

STRAY LEAVES FROM AN OLD JOURNAL.*

BY H. V. C.

The usual evening party was so much increased by the addition of our festive guests and the presence of so many gallant volunteers, that the hall being filled to overflowing, the large oaken parlour was also thrown open for dancing. There, waving over the portraits of some of my uncle's ancestors, cousin Tom and Jenny had very tastefully hung the continental flags; and on a panel above the President's chair, where the royal arms had long rested undisturbed, a huge eagle was now seen covering the space with outstretched wings, bearing in its beak the motto "Liberty," and holding a crown disdainfully in its talons.

These decorations had been so promptly placed there, that all were taken by surprise, and nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of the company. The devices, in particular, were so suggestive that they gave general satisfaction. There were some exceptions however; for among the guests were a few who held petty offices, at the disposal of those in power; there was the post-master of a neighbouring town, who had doubtless before his mind the late dismissal of Benjamin Franklin from a similar office, because he stood forth boldly to uphold the people's rights. And at night-fall, there had unexpectedly arrived an officer of the king's customs at Portsmouth, who stopped to make a friendly visit to my uncle. But he seemed to take great alarm at the patriotic demonstration so openly displayed in the house of the chief magistrate, as did likewise the others, though it is well known that in their hearts they all favour the good cause. But they dare not avow it while the issues are doubtful, as they hold their posts by the tenure of their loyalty; and freedom of will is less prized by them than the gold and high places of oppression. Thank heaven, the freedom of our country doth not rest on such wavering and timorous reeds as these! we have bold and true hearts amongst us, ready to dare and to endure!

But these inopportune guests that came amongst us, with such dubious visages,—cousin Jenny seemed to take especial pleasure in tormenting them, more especially the gentleman of the customs, who has long been seeking to gain her favour, though, it seems, with little chance of success. She congratulated him so heartily on the

good luck which brought him there at such a joyous gathering, and challenged his admiration of her good taste in choosing such appropriate adornments for the occasion, more especially calling his attention to the eagle with its emblematic devices. It was plain to see the poor youth winced not a little under her sharp pleasantry; but he had not address enough to retort, and is one of those timid souls who are always afraid of compromising themselves by speaking their thoughts boldly. I could almost find it in my heart to pity him notwithstanding; she was so careless of his feelings, and there was such disdain in her pleasantry, that it was plain to perceive he never stood farther from her good graces than at that moment. I whispered a word of reproof in her ear, but she laughed merrily, and said "the poor fool would not come a wooing again for many a long day, she would be bound." She however gave him her hand for a country dance, in which he figured to great advantage; but even Jenny's returning smiles could not place him quite at ease, and very soon afterwards he slipped quietly away, his example being followed by all those whose sentiments were not in harmony with the occasion.

But their absence was little heeded by any one. Captain R. had kindly ordered up the small band of his volunteer regiment, which gave us great spirits for dancing, to say nothing of the addition of some half-dozen military beaux. It was, moreover, an infinite relief to the old fiddler, whose arm was apt to get weary on far less jovial occasions, not to mention the sad mistakes he often made before the close of an evening, occasioned by repeated potations from a cider can, which was always placed beside him, "to keep him in tune," he said.

My uncle and aunt were just performing a minuet, the fiddler playing his part solus, and managing to keep up the tune with great propriety, though the evening was far advanced; and we were all standing ready to take our places, and finish off with "Sir Roger de Coverly," when a knock was heard at the hall door, and directly it was repeated louder and more impatiently. It was an unusual call at that late hour; the fiddle