, call him back."

"Not now, sweet Desdemona; some other time."

"But shall it be shortly?"

"The sooner, sweet, because of you," said Othello, softening a little.

"Shall it be to-night at supper?"

"No, not to-night."

"To-morrow dinner, then?"

"I shall not dine at home; I meet the captains at the citadel."

"Why, then, to-morrow night; or Tuesday morning; or Tuesday noon, or night; or Wednesday morning. I prithee, name the time, but let it not exceed three days," coaxed Desdemona with playful persistency. And she went on pleading for Cassio with such winning sweetness that Othello could resist no longer.

"Prithee, no more; let him come when he will. I can deny thee nothing," he exclaimed; and when Desdemona withdrew, happy at the promise she had extorted, he cried, with a sudden return to all his trust and affection, "Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee! And when I love thee not, chaos is come again."

All might now have been well if Iago had not been at hand to pour his poison into Othello's ear. With diabolical cunning—a hint suggested here, a half-retracted phrase there, an affectation of honesty that seemed always checking itself for fear of speaking too openly—Iago contrived to fix the basest suspicions on Cassio. With subtle craft he made it appear as though everything he said were reluctantly dragged from him, and, as on the night before, while making a great parade of [Pg 376] trying to shield Cassio, he succeeded in blackening him with unfounded calumny.

Not content with this, he next, in a serpent-like manner, began to insinuate suspicions against

Desdemona, declaring that he would not on any account let Othello know what was in his thought, and beseeching him in the most meaning tone to beware of jealousy. Those who were jealous, he said, lived a life of torture—doating, yet doubting; mistrusting, yet loving.

“Good Heaven! the souls of all my tribe defend me from jealousy!” he ended fervently.

“Why—why is this?” demanded Othello, firing up, just as Iago had hoped he would do. “Do you think I would lead a life of jealousy, to follow still the changes of the moon with fresh suspicions? No; to be once in doubt is once to be resolved.... No, Iago; I’ll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove; and on the proof there is no more but this—away at once with love, and—*jealousy*.”

Iago remarked he was glad of that, for now he could show the love and duty he bore Othello more frankly. Then he advised Othello to watch his wife closely, and note her behaviour with Cassio, afterwards pretending to draw back, and urging Othello to go no further into the matter, but to leave it to time. So, having succeeded in making Othello thoroughly unhappy, Iago took his leave.

“This fellow’s of exceeding honesty, and knows all qualities of human dealings most skilfully,” thought the poor deceived Othello; and then, as Desdemona herself came in sight, innocence and candour enthroned on her brow, for a moment all mistrust melted. “If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself! I’ll not believe it.” [Pg 377]

Desdemona had come to remind her husband that dinner was served, and that the islanders invited as guests were waiting. Othello, who had been greatly upset by his conversation with Iago, replied in such a faint voice that Desdemona asked if he were ill.

“I have a pain upon my forehead here,” answered Othello.

“That’s with watching. Let me but bind it hard; within this hour it will be well,” said Desdemona, holding out a handkerchief beautifully embroidered with strawberries.

“Your napkin is too little,” said Othello, putting the handkerchief from him, where it dropped, unheeded, to the ground. “Let it alone. Come, I’ll go in with you.”

“I am very sorry that you are not well,” said Desdemona with the simple wistfulness of a child.

When they had gone, the handkerchief was picked up by Emilia, wife of Iago, who was very glad to find it, for her husband had often begged her to steal it for him. But Desdemona so loved the token—for it was the first remembrance Othello had given her, and he had begged her never to part with it—that she always kept it carefully about her, to kiss and talk to.

“I’ll have the work taken out, and give it to Iago,” said Emilia to herself. “What he will do with it Heaven knows, not I; I only do it to please his whim.”

But Emilia was already half repenting of what she had done, before she gave the handkerchief to Iago, and she might possibly have refused to part with it at all if Iago had not put an end to the matter by cunningly snatching it from her with one hand, while he pretended to caress her with the other. Directly it was safely in his possession he dropped the amiable tone he had assumed, and harshly ordered away his wife. [Pg 378]

Iago was delighted to have got this handkerchief, for he meant to make a wicked use of it. He was going to lose it in Cassio’s lodgings, and let the young lieutenant find it, when he would take care that Othello should think it was a present from Desdemona. Iago knew that “Trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ,” and seeing Othello approach, he marked with fiendish satisfaction the cloud of gloom and trouble that rested on his brow.

“Not poppy, nor mandragora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world, shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep which thou owned yesterday,” he said to himself maliciously.

Othello’s peace of mind was, indeed, gone for ever, and all joy and interest in life were over.

“Oh, now, for ever, farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content! Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars that make ambition virtue! O, farewell! Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump, the spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife, the royal banner, and all quality, pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war! Farewell! Othello’s occupation’s gone.”

“Is it possible, my lord?” murmured Iago, with feigned sympathy.

Othello turned on him with sudden fury, and gripped him by the throat. [Pg 379]

“Villain, be sure you prove my love untrue! Be sure of it!” he cried, shaking him violently.

“Villain, be sure you prove my love untrue!”

Iago pretended to be deeply aggrieved by Othello’s distrust, and said if necessary he could bring proofs of what he said.

“Tell me but this,” he went on: “have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief, spotted with strawberries, in your wife’s hand?”

“I gave her such a one; it was my first gift.” [Pg 380]

Iago said he did not know about that, but such a handkerchief he had seen in Cassio’s possession that very day.

Naturally, after that, Othello could not fail to believe that Desdemona had given away his cherished gift to Cassio. He took the first opportunity to ask her for it, when, of course, she was unable to produce it. She had already been greatly distressed at the loss of her treasure, and now was so alarmed by the violent way in which Othello kept demanding it, that she dared not own it was lost, and only said she had it not about her at that moment.

“That is a fault,” said Othello, frowning darkly. “That handkerchief was given to my mother by an Egyptian. She was a charmer, and could almost read the thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it, it would make her amiable, and her husband would love her; but if she lost it, or made a gift of it, her husband would get to loathe her. She, dying, gave it me, and bade me, when my fate would have me marry, to give it to my wife. I did so; and take heed of it! Hold it most precious; to lose it or give it away were such calamity as nothing else could match.”

“Is it possible?” faltered Desdemona.

“’Tis true; there’s magic in the web of it: a sibyl, who numbered in the world two hundred years, sewed the work; the worms were hallowed that spun the silk, and it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful conserved of maidens’ hearts.”

“Indeed! Is it true?” said Desdemona, getting more and more alarmed. [Pg 381]

“Most true. Therefore look to it well,” said Othello in a threatening manner.

Desdemona still persisted that the handkerchief was not lost, and remembering her promise to Cassio, she most unwisely chose this ill-starred moment again to urge her suit. Her innocent good-nature was the final stroke to Othello’s jealous wrath, and harshly repeating, “The handkerchief! the handkerchief!” he strode away in ungovernable fury.

Worked up to madness by the diabolical arts of Iago, he saw in his young wife’s apparent simplicity and candour nothing but the most clever deceit, and he determined to punish her supposed insincerity in the most terrible manner.

No Way but This

Though Othello had come to the terrible conclusion that Desdemona must die, he could not prevent his thoughts dwelling again and again on all the charm and loveliness of his dear young wife. This did not suit Iago’s purpose, for he was afraid lest Othello should relent before his revenge was accomplished. So he did his utmost in every way to incite Othello still more against Desdemona. He cunningly reminded him of Brabantio’s parting words, and said if Desdemona had deceived her father in concealing her affection for Othello, why should she not equally

deceive her husband in concealing her affection for someone else?

"She shall not live—no, my heart is turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand," said Othello. Then, "O, the world hath not a sweeter creature!" [Pg 382]

"Nay, that's not your way," said Iago, ill-pleased.

"I do but say what she is," returned Othello. "So delicate with her needle; an admirable musician—O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear; of so high and plenteous wit and invention——"

"She's the worse for all this," said Iago.

"O, a thousand, thousand times," agreed Othello; then he added wistfully: "And, then, of so gentle a condition!"

"Ay, too gentle," sneered Iago.

"Nay, that's certain;—but, yet, the pity of it, Iago! O, Iago, the pity of it, Iago!"

But one might better have appealed for compassion to a tiger in sight of his prey. Iago knew nothing of pity. He had only one aim in view—to gratify his revenge. If Othello would kill Desdemona, he said, he would undertake Cassio.

Emilia, Iago's wife, was a sharp-tongued, outspoken woman, devoted to her young mistress, and when she saw how jealous and violent Othello was becoming, she did not scruple to tell him plainly that he was utterly wrong in his distrust. But Othello, urged on by Iago's cunning, was now past all reason. By this time he was firmly convinced that Desdemona's simple sweetness of manner was nothing but the most skilful hypocrisy, and that it was his duty to put her out of the world, so that she should betray no more people.

When he spoke to his wife that day after his interview with Iago, his words were so strange and menacing that Desdemona was quite frightened. [Pg 383]

"Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?"

"Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?" she cried piteously. "I understand a fury in your words, but not the words." [Pg 384] [Pg 385]

Othello answered with a torrent of angry accusations, which utterly bewildered Desdemona, and then he abruptly left her, while Emilia vainly tried to soothe and comfort her. This good woman was not slow to express her indignation at Othello's shameful behaviour, and loudly announced her opinion that he was being deceived by "some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow!"

"Oh, heaven, that thou would'st make such people known, and put in every honest hand a whip to lash the rascals naked through the world, even from the east to the west!" she cried, with flashing eyes.

This was not very pleasant hearing for Iago, who was standing by, and he harshly told Emilia she was a fool, and bade her be silent. Then, when Desdemona appealed to him, asking what she should do to win her lord again, Iago pretended to think it was only a little ill-temper on Othello's part, that business of the State had offended him, and consequently he was out of humour with Desdemona.

There was some colour for this suggestion, for a special commission had just arrived from Venice, commanding Othello to return home, and deputing Cassio as Governor of Cyprus in his place.

Iago saw that, if he wanted to dispose of Cassio, there was no time to be lost, for Iago himself would be obliged to leave the island in Othello's suite. He therefore contrived to incite his feeble-minded tool Roderigo to set upon Cassio in the dark that very night and murder him. The attempt, however, was not successful. Roderigo only managed to wound Cassio, and was himself [Pg 386] badly injured in return. Some passers-by—the messengers from Venice—hearing groans in the street, stopped to give help, but it was too dark to distinguish the sufferers. The next person to arrive on the scene was Iago himself, with a light, and coming across the wounded Roderigo, and fearing he would betray his share in the plot, he treacherously stabbed him to death. Cassio was then carefully conveyed away for his wounds to be dressed.

That night, when Desdemona was preparing for bed, a strange melancholy seemed to take possession of her. Emilia, who was in attendance, tried to divert her mind by getting her to join in a little idle talk, but Desdemona's thoughts were running on sad themes.

"My mother had a maid called Barbara," she said musingly. "She was in love, and he she loved proved mad, and did forsake her. She had a song of 'willow': an old thing it was, but it expressed her fortune, and she died singing it; that song to-night will not go from my mind."

And presently, as Emilia helped her to disrobe, Desdemona began singing in a sweet, plaintive key:

"The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
  Sing all a green willow!
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
  Sing willow, willow, willow;
The fresh streams ran by her, and murmured her moans,
  Sing willow, willow, willow;
Her salt tears fell from her, and softened the stones;—
  Sing willow, willow, willow.

"Sing all a green willow must be my garland;
Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve.

"Nay, that's not next. Hark! Who is it that knocks?" [Pg 387]

"It's the wind," said Emilia.

Desdemona listened for a moment, then went on with her song.

"I called my love false love; but what said he then?
    Sing willow, willow, willow;"

Desdemona's voice faltered and stopped. Emilia's duties were done, and, bidding her good-night, Desdemona let her depart, and presently closed her sorrowful eyes in sleep.

Now had come the moment that Othello had chosen for his dark deed. As he drew near and saw his beautiful young wife lying in all the calm repose of innocent slumber, for an instant his soul melted with pity and love, and, bending over her, he kissed her tenderly. But once more he hardened his heart by thinking of the cause that had led him to decide on such an act, and a fresh wave of jealous fury suddenly taking possession of him, he seized the pillows, and held them over Desdemona until life seemed extinct.

There came a furious knocking at the door. Emilia's voice was heard outside, demanding admittance. Othello paused to consider.

"What's best to do? If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife. My wife! my wife! What wife? I have no wife. O, insupportable! O, heavy hour!"

And Othello with a heavy groan hid his face in his hands.

Again came the knocking.

"I do beseech you that I may speak with you, O good my lord." [Pg 388]

Othello drew the curtains of the bed, and unlocked the door. Emilia, in great excitement, had come to bring the news of Roderigo's death. As she was speaking, a strange sort of moan caught her attention. She knew her lady's voice, and, rushing to the bed, tore aside the curtains.

"Help! help, ho! Help! O lady, speak again! Sweet Desdemona! O sweet mistress, speak!"

"A guiltless death I die," murmured Desdemona.

"O, who hath done this deed?"

"Nobody; I myself. Farewell! Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!" And with a little sigh the gentle spirit passed away.

"I told him what I thought."

Othello immediately declared that Desdemona had spoken falsely; it was he who had killed her. Emilia turned on him with bitterest rage and contempt, whereupon he began to explain his reasons for what he had done, saying that it was Iago who had revealed everything to him. Emilia could scarcely believe such a thing. She shouted lustily to rouse the alarm, and when, among others, Iago himself hurried in, she taxed him with what Othello had said.

"I told him what I thought, and told no more than what he found himself was apt and true," said Iago, brazenly.

"You told a lie, an odious, damned lie; upon my soul a lie, a wicked lie," [Pg 389] cried the distracted Emilia, and it was vain for Iago to try to silence his wife; before everyone she proclaimed him for the villain he was.

Alas, poor Othello, he began to see he had been tricked. But one point he still clung to—the handkerchief. Desdemona had certainly given away his cherished gift to Cassio.

"O, thou dull Moor!" cried Emilia. "The handkerchief thou speakest of, I found by chance and gave my husband, for often with solemn earnestness he begged of me to steal it.... She give it Cassio? No, alas! I found it, and I gave it to my husband."

"Thou liest!" said Iago.

"By heaven, I do not—I do not, gentlemen!"

Furious against his wife, Iago had already tried once to stab her, but she had evaded him, and the other men in the room had protected her. He now made another attempt, which was more successful, and Emilia fell to the ground.

"O, lay me by my mistress's side!" she begged.

And there, a few minutes later, she died, with Desdemona's song of "Willow, willow, willow" on her lips, and protesting with her dying breath the innocence of her dear lady.

Now, indeed, the end had come for Othello, and all the anguish of unavailing remorse racked his soul.

"O, Desdemona, Desdemona! Dead!" his heart-broken wail rang through the room.

But it was all in vain now—vain his agony of love and sorrow; vain his pleading; vain his scalding tears; vain the bitter scorn with which he lashed his guilty spirit. [Pg 390]

Cold, cold, pale and still, lay his beautiful young wife, her ears deaf to all voices of earth, and frozen on her silent lips the smile with which she had died.

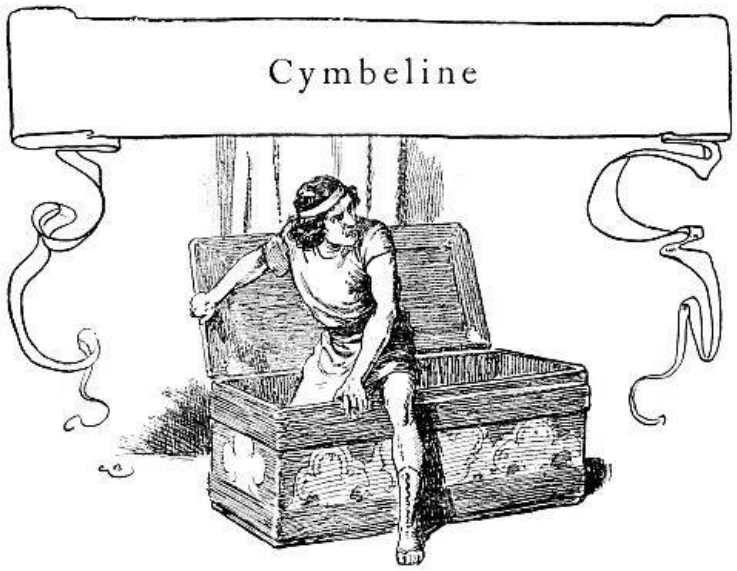
Othello's power and command were taken away, and Cassio ruled in Cyprus. But little cared Othello for this; all worldly ambition was over. As the gentlemen and officers were about to leave the chamber of death, taking Iago with them as their prisoner, Othello, with a dignified gesture, stayed them.

"Soft you; a word or two before you go. I have done the State some service, and they know it. No more of that. I pray you in your letters, when you shall relate these unlucky deeds, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice. Then you must speak of one that loved not wisely but too well; of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand, like the base Indian, threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe.... Set you down this; and say besides, that in Aleppo once, where a malignant and a turbaned Turk beat a Venetian and traduced the State, I took by the throat the circumcised dog, and smote him —thus." And at the last word Othello plunged a dagger into his heart.

With failing strength he dragged his steps to the bed, and fell on the dead body of Desdemona.

"I kissed thee ere I killed thee," came his dying whisper. "No way but this: killing myself, to die upon a kiss."

[Pg 391]



A Princess of Britain

Daughter of Cymbeline, King of Britain, and his acknowledged heir, Imogen had fallen into deep disgrace at Court, and incurred her father's severest displeasure. Cymbeline had lately married a second wife, a widow with one son, and it had occurred to both the King and Queen that it would be an excellent plan for Imogen to marry this youth. But Cloten was a clownish, ill-conditioned lout, and Imogen had chosen to prefer as her husband a poor but worthy gentleman. Posthumus Leonatus had been her playfellow from childhood, for his parents dying when he was an infant, he had been adopted by Cymbeline, who brought him up almost as his own son. Though the King, Queen, and Cloten [Pg 392] himself were enraged at the choice Imogen had made, and the courtiers were forced to appear as if they followed the royal example, not one of the latter but was glad at heart at the thing he pretended to scowl at. For while Cloten was, as one gentleman expressed it, "a thing too bad for bad report," Leonatus was a man endowed with such outward personal grace, and such inward nobility of soul, that it would be difficult to find his equal through all the world. Even as a boy, most praised, most loved, he had come unharmed through the trying ordeal of being a Court favourite, drinking in all branches of learning as lightly as others do air; and the proof of his excellence was evident in the fact that so peerless a lady as Imogen had chosen him for her husband.

But Cymbeline, untouched by his merits, was indignant that his daughter had married "a beggar" when she might have had the only son of the Queen. He pronounced the sentence of banishment on Leonatus, and commanded that Imogen should be imprisoned at Court, under the custody of her step-mother.

The new Queen was a crafty, designing woman, whose chief aim at present was to secure the future throne for her boorish son. Cymbeline, it is true, had had two sons of his own, but they were both stolen when they were little more than babies, the eldest being only three, and the youngest, two years old. From the day of their disappearance no trace of them had ever been found. The Princess Imogen was now the only child, and as Cymbeline's heir, the Queen was anxious to entice her into a marriage with her son. When this attempt failed, the Queen did not scruple to plan other and darker means to accomplish her purpose. She had some knowledge of [Pg 393] medicine, and took pleasure in making perfumes and preserves from all sorts of herbs and simples. Under pretence of perfecting her knowledge, she begged from a physician, Cornelius—who had helped her with her studies—some most poisonous compounds, which would produce a languishing death. She said she did not intend to use them on human beings, but only on animals, to try their power, and apply the antidote, in order to discover their respective virtues and effects.

The good physician did not at all approve of such cruel experiments. He knew the Queen's evil nature, and would not trust one of such malice with drugs of so deadly a kind. While, therefore, pretending to comply with the Queen's request, he really gave her some harmless compounds which would only stupefy and dull the senses for awhile, but do no ultimate injury.

It was well that Cornelius acted so discreetly, for the Queen lost no time in putting her wicked schemes into practice.

When Leonatus, on his banishment, departed for Rome, he left behind him a most faithful, devoted servant, called Pisanio, who was to watch over and attend his dear wife. The crafty Queen tried to win over Pisanio to her interests, promising him large bribes if he would influence Imogen on behalf of her son. But Pisanio's steadfast fidelity was not to be shaken. Seeing that all her fawning friendliness was not likely to achieve her aim, the Queen tried another method to remove Leonatus from her path. While talking with Pisanio, she cunningly let fall, as if by accident, the little box of drugs which she had obtained from Cornelius. When Pisanio picked it [Pg 394]

up, and would have returned it to her, she insisted on his keeping it, as an earnest of future good which she intended to bestow on him, explaining that it was a wonderful cordial by which she had five times redeemed the King from death. The Queen hoped that Pisanio, wishing to do his master good, would give him some of this cordial, which would certainly prove fatal. After the death of Leonatus, if Imogen still persisted in refusing to marry Cloten, the Queen determined that she, too, should have a taste of the poison, when the way would be clear for Cloten to ascend the throne.

While these things were happening in Britain, Leonatus had reached Rome. Here, at the house of a friend, Philario, he happened to meet some acquaintances that he had known in younger days—one a Frenchman, and another an Italian called Iachimo. The Frenchman reminded him of a quarrel which they had had on the occasion of their former meeting, which, he said, was of a slight and trivial nature. But Leonatus, with his ripened judgment, would not admit that the cause of the quarrel was altogether slight.

“Can we, with manners, ask what was the difference?” inquired Iachimo.

The Frenchman replied that a dispute had arisen as to which of the ladies, whom each loved in his own country, was to be most praised; and that Leonatus had asserted that his, in Britain, was the fairest, most virtuous, wise, and constant; and that her favour was less easily to be won than the rarest of the ladies in France. [Pg 395]

“That lady is not now living, or this gentleman’s opinion is by this time worn out,” laughed Iachimo.

“She holds her virtue still, and I my mind,” returned Leonatus.

“You must not so far prefer her before our ladies of Italy,” said Iachimo, still in the same jesting way.

But Leonatus was in earnest, and, in spite of the good-natured bantering of the others, he persisted in extolling the charms and excellence of Imogen.

At their parting in Britain Imogen had given her husband as a remembrance a diamond ring, which had been her mother’s, and which she held very precious; and Leonatus, on his part, had clasped on her arm a bracelet.

Iachimo now said laughingly that if only he had the chance of a few minutes’ conversation with Imogen he would soon win her affection,—in fact, he was ready to wager the half of his estate against Leonatus’s ring that there was no lady in the world of whom he could not say the same.

Leonatus began to get annoyed, and Philario begged them to let the subject drop. But Iachimo would not give in. He now said he wished he had wagered his whole estate. He would lay ten thousand ducats against Leonatus’s ring that if he went to the Court of Britain he would bring back evidence that Imogen’s favour was by no means so hard to win as Leonatus imagined.

Leonatus, stung by Iachimo’s remarks, and longing to prove the falsity of his assertions, and to punish him for his impertinence, said he would accept the wager. But he would wager gold against Iachimo’s gold; the ring he held as dear as his finger—it was part of it. [Pg 396]

Iachimo accused him of fearing to lose the wager, and said he was wise in declining to risk his ring, which so irritated Leonatus that he accepted the challenge.

“I dare you to this match; here’s my ring,” he exclaimed.

“I will not have this wager,” said Philario.

But both Leonatus and Iachimo declared it should go on, and proceeded to settle the conditions, and to have them lawfully recorded. Only Leonatus further determined that, if Iachimo succeeded in winning his wager owing to Imogen’s fault or weakness, Leonatus would cast off his wife utterly; she was not worth debate. If, on the other hand, Iachimo’s advances were repulsed with the contempt they deserved, Iachimo should answer with his sword for his impertinence.

To this Iachimo agreed, and without delay he started for Britain.

Arrived at the Court of Cymbeline, he was introduced to Imogen as the bearer of letters from Leonatus. She received him with charming frankness and cordiality, delighted to welcome one of whom her husband wrote as bestowing much kindness on him. In accordance with a plan Iachimo had thought out, he replied in answer to Imogen’s eager questions concerning Leonatus that he was quite well, exceedingly pleasant, and very merry and gamesome—in fact, he was called “the Briton reveller.”

Imogen was somewhat surprised and a little hurt to hear this, for at home Leonatus was, if anything, of a grave and melancholy disposition.

“*I* never saw him sad,” protested Iachimo; and further he added, Leonatus always laughed loudly when one of his companions, a Frenchman, seemed sorrowful because he had left behind him in his own country a lady whom he loved. “Fancy a man sighing for the bondage of any woman!” Leonatus had said. [Pg 397]

It pained Imogen to think that Leonatus cared so little about her, as Iachimo’s words implied; but when this smooth-tongued Italian gentleman went on to pity her for the way in which her husband seemed to have forgotten her, and counselled her to take revenge, she began to be on her guard.

“Revenge?” she said. “How should I be revenged? If this be true, how should I be revenged?”

Iachimo replied that if Leonatus cared so little about her as to be able to amuse himself happily with all the most riotous companions in Rome, why, then, let Imogen waste no longer any thought on him, but bestow her affection on one who was ready to be her devoted friend and servant. *He* —Iachimo—would never neglect her as Leonatus had done.

Imogen interrupted these silky speeches with indignant scorn, and ordered Iachimo to leave her presence instantly. “What ho, Pisanio!“ she cried, to summon her faithful attendant, for she would not listen to another word from this insulting stranger.

Then, with supple guile, Iachimo suddenly changed his tactics, and burst into the most glowing praise of Leonatus. He implored Imogen’s pardon, and declared that all he had said was quite false, and only to test her love. Leonatus was one of the best and truest of men—“he sits among men like a descended god; he hath a kind of honour sets him off, more than mortal seeming.” [Pg 398]

Iachimo’s present words made amends to Imogen for his unworthy artifice, and she pardoned him, and resumed all her former gracious charm of manner.

“I had almost forgotten to entreat your grace in a small request,” said Iachimo, as he was taking his leave. “And yet of moment, too, for it concerns your lord; myself and other noble friends are partners in the business.”

“Pray, what is it?” asked Imogen.

Iachimo answered that Leonatus and about a dozen of his friends in Rome had joined together to buy a present for the Emperor. He, as their agent, had purchased this in France; it was plate of rare device, and jewels of rich and exquisite form. They were of great value, and being a stranger in Britain, Iachimo was anxious to have them in safe keeping. Might he beg of Imogen to take them under her protection?

“Willingly; and I will pledge mine honour for their safety,” responded Imogen. “Since my lord hath interest in them, I will keep them under my own protection, in my bedchamber.”

“They are in a trunk, attended by my men,” said Iachimo. “I will make bold to send them to you, only for this night. I must leave to-morrow. Therefore, if you please to greet your lord with writing, do it to-night.”

“I will write,” said Imogen. “Send your trunk to me; it shall be safely kept and faithfully yielded to you. You are very welcome.” [Pg 399]

How Iachimo won his Wager

The trunk sent by Iachimo was duly placed for security in Imogen’s chamber, but it was no plate or jewels that it contained. That night, when the Princess slept, a lighted taper still burning in the room, and near at hand the book she had been reading ere she fell asleep, the lid of the trunk was lifted, and a man stepped out. It was Iachimo. With rapid glance he surveyed the room, carefully studying every detail, what pictures there were, where the window was placed, what was the adornment of the bed, the arras, the figures and the story represented. But even this was not sufficient for his purpose. He stealthily approached the bed, and while Imogen lay wrapt in deep sleep, he slipped from her arm the bracelet which Leonatus had given her, noting at the same time, on the pure whiteness of her skin, a little mole with five spots, like the crimson spots in the bottom of a cowslip. Next he took up the book she had been reading, looked carefully at the title, and observed the exact passage in the tale where she had left off. Then, satisfied with his ignoble work, he went back into the trunk. The lid shut with a spring, and once more there was apparently nothing in the room to disturb the innocent serenity of the sleeping Princess.

In the morning early came an unwelcome suitor. Cloten, the Queen’s son, had been advised to try the effects of music on the hard-hearted lady, who unceasingly repulsed his advances. He therefore ordered some musicians to attend outside her chamber window, and sing a charming [Pg 400] little “aubade”—that is, a song of the nature of a serenade, but sung at dawn to waken the sleeper instead of during the night. The song chosen was an especially pretty one, with a wonderfully sweet air, and Cloten hoped it would not fail to touch Imogen’s heart.

“Hark, hark! the lark at heaven’s gate sings,
And Phœbus ’gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes;
With every thing that pretty is,
My lady sweet, arise;
Arise, arise!”

Imogen liked the pretty music, but she was sorry not to be able to thank Cloten properly for his trouble, for she disliked him as heartily as ever, and, vexed by his importunity, was forced to tell him so. Cloten tried to persuade her to give up her husband, saying that the contract which she pretended with that “base wretch, one bred of alms, and fostered with cold dishes, with scraps of the Court,” was no contract, and that the marriage could easily be dissolved.

Imogen, furious that this contemptible creature should thus dare to insult the noble Leonatus, indignantly heaped scorn on Cloten, telling him that he was too base even to be her husband’s

groom; that he would be too much honoured, and be worthy of envy, if he were styled the under hangman of his kingdom. In short, she ended, the meanest garment that Leonatus had ever worn was dearer in her eyes than a hundred thousand men such as Cloten.

Imogen had already had cause that morning for grave distress, for she had discovered the loss of her bracelet, and was greatly upset about it. Leaving her clownish wooer to brood sullenly over this unusual plain-speaking (for all the gentlemen at Court flattered and fawned on Cloten to his face, though they roundly abused him behind his back), Imogen now called her faithful Pisanio, and bade him tell her waiting-woman to make the most careful search for the missing jewel. [Pg 401]

"It was thy master's; I would not lose it for a revenue of any King's in Europe. I *think* I saw it this morning; I am confident last night it was on my arm; I kissed it. I hope it be not gone to tell my lord that I kiss aught but him," she ended, with a melancholy attempt at a little jest.

Alas, poor Imogen, if she had only known how fatally near the truth came her lightly-spoken words!

At that same moment Iachimo was speeding back to Rome with his unwelcome tidings. At first Leonatus took for granted that Iachimo must have lost his wager; he had an answer ready for everything that the latter could say; but little by little the wily Italian contrived to make it appear that Imogen had been far too generous in the favours and friendliness she had lavished on this stranger. He had seen her chamber, he said, and forthwith he described all the tapestry of silk and silver with which it was hung. The chimney was south of the room, and the story of the huntress Diana was wonderfully carved as the subject of the chimney-piece. The roof of the chamber was fretted with golden cherubs; the andirons on the hearth were two winking Cupids of silver, each standing on one foot. [Pg 402]

Leonatus was forced to admit that all this was true; but still, he said, it did not prove that Iachimo had won his wager.

Then, with a self-assured air of triumph, Iachimo produced the bracelet, which he declared Imogen had taken from her arm to give him.

Leonatus, with one last effort to preserve his belief in Imogen's love and fidelity, suggested that perhaps she had taken off the bracelet to send it to him.

"She writes so to you, doth she?" asked Iachimo cunningly. But alas, Imogen's letter, which he had himself conveyed, made no mention of such a fact.

"O, no, no, no! It's true. Here, take this too!" cried Leonatus, handing Iachimo the ring which he had wagered. And he broke out into a torrent of despairing scorn for the utter falsehood and inconstancy of all women.

"Have patience, sir, and take your ring again," counselled Philario, who all through this interview had keenly distrusted the plausible Iachimo. "It is not yet won. Probably Imogen lost the bracelet; or who knows if one of her women, being bribed, has not stolen it from her?"

"Very true, and so I hope he came by it," said Leonatus. "Return me my ring, and give me some stronger proof than this, for the bracelet was stolen."

Then Iachimo told of the little mole which he had noticed on the white skin of Imogen, and Leonatus could no longer refuse to admit that he had lost his wager.

He had loved Imogen so deeply, so tenderly, he had placed such absolute trust in her perfect goodness and truth, that the shock of discovering her falsehood and inconstancy was a terrible one. All women were alike, he thought bitterly; there was no fault in man that woman did not have in greater measure—lying, flattery, deceit, revenge, ambition, self-indulgence, covetousness, pride, disdain, luxury, slander, fickleness—every fault that could be named, was found more abundantly in woman than in man. [Pg 403]

So, maddened by the supposed treachery of his peerless wife, the unhappy Leonatus began to brood thoughts of dark revenge.

The Cave of Belarius

About this time there came to the Court of Cymbeline emissaries from the Roman Emperor, demanding the annual tribute of three thousand pounds which Julius Cæsar had exacted from the conquered Britons, and which latterly Cymbeline had neglected to pay to his successor, Augustus Cæsar.

On hearing the demand brought by Caius Lucius, the Ambassador, the Queen at once took it upon herself to urge Cymbeline not to pay the tribute, and Cloten, in his foolish manner, chimed in with silly defiance and childish insults. With more dignity, Cymbeline confirmed the words of the Queen, and declined to pay, whereupon Caius Lucius pronounced a declaration of war against Britain in the name of his master Augustus Cæsar.

His unwelcome duty done, he was then ready to enjoy the hospitality which Cymbeline courteously offered to him during the remaining day or two of his visit to the Court, after which the King sent him with a safe conduct and an honourable escort to Milford Haven, and forthwith began his preparations for war. [Pg 404]

In the meantime other messages had also come from Rome—letters to Pisanio and to Imogen. The one to Pisanio contained a terrible command. The one to Imogen filled her heart with joy. She was bidden to set off at once to Milford Haven, where Leonatus stated he was at that time,

and where he wished his wife to join him. Imogen was all excitement and eagerness to be off; she begged Pisanio with pretty impatience to tell her how quickly they could get to Milford Haven, and chid him for the slowness of his reckoning. Her quick wit at once devised a scheme whereby she could escape unnoticed, and in the guise of her waiting-woman she contrived to slip out of the palace to where Pisanio was ready to conduct her on her journey.

But alas, poor lady, on the road to Milford Haven a terrible awakening awaited her. Pisanio showed her the letter he had received from Leonatus, and there she read of the crime of which he accused her, and that Pisanio had orders to put her to death. Knowing herself blameless, Imogen was nearly killed by the cruel words, and in heart-broken accents she begged Pisanio to strike at once, and obey his master's bidding. But Pisanio indignantly flung his sword away, refusing to stain his hand with such a deed. He had only brought her thus far, he said, to think out what was best to be done. His master must certainly have been deceived; some villain, peculiarly skilful in his art, had done this injury. Pisanio said he would give notice to Leonatus [Pg 405] that Imogen was dead, sending some token of the fact as he had been commanded. Imogen would be missed at Court, and that would confirm his words.

"Why, good fellow, what shall I do the while? Where bide? How live?" asked poor Imogen. "Or what comfort shall I take in life when I am dead to my husband?"

Pisanio asked if she would like to return to Court, but Imogen declared she would have no more of Court, or father, or the clownish Cloten, who had so pestered her with his love suit. Pisanio said that if she would not stay at Court she could not remain in Britain, whereupon Imogen asked were there not other places in the world than Britain where the sun shone? In the volume of the world, the little isle of Britain was no more than a swan's nest in a great pool.

Pisanio was glad she was willing to think of other places, and went on to suggest a scheme, daring indeed, but which Imogen was only too glad to accept. This was nothing less than that Imogen should disguise herself as a page, and seek service with the Roman Ambassador, Lucius; then she could go with him to Rome, where she would be living near Leonatus, and, even if she did not see him, she could hear hourly reports of his doings. Pisanio, with this end in view, had taken care to provide himself with the dress of a page, which he now handed over to Imogen. Lucius was to arrive on the following day at Milford Haven, and Pisanio advised Imogen to go there to meet him, and offer her services, which he would probably accept. Pisanio himself must now return to the palace, in case his absence should give rise to suspicion, but from the [Pg 406] mountain-top where they stood he pointed out Milford Haven, and it seemed within easy distance. Finally, before taking leave, he gave Imogen the little box of drugs which the Queen had presented to him, telling her that it contained some precious cordial that would cure her if ever she were ill. So the faithful servant bade farewell to his dearly loved mistress.

"Best draw my sword."

Poor Imogen set out with a brave heart on her perilous adventure, but the town that had looked so near seemed to recede as she walked towards it. For two days and nights she wandered on, almost spent with hunger, and making the ground her bed. At last she came to an opening in the side of the mountain, which looked as if it were used for some kind of habitation, for a path led to the low entrance. Imogen found it was a cave, evidently furnished for use. At first she was afraid to enter, not knowing what danger might lurk inside, but hunger made her valiant. She called, but no one answered.

"Ho! Who's there? If anything that's civil, speak. Ho! No answer? Then I'll enter. Best draw my sword; and if mine enemy but fear the sword as I do, he'll scarcely look at it. Grant such a foe, kind heaven!"

So, timid and quavering, in her boy's tunic, with her short, broad- [Pg 407] bladed sword gripped in her trembling hand, Imogen pushed aside the brushwood and entered the cave.

She had not long disappeared when the real owners of the cave approached. These were an elderly man of commanding presence and two noble-looking youths of twenty-two and twenty-three years old. In spite of their rustic and almost savage garb of hunters, there was an air of unmistakable distinction about all three; to the frank brow and free step of the mountaineer the lads joined a princely grace of bearing which told of high birth and noble breeding.

Their appearance did not belie them, for these boys were no other than the two sons of Cymbeline, stolen in their infancy by a banished lord in revenge for an act of great injustice. Belarius had been a gallant soldier, first among the best, and much beloved by Cymbeline, by whose side he had often fought the Romans. But at the very height of his renown he was suddenly reduced to the deepest disgrace, not for any fault of his own, but because two villains, whose false oaths prevailed before his perfect honour, swore to Cymbeline that he was confederate with the Romans. Then followed his banishment and his theft of the two young Princes; and so for twenty years he had lived this wild life among the Welsh mountains, bringing up the boys as if they had been his own sons, and training them in all sorts of manly exercises. In this new existence Belarius called himself "Morgan"; Cymbeline's eldest son Guiderius went by the name of "Polydore"; and the younger, Arviragus, was known as "Cadwal."

Weary and hungry with a long day's hunting, and looking forward to a good meal from the [Pg 408] spoils of the chase, these three were about to enter their cave, when a sudden sign from Belarius

stopped the other two.

“Stay; come not in. But that it eats our victuals, I should think here were a fairy,” said Belarius.

“What’s the matter, sir?” asked Guiderius, the elder boy.

“By Jupiter, an angel! Or, if not, an earthly paragon! Behold divineness no elder than a boy!” cried Belarius, as Imogen, alarmed by the sound of voices, came to the entrance of the cave.

Terrified at the sight of these newcomers, who, for their part, stood gazing in bewilderment at this strange intruder, she began a hasty apology.

“Good masters, harm me not. Before I entered here, I called, and thought to have begged or bought what I have taken. Good troth, I have stolen nothing, and would not, though I had found gold strewed on the floor. Here’s money for my meat; I would have left it on the board as soon as I had made my meal, and parted with prayers for the provider.”

“Money, youth?” exclaimed the elder Prince disdainfully.

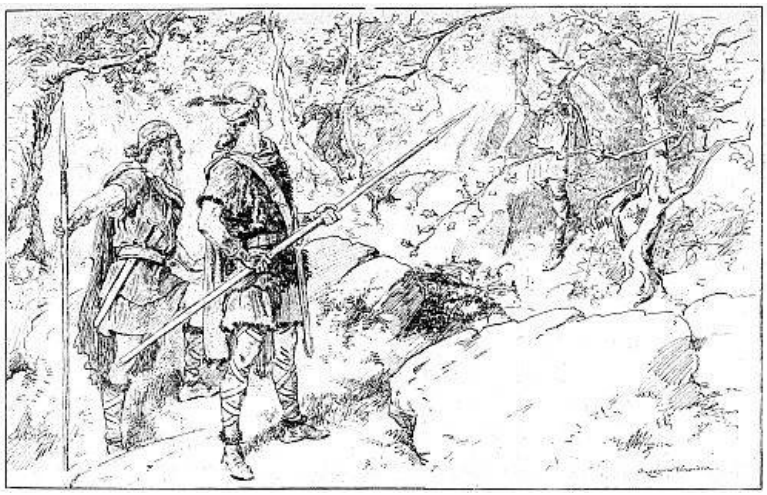
“All gold and silver rather turn to dirt!” added the second.

“I see you are angry,” said Imogen piteously. “Know, if you kill me for my fault, I should have died if I had not made it.”

“Whither bound?” asked Belarius.

“To Milford Haven.”

“What’s your name?” [Pg 409]



“Good masters, harm me not.”

“Fidele, sir. I have a kinsman who is bound for Italy; he embarked at Milford, to whom being on my way, almost spent with hunger, I am fallen into this offence.” [Pg 410] [Pg 411]

“Prithee, fair youth, think us no churls, nor measure our good minds by this rude place we live in,” said Belarius kindly. “Well encountered! ’Tis almost night; you shall have better cheer ere you depart, and thanks to stay and eat it. Boys, bid him welcome.”

At Belarius’s words the two young Princes stepped forward, and with the most courteous grace did their best to comfort the timid wayfarer, trying with gentle words to put him at his ease, and saying affectionately they would love and welcome him like a brother.

And so, cheered and comforted, and led by the younger lad’s arm thrown protectingly around her, the poor wanderer entered the rude cave, which love and courtesy made so fair an abiding-place.

Fidele

The absence of Imogen was not long in being discovered at Court. The Queen secretly rejoiced, for she hoped that Imogen had either killed herself in despair, or gone to rejoin her husband, in which latter case she would be too deeply dishonoured ever to return. Either of these would forward the Queen’s aim, for Imogen being disposed of, she would have the placing of the British crown.

Cymbeline was so enraged at his daughter’s disappearance that no one dared go near him. But Cloten, meeting Pisanio as he returned to the palace, forced from him the letter which Leonatus had written to Imogen, telling her to meet him at Milford Haven. This put into Cloten’s boorish head a brilliant scheme of revenge. He had not forgotten Imogen’s disdainful taunt that she held in more respect “the meanest garment” of Leonatus than the noble person of Cloten, together with the adornment of his qualities. Cloten now procured from Pisanio a suit of clothes that had belonged to Leonatus. He intended to dress himself in these, and to go in pursuit of Imogen. He reckoned on finding her at Milford Haven with her husband, where he promised himself the pleasure of slaying Leonatus in front of her eyes, in the very garments she had seen fit to honour so much, after which he intended to drive Imogen back to Court with the roughest and most insulting treatment he could devise. [Pg 412]

Such was the alluring plan which presented itself to the brain of this amiable creature, but the reality did not happen quite in accordance with the design he had sketched.

Following in the track of Imogen, he managed to trace her to the cave which now sheltered her. There, happening to fall in with Belarius and the two young Princes, Cloten at once began his usual style of bullying insult. Recognising him for the Queen's son, and fearing some ambush which threatened danger to them, Belarius and Arviragus started to search for any enemies that might be hidden near, leaving the elder lad to deal with the intruder. The haughty spirit of Guiderius was certainly not framed to brook the uncalled-for insolence of this blusterer, and when Cloten addressed him as "a robber, a law breaker, a villain," and bade him "Yield thee, thief!" Guiderius retorted with equal scorn. [Pg 413]

"Hence," he said disdainfully, "thou art some fool; I am loath to beat thee."

"Thou injurious thief, hear but my name, and tremble," cried the silly youth.

"What's thy name?"

"Cloten, thou villain."

"Cloten, thou double villain, be thy name, I cannot tremble at it," said Guiderius contemptuously. "Were it Toad, or Adder, or Spider, it would move me sooner."

"To thy further fear—nay, to thy utter confusion—thou shalt know I am son to the Queen," said Cloten braggingly.

"I am sorry for it, not seeming so worthy as thy birth."

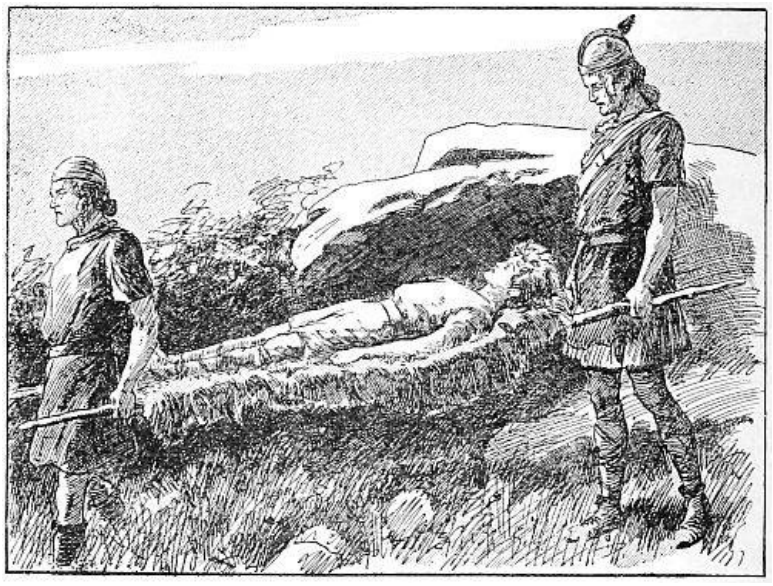
"Art not afraid?" demanded Cloten.

"Those that I reverence, those I fear—the wise," answered Guiderius. "At fools I laugh, not fear them."

"Die the death!" cried Cloten, springing at him. "When I have slain thee with my own hand, I'll follow those that even now fled hence, and on the gates of Lud's town set your heads. Yield, rustic mountaineer."

But the "rustic mountaineer" had no intention of yielding, and it was the head of the foolish Cloten that presently paid the penalty for its owner's blustering insolence.

Safe in the love and protection of her unknown brothers, Imogen had lived for some few days in their cave, making bright the rude dwelling with little womanly graces. Her new friends had taken her straight to their hearts, and in especial Arviragus, the younger Prince, felt for this [Pg 414] stranger a deep attachment which he was unable to explain. But all united in praise of Fidele. Belarius noted his noble bearing and gracious manners, which spoke of good breeding. "How angel-like he sings!" put in Arviragus; and Guiderius commended the daintiness of his cooking, which served dishes fit for the banquet of some goddess.



"Thou thy worldly task hast done."

But there came a day when Imogen could not attend as usual to her little household duties; she was very ill. Belarius bade her remain in the cave, and said they would come back to her after their hunting. Guiderius offered to remain at home with her, but Imogen would not hear of it. So, with many parting words of affection at last they left her. Remembering the little box of drugs [Pg 415] that Pisanio had given her as a wonderful cordial, Imogen now resolved to try its power. But instead of curing her at once, the effect, as the good physician Cornelius had foreseen, was to send her off into a heavy sleep which seemed exactly like death.

On their return from hunting, Arviragus, running into the cave to look for Imogen, found her lying on the floor, her hands clasped, her right cheek reposing on a cushion. Thinking her asleep, Arviragus took off his rough brogues, in order that he might tread softly. But alas, he soon found

that no step or voice could awaken Fidele from the smiling slumber in which he lay.

Stricken with grief, the two Princes prepared a bier to carry their dear young comrade to the place of burial, Arviragus saying that while summer lasted, and as long as he lived near, he would sweeten the sad grave with fairest flowers.

Then, as they bore him on the bier, they spoke in turn a tender dirge, for their hearts were too full of grief to allow them to sing it.

"Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
  Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
  Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

"Fear no more the frown o' the great;
  Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;
Care no more to clothe and eat;
  To thee the reed is as the oak;
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

[Pg 416]

"Fear no more the lightning flash,
  Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone,
Fear not slander, censure rash,
  Thou hast finished joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

"No exorciser harm thee!
 Nor no witchcraft charm thee
 Ghost unlaid forbear thee!
 Nothing ill come near thee!
 Quiet consummation have;
 And renowned be thy grave!"

Grief for the loss of Imogen had for a moment caused the death of Cloten to be forgotten; but Belarius reminded the young Princes that, after all, he was a Queen's son, and though they had killed him as a foe, they must bury him as a Prince. Fetching the dead body, therefore, they placed it not far from the bier where Imogen lay, and strewed both with flowers.

Soon after the mourners had retired, Imogen woke from the sleep into which the drug had thrown her. As she recovered her dazed senses, she presently became aware that near at hand lay a dead man, and recognising the garments of Leonatus, she at once took for granted that it was indeed her husband who had been thus cruelly slain. Struck to the heart by this new sorrow, she flung herself half fainting on the body, and there soon afterwards she was found by the Roman General, Lucius. Pitying her desolate condition, for he thought this lad in his page's dress was weeping over his dead master, Lucius took Imogen into his own service.

On hearing of Cymbeline's refusal to pay tribute, the Roman Emperor lost no time in sending [Pg 417] over an army to enforce his demand. The rival forces met near Milford Haven, not far from the cave of Belarius. Hearing the noise of warfare, Belarius first suggested flight to the upper mountains for better security, but the noble spirit of the two young Princes scorned such cowardly counsel, and they boldly determined to throw in their lot with the British in fighting the enemy of their country.

Leonatus also at this crisis had returned from Rome, and, disguised as a poor soldier, he fought in the ranks of the British. Meeting Iachimo, who was commanding the Roman troops, Leonatus fought with him on the battle-field and vanquished him. The proud Roman was deeply mortified that a noble knight like himself should be overcome and disarmed by one whom he imagined to be a low churl. Repentance for the base way in which he had behaved to Imogen stirred in his heart; he thought it was the guilt and heaviness of his own soul that in this combat had unnerved his manhood and enfeebled his arm. As for Leonatus, he fought in reckless despair, his grief for Imogen's murder, which he believed Pisanio to have carried out, making him long for the death which seemed to shun him.

The valour of Guiderius and Arviragus had soon an opportunity of displaying itself. The British, sorely bested, were in act of flight, and Cymbeline had been captured by the Romans, when Belarius and the two Princes went to his assistance, and with the aid of Leonatus succeeded in rescuing the King. By their desperate courage they drove back the flying Britons, and forced them to rally and resist the foe, and finally achieve a brilliant victory. [Pg 418]

After the skirmish, some British soldiers coming across Leonatus, took him for a fugitive from the Romans, and put him into prison. Leonatus was ready to welcome bondage, for it was a way, as he looked at it, to liberty. Death was the key that would unbar those locks; his conscience was more heavily fettered than his limbs. It was not enough to be sorry; he longed to die. For Imogen's dear life, which he had stolen from her, he would gladly yield up his own.

When, therefore, the gaolers came the following morning to lead him forth to death, Leonatus

told them he was more than ready—he was merrier to die than they to live. Another messenger arriving with an order that his fetters were to be knocked off, and that he was to be conducted to the King. Leonatus followed him willingly, believing that at last the moment for death had come.

Cymbeline was seated in his tent, and at his side stood his three preservers—the aged warrior, with white flowing beard, and the two gallant striplings. A fourth was missing, and Cymbeline lamented for him—a poor soldier, he said, who fought so nobly that his rags shamed gilded arms. Anyone who found him should receive the highest favour from the King. No one could give tidings of this hero, but Cymbeline proceeded to confer the honour of knighthood on the three other champions, and to appoint them companions to his own person, with dignities becoming their estate.

At this moment there came an interruption,—Cornelius, the physician, entered; he brought the news that the wicked Queen's life was ended, and that before her death she had confessed all her villainy—her duplicity towards Imogen, and her intention of poisoning both her and Cymbeline, in order to secure the crown for her own son. The strange disappearance of Cloten, for whose sake she had wrought so much evil, and the consequent failure of all her schemes, made her grow desperate, and so in despair she died. Cymbeline could not but be moved by the account of this unsuspected treachery on the part of his wife, for she was as beautiful in person as she was wicked in mind, and he had been quite deceived by her. His thoughts now began to turn with tenderness to the innocent daughter whom he had treated with such unjust severity. [Pg 419]

Lucius, the Roman General, was next led as prisoner before the King. He was ready to accept with manly dignity the doom of death which he presumed would be meted out to him, but he petitioned as a last favour that the life of his little page might be spared.

"Never master had a page so kind, so duteous, diligent, so tender on occasion, so deft and careful," pleaded Lucius. "He hath done no Briton harm, though he hath served a Roman. Save him, sir, and spare no blood beside."

Lucius's generous plea was scarcely needed, for Cymbeline, touched by some deep feeling which he could not explain, had already been won over to the boy's side, and now not only granted him his life, but said he might ask what favour he chose, even if it were to demand the noblest prisoner taken.

Lucius naturally expected that Fidele would take this opportunity to beg for his master's life, but Imogen had seen Iachimo standing among the other prisoners, and noticing on his finger the diamond ring which she had given to Leonatus, she begged as her favour of the King that Iachimo should be bidden to say of whom he had received the ring. [Pg 420]

Iachimo, who had long bitterly repented of his unworthy deed, now made a true confession of all that had happened, lavishing praise on Leonatus and his peerless wife, and heaping all the blame upon himself. Leonatus, who had been standing in the background, unable to contain himself when he heard how cruelly he had been tricked, would gladly have killed Iachimo on the spot, and then died, himself, with grief and shame.

"O Imogen! My queen, my life, my wife!" he cried, frantic with despair at the tragedy he had himself wrought. "O Imogen, Imogen, Imogen!"

But, happily, the calamity was not past remedy. Imogen herself was at hand, and soon everything was put right. Belarius restored to Cymbeline the two boys stolen in infancy, and in the joy of finding them again, Cymbeline pardoned the offender.

"I lost my children," he said; "if these be they, I know not how to wish a pair of worthier sons."

The young Princes welcomed with rapture their dear young comrade Fidele, whom they had mourned as dead, and who was now given back to them as their own beloved sister.

To Caius Lucius, the Roman General, Cymbeline, with royal generosity, announced that though the victor, he would henceforth pay to Augustus Cæsar the rightful tribute he demanded, which his wicked Queen had dissuaded him from doing. [Pg 421]

The poor soldier whom Cymbeline was desirous of thanking turned out to be no other than Leonatus, his own son-in-law.

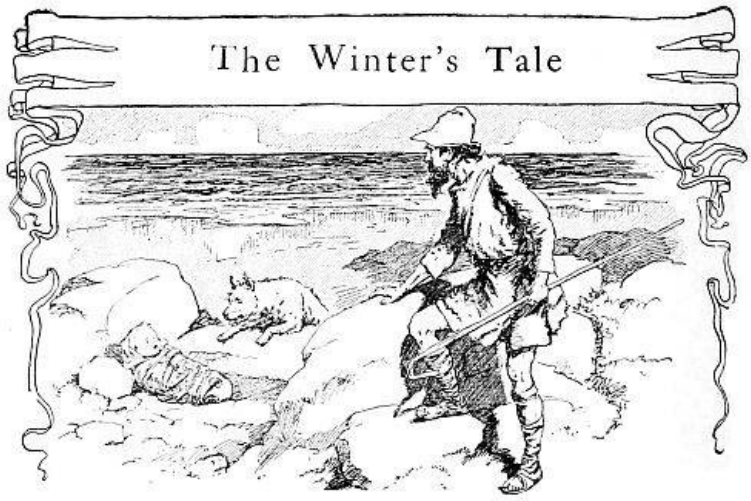
Even Iachimo met with mercy. In deep contrition he knelt before Leonatus, saying humbly:

"Take that life, I beseech you, which I owe you; but your ring first; and here the bracelet of the truest Princess that ever swore her faith."

"Kneel not to me," said Leonatus. "The power that I have over you is to spare you; the malice towards you, to forgive you; live, and deal with others better."

"Nobly doomed!" pronounced Cymbeline. "We will learn generosity of our son-in-law. Pardon's the word to all."

[Pg 422]



At the Palace of Leontes

eontes, King of Sicilia, and Polixenes, King of Bohemia, had always been the closest and dearest friends. Trained together in childhood, and as boys never apart, a deep-rooted affection had sprung up between them, and when the necessities of their royal birth and dignities made separation necessary, by calling each to rule over his own kingdom, they still kept up the warmest intercourse by gifts, letters, and loving embassies. Both in due course married. Hermione, wife of Leontes, was a noble and beautiful woman, and they had one child, a princely boy called Mamillius. Polixenes, in Bohemia, had also one boy, Florizel, within a month of the same age as Mamillius. When the children were five [Pg 423] years old, Polixenes came to pay a visit to Leontes, and for many months he remained in Sicilia, renewing the happy days of boyhood with his old friend, and made cordially welcome by Hermione for the sake of her husband.

But at last the time came when Polixenes must turn his steps homeward; he had been long absent from Bohemia, and matters of state required his presence. Leontes pressed him warmly to remain, even if it were only for a few days longer, but Polixenes was firm. Then Leontes bade his wife try her powers of persuasion. Glad to please her husband, and liking their visitor for his own sake, Hermione merrily announced that she absolutely refused to let Polixenes go. It was useless for him to pretend excuses; Bohemia was getting on very well without him. Polixenes must learn, she said, that a lady's "Verily" was just as potent as a lord's; and she had said "Verily" he must stay, either as her prisoner or her guest—he could take his choice, whichever he preferred, but one of them he certainly should be.

Polixenes could not be so churlish as to resist such a sweet pleader, and accordingly he said he would stay for another week. But no sooner was this point settled than a strange fit of jealous rage took possession of Leontes. To his unhappy temper it seemed that Hermione was showing far too much affection to this friend of his, and he was enraged that Polixenes had consented to do for her what he had refused to do for himself. With growing wrath he watched their light-hearted cordiality, for Hermione was gay and joyous by nature, and her innocent playfulness was always ready to sparkle forth in merry words. Instead of trying to banish his sullen suspicions [Pg 424] Leontes chose to keep brooding over them, and presently they overmastered his reason to such an extent that he confided them to one of his lords, called Camillo, and ordered him to find means of poisoning Polixenes.

In vain did the honest old courtier try to argue with Leontes, begging him to put aside such delusions, for they were most dangerous, and protesting there was no truth whatever in them. Leontes refused to listen to reason, and Camillo thought the best plan was to appear to yield. He therefore said he would undertake to get rid of Polixenes, provided that after he was gone, Leontes would promise to treat his Queen exactly the same as formerly. This, Leontes replied, it was his intention to do.

Camillo, however, instead of poisoning Polixenes, warned him of the danger he was in, and the King of Bohemia, already put on his guard by the frowning looks which met him in all directions, determined to leave at once. Knowing that it would be impossible to continue in the service of Leontes when the latter discovered what he had done, Camillo accepted an offer from Polixenes to join his followers, and the two left Sicilia that very night.

Leontes, hearing of their hasty departure, was more convinced than ever in his suspicions, and in spite of the indignant remonstrances of all his lords, his next step was to order the imprisonment of his noble Queen. Not long after she was shut up in prison, Hermione had a little baby girl, but in his fury against his wife Leontes refused to see his little daughter, or to treat her in any way as a child of his own.

All the Court ladies were devoted to their beloved Queen, and not one of them but believed in her innocence, and was indignant at the cruel way in which she was treated. But not contented with simply pitying her, one of them, Paulina, wife of the lord Antigonus, determined to make an effort to get justice done. She thought that perhaps at the sight of the innocent little child, the King's stubborn heart might relent. Paulina was a woman of firm and dauntless character. She went to the prison, calmly carried off the infant in the face of some feeble objections from the gaoler, then, proceeding to the palace, she insisted on making her way into the presence of the King. Leontes ordered her to be removed, but the spirited lady drew herself up with such an air of defiance that for a moment no man dared lay hands on her. [Pg 425]

"Of my own accord I will go, but first I'll do my errand," she said haughtily. Then, kneeling before the King, she placed the child at his feet. "The good Queen—for she is good—hath brought you forth a daughter," she said. "Here it is; she commends it to your blessing."

But her appeal was useless. With uncontrolled fury Leontes bade her be gone, and to take the child with her. Paulina cared nothing for his wild torrent of abuse, but unflinchingly expressed her opinion that he was acting in a most senseless manner, and said that his cruel usage of the Queen would make him scandalous to the world.

The outspoken lady was at last hustled away, but she left the child behind her, bidding the King look to it. Paulina's husband, Antigonus, had taken up the infant in pity, and now Leontes turned on him with fury, accusing him of having set on his wife, and ordering him to take away the child and kill it. [Pg 426]

"She commends it to your blessing."

Antigonus respectfully denied that he had set on his wife, and the other lords confirmed what he said, and further besought on their knees that Leontes would relent from his horrible purpose.

Softening a little, Leontes grudgingly consented that the child might live, but he forthwith commanded Antigonus, on his allegiance, to carry it away to some remote and desert place quite [Pg 427] out of his dominions, and there leave it, without more mercy, to its own protection and the favour of the climate. Chance might nurse it, or end it.

Antigonus, though sore at heart, did as he had sworn to the King he would do, and carried away the child. That night, as he was in the ship that conveyed them away from the domain of Sicilia, there came to him a dream. The spirit of Hermione stood before him, clad in pure white robes, her eyes flashing fire. When their fury was spent, she spoke thus:

"Good Antigonus, since Fate, against thy better disposition, had made thy person for the thrower-out of my poor babe, according to thine oath, there are places remote enough in Bohemia; there weep, and leave it crying. And because the babe is counted lost for ever, prithee call it Perdita. For this ungentle business, put on thee by my lord, thou never more shalt see thy wife Paulina."

And so, wailing, the vision melted into the air.

In accordance with this dream, Antigonus carried the babe into the country of Bohemia. Unable to weep, but his heart bleeding for pity at the cruel deed which his oath enjoined on him, he placed it tenderly on the ground. As he turned away he was pursued by a savage bear, which made him take to instant flight. He had not, therefore, the happiness of knowing that the little child found a speedy preserver, for within a few minutes an aged shepherd, in search of some strayed sheep, came that way.

"Good luck, what have we here?" he cried in astonishment. "Mercy on us, a bairn!—a very [Pg 428] pretty bairn! A boy or a girl I wonder. A pretty one—a very pretty one! I'll take it up for pity; yet I'll tarry till my son come. He hallooed but even now. Whoa, ho, hoa!"

The shepherd's son, coming up to wonder over the strange discovery, soon noticed there was a heap of gold hidden away in the costly wrappings of the little foundling, and rejoicing in their luck, the rustics carried Perdita home to their shepherd's cottage.

The Oracle Speaks

Leontes, in order to avoid the reproach of tyranny which he feared his people had only too much reason to fasten on him, decreed that the Queen should be openly tried in a court of justice, and herself appear in person to answer the charges he had seen fit to bring against her. He had despatched messengers to the Temple of Apollo, at Delphos, to consult the Oracle, and on their return the trial was appointed to take place. The messengers had brought back the answer of the Oracle in a sealed cover, and at the proper moment during the trial the seals would be broken and the verdict would be read in open court.

Hermione's answer to the accusations brought against her was an indignant denial. She declared that she had never had for Polixenes more affection than was right and fitting for any honourable lady to have for her guest, such an affection as Leontes himself had commanded her to bestow on the friend who had loved him from infancy. She had never conspired with Camillo against Leontes; all she knew was that Camillo was an honest man, and she was entirely ignorant [Pg 429] why he had left the court.

The only effect these words had on Leontes was to make him more violent than before. He told his wife that as she had already been past all shame, so she was now past all truth, and he threatened her with the punishment of death.

"Sir, spare your threats," said Hermione with noble dignity. "The spectre you would frighten me with, I seek. To me life is no great thing to be desired. The crown and comfort of my life—your favour—is lost, for I feel it to be gone, though I know not how it went. My second joy—my first-born child—I am debarred from his presence, like one infectious. My third comfort—my dear little innocent baby—has been torn from me. I have myself been branded with disgrace on every hand. And, lastly, I have been hurried here to this place, in the open court, while I am still weak and ill, and unfitted to appear. Now, my liege, tell me what blessings I have here while I am alive, that I should fear to die? Therefore proceed. But yet, hear this: mistake me not, I do not beg for life; I prize it not a straw. But for mine honour, I will not have that condemned without any proof except what your jealous surmises awake. My lords, I refer me to the Oracle. Apollo be my judge!"

The councillors present declared that Hermione's request was altogether just, and ordered the messengers from Delphos to be summoned. The latter then handed to the officer of the court the sealed letter from the Oracle, which he forthwith opened and read in the presence of all. [Pg 430]

The Oracle spoke thus:

> "Hermione is innocent; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes a jealous tyrant; the innocent babe is his daughter; and the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found."

"Now blessed be the great Apollo!" shouted all the lords.

"Praised!" cried Hermione.

"Hast thou read truth?" demanded Leontes.

“Ay, my lord, even so as it is here set down,” said the officer of the court.

“There is no truth at all in the Oracle,” exclaimed Leontes. “The trial shall proceed; this is mere falsehood.”

But at that instant came a terrible shock to the headstrong King. A servant entered with the mournful tidings that the young Prince, the noble boy Mamillius, was dead. The separation from his beloved mother, and dread as to her possible fate, had so wrought on the imagination of the sensitive child that he had died of grief.

On hearing of this new calamity, Hermione’s fortitude gave way, and she fell fainting to the ground.

Leontes’s stubborn spirit began to quail. He saw in this blow the wrath of heaven against his injustice. He admitted that he had too much believed his suspicions; he ordered that the Queen should be carried away, and every remedy tenderly applied to restore her to life.

In his new terror he hastily began to make good resolutions. He would be reconciled with Polixenes; he would woo the Queen again; he would recall Camillo, whom he forthwith proclaimed a man of mercy and truth, for by his piety and humanity he had saved the life of Polixenes when Leontes would have poisoned him. [Pg 431]

But these good resolves came too late. Even as Leontes was speaking, Paulina rushed back into the court, weeping and wringing her hands. With burning words that went straight to the truth, she hurled the bitterest reproaches at the King, denouncing his tyranny and worse than childish jealousy, which had led to one evil after another. He had betrayed Polixenes, attempted to poison Camillo’s honour, cast forth to the crows his baby daughter, had indirectly brought about the death of the young Prince. But last, beyond all these things—worst of all—the Queen was dead!

“O, thou tyrant!” she cried, almost distracted with grief. “Do not repent these things, for they are heavier than all thy woes can stir; therefore betake thee to nothing but despair. A thousand knees, ten thousand years together, naked, fasting, upon a barren mountain, and still winter, in storm perpetual, could not move the gods to look on thee with pity.”

“Go on, go on,” murmured the conscience-stricken Leontes. “I have deserved all tongues to talk their bitterest.”

Paulina, seeing that Leontes was sincere in his repentance, now softened, and in her impulsive fashion asked pardon for her rash and impetuous words. But Leontes was honest enough to own that she had spoken nothing but truth, and he would not let her retract what she had said.

“Prithee, bring me to the dead bodies of my wife and son,” he said. “One grave shall be for both; on it shall appear the cause of their death, for my perpetual shame. Once a day I’ll visit the chapel where they lie, and tears shed there shall be my recreation.” [Pg 432]

So the unhappy King strove in vain by a tardy penance to atone for the wrongs he had done.

A Queen of Curds and Cream

Sixteen years had rolled away since the day when the shepherd had found the little deserted baby, and taken it to his own cottage. The old man had prospered since those days, and from having almost nothing had risen to large estates. The maiden who passed as his daughter had grown into such rare loveliness that the report of her beauty spread through all the country of Bohemia, and even reached the palace of the King.

Polixenes, it will be remembered, had one son, Florizel, who was the same age as the young Prince Mamillius of Sicilia, dead sixteen years before. Prince Florizel at this time was about twenty-one years old.

It happened one day when he was out hawking that his falcon flew across the land belonging to the shepherd, and seeing Perdita, Florizel was so struck by her charm and beauty that he at once fell in love with her. From that day he was a constant visitor at the shepherd’s house, so much so that the King, his father, noticed his frequent absence from home, and taking counsel with Camillo, they decided to go themselves to the shepherd’s house in disguise to see what could be the attraction that was always taking the Prince to this homely dwelling.

The day they chose for their expedition was the great feast of the sheep-shearing, when all the shepherds and shepherdesses collected together to make merry. Among the company, in the guise of a shepherd, came Florizel, who was only known to the adopted father of Perdita as Doricles, and whom he imagined to be nothing but a humble swain. [Pg 433]

The old shepherd had provided a goodly entertainment for his guests, and seeing that Perdita was inclined to be too shy and retiring, he insisted on her taking full direction of everything, reminding her that she was the hostess of the meeting, and that she must bid all these unknown friends welcome.

“Come, quench your blushes, and present yourself that which you are, mistress of the feast,” he said. “Come on, and bid us welcome to your sheep-shearing; so your good flock shall prosper.”

Thus urged, Perdita made a brave effort to conquer her girlish shyness, and with the prettiest grace possible she went up to the two strangers whom her father had pointed out, and bade them welcome. These strangers were Polixenes and Camillo. Calling to her a shepherdess who was carrying a basket of flowers, Perdita selected some and gave a little posy to each of the strangers.

“Reverend sirs, for you there’s rosemary and rue; these keep seeming and savour all the winter long. Grace and remembrance be to you both, and welcome to our shearing.”

Polixenes and Camillo were enchanted with the loveliness and modest grace of this lowly-born damsel, who, in spite of her bashfulness, showed that she could answer with wit and intelligence when they began to converse with her. For the King and Camillo, Perdita had chosen the flowers [Pg 434] of middle summer—hot lavender, mint, savory, marjoram, the marigold that goes to bed with the sun and with him rises weeping. These are the flowers of middle summer, and these she thought suitable to give to men of middle age. But when a bevy of fair young shepherdesses approached, in all the first sweet bloom of early girlhood, she longed to have some flowers of the spring that would become their time of day.

“O Proserpina, for the flowers now, that frighted thou let’st fall from Dis’s waggon!” she cried. “Daffodils, that come before the swallow dares, and take the winds of March with beauty; violets dim, but sweeter than the lids of Juno’s eyes, or Cytherea’s breath; pale primroses, that die unmarried ere they can behold bright Phœbus in his strength; bold oxlips, and the crown imperial; lilies of all kinds, the flower-de-luce being one. O, these I lack, to make you garlands of!”

“This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever ran on green-sward!” cried Polixenes when, a few minutes later, Perdita led off with Florizel the rustic dance of shepherds and shepherdesses. “Nothing she does or seems but smacks of something greater than herself, too noble for this place.”

“Good sooth,” agreed Camillo, “she is the Queen of curds and cream.”

“Pray, good shepherd, what fair swain is this who dances with your daughter?” asked Polixenes of their aged host.

The shepherd replied that he was called Doricles, and boasted that he was well off; he had it only on the young man’s own report, but he believed it, for he looked like truth. [Pg 435]

“He says he loves my daughter; I think so too. And, to be plain, I think there is not half a kiss to choose which loves the other best.”

“She dances featly,” said the King.

“So she does everything, though I report it who should be silent. If young Doricles do light upon her, she shall bring him that which he dreams not of.”

But in spite of the King’s admiration for Perdita, he had no mind that the heir to the throne of Bohemia should wed the daughter of a lowly shepherd. As the feast went on and became merrier and more uproarious, Florizel could no longer restrain his affection; and calling the two strangers as witness, he begged that the contract of marriage between himself and Perdita should be there and then concluded.

The aged shepherd was quite willing to join their hands, but Polixenes bade the young man pause. Had he no father, he asked, and did he know of this?

“He neither does nor shall,” replied Florizel.

“Methinks a father is, at the nuptial of his son, a guest that best becomes the table,” said Polixenes. Was the father incapable, stupid with age or illness, crazy, childish?

“No,” answered Florizel to all this; but he nevertheless persisted in refusing to let him know what was taking place.

Then Polixenes threw off his disguise and revealed himself as the King. All was now consternation. He terrified the shepherd by saying he would probably be hanged for letting his daughter entrap the young Prince; he commanded Florizel to part instantly from Perdita, and follow him to the Court; and he threatened the maiden with cruel death if ever she dared [Pg 436] henceforth to encourage his son by the slightest word or caress.

The old shepherd was in despair at the King’s displeasure, for it meant ruin to them all, and perhaps a shameful death for himself. Perdita prepared with a breaking heart to give up her lover. She had often warned him what would come of this; she was no fitting mate for a Prince. Her dream of happiness was over.

“Being now awake, I’ll queen it no inch further, but milk my ewes and weep,” she murmured sorrowfully.

But Florizel had no intention of giving up the bride to whom he had plighted his troth. Not for Bohemia, nor for all the pomp that the sun saw, or the earth held, or the sea hid, would he break his oath to his beloved.

Camillo, who had remained behind when Polixenes wrathfully departed, tried to reason with the Prince. But Florizel was resolute. For some time, fearing a possible event such as had now happened, he had had a ship prepared for flight, which was riding at anchor close by. He bade Camillo return to Court and inform Polixenes that he had put to sea with Perdita; what course he meant to hold it would be better for Camillo not to know or the Prince to tell.

A plan now occurred to the good Camillo by which he hoped to benefit every one concerned. He still kept a warm feeling of affection for his late master, Leontes, and often during his sixteen years of exile he had longed to return to Sicilia. He now proposed to Florizel that he should carry Perdita to the Court of Leontes, where they would be certain to receive the warmest welcome from the repentant King, who would be anxious to make every possible amends to the son for the [Pg 437]

way in which he had treated the father. Camillo, meanwhile, would stay with Polixenes, and do everything in his power to soften his resentment and reconcile him to his son's marriage.

The Oracle Fulfilled

After the departure of Florizel and Perdita, the shepherd's son, seeing the despair of the old man because of the disgrace he had fallen into, counselled him to go and tell the King that Perdita was no daughter of his.

"There is no other way but to tell the King she is a changeling, and none of your flesh and blood," he declared. "She being none of your flesh and blood, your flesh and blood has not offended the King, and so your flesh and blood is not to be punished by him. Show those things you found about her, those secret things, all but what she has with her. This being done, let the law go whistle, I warrant you."

"I will tell the King all, every word," said the timorous old man. "Yea, and his son's pranks, too, who, I may say, is no honest man, neither to his father nor to me, to go about to make me the King's brother-in-law."

The worthy rustics at once put their intention into practice, and hearing that the King had already left the palace in pursuit of his son, they followed him to the seaside, to deliver over the things which had been found with the deserted infant.

Since the death of Hermione, Leontes had lived a life of penance and gravity, devoting himself [Pg 438] to the memory of his lost wife and son. Some of his councillors would fain have persuaded the King to marry again, but the impetuous lady, Paulina, faithful to her deeply-wronged mistress, declared that there was no lady living that could be compared with her, or was fit to take her position as Queen. Paulina reminded Leontes also of the words of the Oracle, which had said that there would be no heir to the throne until that which was lost was found.

Leontes, who was much more tractable than of old, and who knew now how to value the unflinching honesty of this outspoken lady, replied that he would never marry again until Paulina herself bade him do so.

"That shall be when your first Queen breathes again—never till then," said Paulina. And matters were in this state when Florizel and Perdita reached Sicilia.

The young pair received the warmest welcome from Leontes, but closely following their arrival came a messenger from Polixenes, begging Leontes to seize hold of the Prince, who, casting off both his dignity and duty, had fled from his father, and from his hopes, with a shepherd's daughter. Polixenes himself had arrived in Sicilia, bringing with him the old shepherd, the seeming father of Perdita.

But the momentary cloud was soon dispelled, and great and unexpected joy filled the whole country. The things which the aged shepherd had taken to Polixenes furnished full proof that the rescued little babe was no other than the long-lost daughter of Leontes. The mantle of Queen Hermione; her jewel on the neck of it; letters of Antigonus found with it, which they knew to be in [Pg 439] his handwriting; the majesty of Perdita herself, which so closely resembled her mother; the nobility of her bearing, which nature showed was above her breeding, and many other evidences, proclaimed her with all certainty to be the King's daughter.

All was now rejoicing. Bonfires were lighted, and crowds ran about the streets, gossiping over the news, and wondering at all the strange things that were taking place. The meeting of the two Kings, it was reported, was a sight never to be forgotten—such a weeping for joy, casting up of eyes, and holding up of hands. Leontes, overcome with rapture at finding his daughter again, one moment embraced her, the next cried, "O, thy mother, thy mother!" Then he asked forgiveness of Polixenes; then embraced his son-in-law; once more flung his arms round his daughter; now thanked the old shepherd, who stood by like a weather-beaten relic of many Kings' reigns.

So with Paulina, joy and sorrow strove for utterance at the sight of the young Princess. One moment she wept for the loss of her husband, whom the shepherd's son had seen killed by the bear, the next she was filled with rapture that the oracle was fulfilled. She lifted the Princess from the ground, and so locked her in an embrace, as if she would pin her to her heart that she might no more be in danger of losing her.

The Princess was told of her mother's death, with the manner how she came by it, bravely confessed and lamented by the King himself. Hearing that there was a wonderful statue of the Queen, which had taken many years to make, and which was just completed, and in the keeping of Paulina, Perdita was most desirous to see it, and thither the royal party and all their company [Pg 440] of lords and ladies now went.

On arriving at Paulina's house, Leontes looked all about for the statue, but though Paulina led them through a gallery rich with many rare and beautiful objects, they did not see there what Perdita had come to look upon—the statue of her mother. At last they reached the chapel, and Leontes ventured to remind Paulina of the object of their visit.

"As she lived peerless," replied Paulina, "so her dead likeness, I do well believe, excels whatever yet you looked upon, or hand of man hath done; therefore I keep it lonely, apart. But here it is; prepare to see the life as vividly mocked as ever still sleep mocked death; behold, and say 'tis well!"

Paulina drew back a curtain, and there, beautiful and motionless before their eyes, stood the majestic image of the dead Queen.

For a moment they stood mute and breathless, gazing in amazement, for surely artist's cunning had never wrought so wonderful a representation of life.

"I like your silence," said Paulina; "it the more shows off your wonder. But yet, speak. First you, my liege; comes it not something near?"

"Her natural posture!" murmured Leontes. "Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed thou art Hermione; or, rather, thou art she in thy not chiding, for she was as tender as infancy and grace. But yet, Paulina, Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing so aged, as this seems."

"O, not by much," said Polixenes. [Pg 441]

"O, thus she stood ... when first I wooed her!"

"So much the more our carver's excellence," said Paulina, "which lets go by some sixteen years, and makes her as if she lived now." [Pg 442] [Pg 443]

"As now she might have done," sighed Leontes. "O, thus she stood, even with such life of majesty, warm life, as now it coldly stands, when first I wooed her!"

"Give me leave," said Perdita, "and do not say 'tis superstition that I kneel and then implore her blessing. Lady, dear Queen, that ended when I but began, give me that hand of yours to kiss."

"O, patience!" said Paulina. "The statue is but newly fixed; the colour is not dry."

She made a movement to draw the curtain, saying that if they looked much longer they would presently think the statue moved. But Leontes implored her to let him gaze at it longer, for the more he did so, the more lifelike it appeared; it seemed to breathe; there was light in the eyes; it recalled to him all his love and sorrow for the lost Hermione.

"Let no man mock me," he said, "for I will kiss it."

Paulina begged him to forbear, and again offered to draw the curtain, and again he prevented her.

“Either forbear, and at once leave the chapel, or prepare for further amazement,” said Paulina. “If you can behold it, I’ll make the statue move indeed, descend, and take you by the hand. But then you’ll think—which I protest against—I am assisted by wicked powers.”

“What you can make her do, I am content to look on,” said Leontes; “what to speak, I am content to hear; for it is as easy to make her speak as move.”

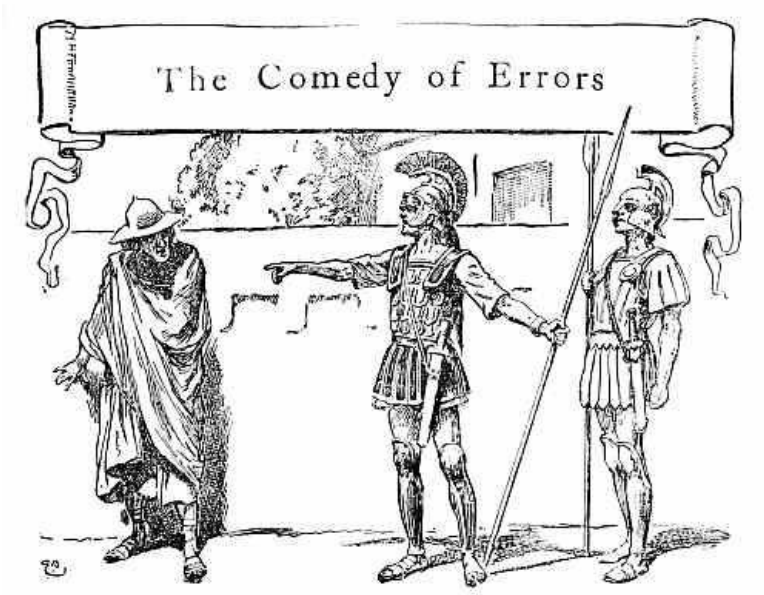
Then Paulina bade music sound, and as the soft strains floated through the chapel, the statue of Hermione stirred, stepped down from its place, and took Leontes by the hand. [Pg 444]

Yes, it was indeed Hermione, living and breathing, as she had parted from her husband sixteen years ago. His long sorrow and penance were over; henceforth he would live in tenderest affection with his deeply-cherished wife.

The faithful Paulina was not left to spend her latter years in loneliness. Antigonus was dead, but Leontes reminded her that as she had found a second wife for him, so he would find a second husband for her.

“I’ll not seek far,” he said, “to find thee an honourable husband, for I partly know his mind. Come, Camillo, and take by the hand this lady, whose worth and honesty are richly noted and here proclaimed by us, a pair of Kings.”

[Pg 445]



A Walk through Ephesus

here was once a merchant of Syracuse called Ægeon, who had two baby sons, the one so like the other that it was impossible to tell them apart. At the time these children were born Ægeon was travelling, for his business often compelled him to make long journeys. It happened that on the same day, and in the self-same inn, a poor woman had also twin sons. The parents being extremely poor, and those being the days of slavery, Ægeon bought and brought up these children to attend on his own sons. When they were still quite young, Ægeon and his wife started to return home. On the voyage [Pg 446] back a dreadful storm arose; the sailors saved themselves in a boat, but left the merchant, his wife, and the children on the doomed vessel. The wife, seeing the fate that threatened them, bound one of her children and one of the twin slaves to a small mast; the merchant was equally heedful of the other two boys, and the children being thus disposed of, the father and mother also bound themselves one to each mast.

Presently the storm abated; the sun again shone forth, and by his light the merchant saw two ships in the distance, making towards them, one of which seemed to be from Corinth, the other from Epidaurus. But before they could reach them, their own ship was driven violently against a huge rock and split in two. Parents and children were tossed into the sea; the mother and the two elder boys were picked up by the fishermen of Corinth, and at length the merchant and the other boys were rescued by the other ship. The latter would have pursued the fishermen and reft them of their prey, but that their ship was too slow of sail, so that they had to pursue their way homeward.

At eighteen years of age the youngest boy became inquisitive after his brother, and begged his father to let him go in quest of him, taking with him his attendant, who was in the like plight as himself. Ægeon, himself longing to behold once more the wife and son whom he had lost, at last gave a reluctant consent. So Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse departed on their voyage of discovery; but time passed, and they did not return. At last Ægeon determined to go himself in search of them. Five years he spent in furthest Greece, roaming through the bounds of [Pg 447]

Asia, till at last, coasting homeward, he came to Ephesus, hopeless of finding the lost boys, yet loath to leave unsought either that or any place which harboured men.

It happened at that time, owing to the enmity and discord between the towns of Ephesus and Syracuse, that it had been agreed in solemn synod by the citizens of both to admit no traffic with the adverse town. If any native of Ephesus were seen at Syracuse, or if any native of Syracuse came to the Bay of Ephesus, he was to die, and his goods were to be confiscated at the disposal of the Duke, unless he could levy a thousand marks to pay the penalty and ransom himself.

Ægeon, being a native of Syracuse, on arriving at Ephesus was arrested under this law, and brought before the Duke. His possessions not amounting to the value of even a hundred marks, he was condemned to die. The Duke of Ephesus, on hearing the pitiful tale which Ægeon related, would gladly, out of compassion, have released him, but it was not possible to recall the sentence of death which had been passed, unless the fine were paid. The Duke granted what favour lay in his power, and gave the merchant a day's grace, bidding him seek all the friends he had in Ephesus, and try to beg or borrow the sum required in order to save his life.

Unknown to Ægeon, it happened that not only the son of whom he was in search, but also the other son whom he had lost years before, was at that time in Ephesus. The latter had been settled there for many years, and was married to a wife called Adriana. Both sons of the merchant were [Pg 448] known by the same name—"Antipholus," and both their slave attendants were called "Dromio." The resemblance which had been so strong in the infancy of the two sets of twins still continued, and after the arrival in Ephesus of Antipholus and Dromio from Syracuse this resemblance was to lead to endless confusion.

The news that a merchant of Syracuse had been arrested soon spread through the city. Antipholus, who had just arrived after a long journey, was warned by a friendly merchant, who, paying him a large sum of money which he had in keeping for him, counselled Antipholus not to let it be known he came from Syracuse. Antipholus despatched his servant Dromio with the money back to the inn—the "Centaur"—where they were lodging, saying he would return there in an hour to dinner. In the meantime he intended to walk about and view the city, lamenting the while that he had not yet found the lost mother and brother of whom he was in search.

Much to the surprise of Antipholus, he presently saw a man approaching whom he took to be his servant Dromio. As a matter of fact, it was his servant's twin brother, who, for his part, mistook Antipholus for his own master.

"What now? How chances it you are returned so soon?" demanded Antipholus of Syracuse.

"Returned so soon? Rather approached too late," retorted Dromio of Ephesus. "The capon burns, the pig falls from the spit, the clock hath struck twelve——" And he went on to say that his mistress was very angry because the dinner was getting cold, and his master had not returned.

"Stop, sir!" said Antipholus, checking his rapid flow of words. "Tell me this, I pray: where have [Pg 449] you left the money I gave you?"

"O—sixpence that I had on Wednesday last to pay the saddler for my mistress's crupper? The saddler had it, sir; I did not keep it."

"I am not in a sportive humour now," said Antipholus sternly, for he knew that Dromio was a merry fellow, who loved a jest. "Tell me, and dally not, where is the money? We being strangers here, how dare you trust so great a charge out of your own custody?"

But Dromio persisted that Antipholus had given him no money, and kept on begging him to come home to his wife, who was waiting dinner for him at the Phœnix. Antipholus, at last quite losing his temper at what he imagined was his servant's impertinence, fell on him and began to beat him, whereupon Dromio took to his heels and disappeared.

"Upon my life," thought Antipholus, "the villain has been over-reached of all my money. They say this town is full of trickery—such as simple jugglers who deceive the eye, sorcerers and witches, disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks, and many such-like sinners. If it prove so, I will the sooner be gone. I'll go to the Centaur to seek this slave. I greatly fear my money is not safe."

Adriana, meanwhile, was greatly annoyed with her husband for not returning, and it was useless for her sister Luciana to counsel patience. When Dromio came back, and instead of bringing his master reported his strange behaviour, Adriana became more incensed than ever. [Pg 450]

"Go back again, thou slave, and fetch him home," she commanded angrily.

"Go back again, and be new beaten home?" said poor Dromio. "For heaven's sake, send some other messenger."

"Hence, prating peasant, fetch thy master home," cried the irate lady, threatening to strike him.

Dromio thought it discreet to obey, but he went off grumbling.

"You spurn me hence, and he will spurn me hither; if I continue in this service, you must case me in leather."

When the man had gone Luciana rebuked her sister for her impatience, saying that probably her husband was kept by business. But Adriana would not be soothed. She was full of jealous anger, declaring that she stayed at home neglected, while her husband amused himself abroad with merry companions; he was certainly tired of her, and had found some one he liked better.

“Self-harming jealousy! Fie, beat it hence!” said Luciana; but Adriana paid no heed to her wise counsels, preferring to make herself unhappy with groundless jealousy.

Antipholus of Syracuse, on reaching the Centaur Inn, found that his gold was perfectly safe, but he was still extremely annoyed with Dromio for his ill-timed jesting, and when the slave appeared, he asked him what he meant by behaving in such a fashion. Was he mad that he had answered him so madly?

Dromio, of course, replied that he had never seen his master since he parted from him until that moment; and he further asked, what did his master mean by such a jest? Enraged by this [Pg 451] apparent fresh impudence on the part of his slave, Antipholus began to beat him soundly.

But both master and man were to be still further bewildered, for at this moment up came two ladies, one of whom addressed Antipholus as if he were her husband, and began to reproach him for his unkind behaviour.

“How comes it that you are thus estranged?”

“Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown!” she said. “Some other lady has your sweet expression; I am not Adriana nor your wife. The time was once when you would vow that never words were music to your ear, that never object was pleasing to your eye, that never touch was welcome to your hand, that never meat was savoury to your taste, unless I spake, or looked, or touched, or carved it to you. How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it, that you are thus estranged from yourself? Ah, do not tear yourself away from me!” [Pg 452]

“Plead you to me, fair dame? I do not know you,” answered the bewildered Antipholus. “I have only been in Ephesus two hours; I am as strange to your town as to your talk; I cannot understand one word of what you say.”

“Fie, brother, how the world is changed with you!” said Luciana. “When were you wont to treat my sister thus? She sent a message by Dromio to tell you to come home to dinner.”

“By Dromio?” said Antipholus.

“By me?” echoed Dromio, who, of course, was not the one she had sent.

“By thee,” retorted Adriana; and she repeated the answer her own servant had brought back.

Antipholus began to think he must be dreaming, and had been married to Adriana in his sleep; but when both the ladies insisted on his going back with them to dinner, he allowed himself to be persuaded, and determined to see what would be the end of this strange adventure.

As for Dromio, he was told to act porter at the gate, and to let no one enter unless he wanted another beating.

Confusion worse Confounded

Dromio of Ephesus, who for the second time had been sent in search of his master, at last found him. Antipholus of Ephesus had been detained at the shop of a goldsmith, Angelo, who was making a chain for his wife. The chain was not yet completed, but was promised for a little later. Antipholus returned home, bringing with him as guests the goldsmith Angelo and a merchant [Pg 453] called Balthazar, but when they reached the house they were refused admittance. No argument or entreaty would induce the porter or the servants inside to open the door. They said their master and Dromio were already at home, and that these must be impostors. Antipholus at last went away in a rage, saying that he would go and dine somewhere else, where he was treated with less disdain.

Meanwhile, inside the house, Luciana was not at all pleased with the way her supposed brother-in-law was behaving to his wife, and when they found themselves alone, she took him to task about it. Antipholus of Syracuse again persisted that Adriana was no wife of his; in fact, he said, he very much preferred Luciana herself. Luciana did not think it right to listen to such speeches, and went off to fetch her sister, leaving Antipholus more than ever charmed with her gentle grace, enchanting beauty, and wise discourse.

While he was musing over this, and thinking it high time that he should leave Ephesus, which seemed to him inhabited by none but witches, Angelo the goldsmith came that way, bringing the chain which Antipholus of Ephesus had ordered as a present for his wife. Antipholus of Syracuse, to whom he handed it in mistake, of course knew nothing about it, and declared he had never ordered it; but Angelo insisted on his keeping it, saying he would come back at five o’clock for the money.

Antipholus had already sent Dromio to find out if there were any ship sailing from Ephesus, for he did not want to stay a single night in such a queer place. He now resolved to go and wait for Dromio in the market, so that they could get off at the first possible moment. [Pg 454]

Angelo the goldsmith was in debt to another merchant, and now the creditor began to press for his money. Angelo replied that the very sum he owed was due to him from Antipholus; he expected to receive the money at five o’clock that day, and if the merchant would walk down with him to the house, he would discharge the bond. Antipholus of Ephesus, however, saved them the trouble by walking up at that moment. Angelo asked him for payment for the chain, which, of

course, *this* Antipholus declared he had never had. Angelo protested that he had given it him only half an hour before. Antipholus indignantly denied it.

The merchant creditor now lost patience, thinking Angelo only wished to escape by some false excuse, and he ordered an officer to arrest him. Angelo, feeling that his reputation was at stake, then ordered the officer to arrest Antipholus for not paying him the money for the chain. To add to the confusion, at that moment up came Dromio of Syracuse, who, mistaking this wrong Antipholus for his own master, told him that a ship was just ready to sail, he had got all their goods on board, and the vessel only waited for them and the skipper.

Antipholus of Ephesus thought this was his own Dromio, and that he must be losing his senses, but he had no time to debate the matter now. He bade him hasten home to Adriana and get from her a purse of ducats, which would serve to bail him from arrest. Dromio did as he was told. He rushed to the house, stammered out his confused story, got the purse from Adriana, and was returning with it, when he happened to meet his own master, Antipholus of Syracuse. To him he [Pg 455] handed the purse. Antipholus was quite unable to understand this new freak, but not caring to waste time in explanations, asked if any ship were departing that night. Dromio replied that an hour ago he had brought him word that the bark *Expedition* was just ready to sail, when Antipholus was arrested.

“Here is the money you sent for to deliver you,” he concluded.

“The fellow is distracted, and so am I,” said Antipholus. “We wander here in illusions. Some blessed power deliver us hence!”

Adriana, with Luciana, hastened to the release of her husband, but when they found him he said such strange things—declaring that he had not dined at home, and that he had been locked out of his own house, while she and Luciana knew quite well that he had dined with them—that everyone thought he was mad, and he was bound and carried away home, and put under care of a doctor, his man Dromio being also treated in the same way.

Not long after this, Angelo and his merchant creditor met Antipholus of Syracuse, who this time, instead of denying he had had the chain, at once admitted it. Angelo reproached him with having denied it before. Antipholus declared he had never done so. The merchant said they had heard him with their own ears. The end of the matter was that they all got so angry that they drew their swords and began to fight. Adriana, coming up at that moment, thought it was her husband who had got free from his bondage, and called to the others not to hurt him, he was [Pg 456] mad, but to seize him and take away his sword.

Antipholus of Syracuse, seeing that he was likely to be overpowered, slipped with Dromio for refuge inside a Priory, near which they were standing. The Abbess refused to give them up, as they had taken sanctuary there, though Adriana vehemently demanded her husband.

Luciana advised her sister to appeal to the Duke, and as it happened, the Duke himself now approached, on his way to attend the execution of the luckless Ægeon, who up to the present had not been able to obtain the money for his ransom.

Adriana told her story to the Duke, who thereupon commanded that the Lady Abbess should be summoned to his presence. At that instant a servant came rushing up in terror to Adriana saying that his master and Dromio had got loose, and had tied up the doctor, and were beating the servants.

“Peace, fool! Your master and his man are here,” said Adriana. “What you report to us is false.”

But the speedy appearance of Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus showed that the servant had spoken truth.

“Unless the fear of death makes me doat,” said Ægeon, “I see my son Antipholus and Dromio.” [Pg 457]

“I see my son Antipholus.”

There was still some further confusion, for this Antipholus had no knowledge of his father. But [Pg 458] when Antipholus of Syracuse came from the Priory, and the two sets of brothers stood face to [Pg 459]

face, matters were soon happily cleared up. To add to the general joy, the good Abbess turned out to be no other than the wife of Ægeon. There was no difficulty now about getting ransom for the merchant, and, in fact, the Duke pardoned his life without accepting the ducats which Antipholus of Ephesus offered.

Antipholus of Syracuse could now pay his court without rebuke to the lady who had so charmed his fancy; and Adriana, to whom the Duke had spoken some plain words, promised to be a less shrewish wife for the future.

“I see by you I am a sweet-faced youth.”

Among the gay company none were merrier or more delighted than the two Dromios. They embraced vigorously, and gazed at each other with admiration. [Pg 460]

“Methinks you are my glass, and not my brother,” said Dromio of Ephesus. “I see by you I am a sweet-faced youth. Will you walk in to see their gossiping?”

But each brother was too modest to walk into the house first, so they settled the difficulty by going in hand in hand, not one before the other.

WELLS GARDNER, DARTON AND CO., LTD.,
3 PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS, LONDON, ENGLAND.

Transcriber Notes:

Uncertain or antiquated spellings or ancient words are preserved.

The illustrations have been moved so that they do not break up paragraphs and so that they are next to the text they illustrate.

Both "Thisby" and "Thisbe" appear in the original publication and have been preserved in this ebook.

viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification

number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.