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POETRY.

DEATH'S FINAL CONQUEST.

The glories of our birth and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armor against Fate;
Death lays his icy hands on kings,
Sceptre and Crown,
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field,
And plant fresh laurels where they kill;
But their strong nerves at last must yield;
They tame but one another still,
Early or late,
They stoop to fate,
And must give up their mourning breath,
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on our brows,
Then hasten to no more our mighty deeds;
Upon death's purple altar now,
See where the victor victim lies,
All heads must come
To the cold tomb;
Only the actions of the just
Sweat sweet, and blossom in the dust.

SHILLBY.

THE SPANISH LADY.

THE STORY OF LADY OLIVIA DE CASTRO.

SAID TO BE AUTHENTIC.

It is strange, and often lamentable, to consider the influence which public events have upon private fortunes. I do not now speak of the widows made by war, of the other many and dreadful sufferings which that awful scourge inflicts upon humanity. The sense of the public destinies carries upon its face many a private shallop; sometimes by its current, and adorned by its course; but far more often, after a long succession of perils, wrecked and utterly destroyed.

Who, but a soothsayer, would have seen by connexion between the fortunes of Herbert Meynell, the son of an English knight and dame, born and bred in England, and those of Donna Olivia de Castro, the daughter of a Spanish grandee, whose only migration had been between her father's castle in Old Castile, and his palace at Madrid? And yet these two persons fixed the fate of each other's lives. And what brought them together? The course of public events.

Sir Herbert Meynell's father had been one of those gentlemen of knightly families, who sought the hereditary knighthood, which James I. constituted for pecuniary purposes, under the title of baronet. He was a favourite of the king, and his son was bred up very much about the person of prince Charles. Sir Herbert was thus, at the period of his father's death, which happened in the year 1620, when he was about two-and-twenty years old, far from being the coarse, uneducated, mannery bumpkin, which the mere country gentlemen of England almost invariably were at that day. He had been bred about the court, and among the best even there. He had great natural advantages, and he had cultivated them, whether of body or of mind, to the utmost. Accordingly, at the time that he succeeded to the vast estate of the extent of which he was fully conscious, he was one of the most accomplished gallants of the court, in which he fixed his residence. Coming from the middle, he had family connections with the lord of the ascendant, Buckingham; and, although not by office one of his retainers, he was constantly about his person, and was considered as one of his most favoured followers.

Accordingly, when that most extraordinary expedition, the prince's journey to Spain, was resolved on, Sir Herbert was singled out as one of the galaxy of noble and gallant persons who were to go direct to Spain, and form the retinue of the prince during his residence at Madrid. Buckingham had originally wish-

ed that he should accompany them; but, as their escort was literally limited to three—Sir Francis Cottington, Sir Richard Graham, and Endymion Porter—this was found to be impossible. He went out, however, with Lord Howarth, Lord Kensington, Lord Cecil, Lord Howard, and the other young nobles who formed the court of the prince at Madrid.

Never, perhaps, was there more youth, beauty, wit, wealth, and rank, concentrated together than in this cortège. The Duke of Buckingham, whose eminence itself had originally arisen from his advantages of person, was, at this time, in the very zenith of manhood, and an unparalleled course of continued success had added all the *vis vite*—the animation, buoyancy, and brilliancy—which are the usual attendants of good fortune. The young noblemen who had followed the prince to Madrid, were the very *élite* of the court. They had been singled out with reference to their showy and imposing qualities; and though the prince himself already indicated that cold and reserved temper, which afterwards proved of so much detriment during the course of his ill-fated life, yet it could scarcely have been possible for Francis I. or Henry Quatre to have gathered around him a retinue more distinguished for grace, vivacity, and *Poitrine Cour*.

But, even among these, Sir Herbert Meynell stood prominent. He was, at this time, scarcely five-and-twenty—tall, graceful, and athletic in form—with the eye of a falcon, yet a smile soft, sweet, and penetrating as that of a woman; and, too, under the eye of Buckingham, with this model of courtesy, grace and gallantry constantly in view, no wonder that he had imbibed much of that excellent manner which even his enemies admit Buckinham to have possessed, and still less wonder that he should also have contracted some of those vices which even his best friends have never denied. Such was Sir Herbert Meynell, at the time that he arrived at the court of Spain, in person and outward manner; what he was in heart, the following narrative will probably show.

It was in the month of May, 1623, that a bull-fight was held at Madrid, for the purpose of displaying this national exhibition to the Prince of Wales. Splendidly as these shows are always put up, especially when honoured by the royal presence, the magnificence was redoubled on the present occasion, as may very naturally be supposed. And, indeed, if the object were to display to the English prince an exhibition of Spanish character, no means so well calculated for the purpose could have been chosen. It went, indeed, a little farther than was, probably, intended; for all the points of character that were displayed, were not, perhaps, quite in consonance with the ideas of the prince.

Certainly, in those days, a public bull-fight might be considered as a condensation, upon one spot, of all the most prominent parts of the national disposition in Spain. The love of display—not the fight, gay and gaudy feeling of Frenchmen—but the more grave, more solid, I had almost said solemn—partaking rather of the nature of the tournament of old days than the hall-room of modern times—with such feelings did the Spanish cavaliers enter the arena, dressed splendidly, but rigidly national, and, casting up their eyes to the galleries, loaded with beauty, which stretched around the enclosure above, await with proudly-swelling hearts, the signal which was to give them the opportunity of exhibiting their persons and their prowess to such fair beholders.

And these very beauties formed in themselves no trivial portion of the exhibition. The ladies of the court, accustomed to mix freely in society, were there very much as the belles of London, or Paris go to the opera; but the great majority were persons who, living though they might be in rank, yet, being only in private life, were subject to the many and minute restrictions which the modes of life then prevalent in Spain enforced. To the

* Buckingham wearing the French costume was one of the first things by which he gave offence to the court of Spain.

a bull-fight was a gala looked to with eagerness, and enjoyed with delight. With all the advantages of dress—placed too in a position conspicuous, yet, at the same time, not painfully so, from its being occupied by all alike, few things could be more dazzling than this circle of loveliness and brilliancy. The Spanish ladies are, or, at least, then were, peculiarly fitted for this species of exhibition. Less light, lively, and vivacious than the French, they probably shone less in the ball-room; but the *salon*; put their full, deep, Cleopatra-like order of beauty, admirably became a position such as this, where they sat as the arbitresses and rewarders of the exertions of their *preux*. There is something in the repose of a Spanish woman's countenance, indicating, as it does, the slumber of profound, fervent, even fierce, passion beneath, which impresses the mind more than almost any other description of beauty.

Upon a foreigner, especially, this effect is strong, and the bold and loose gallants of the English court had not looked upon the fair Iberians unmoved; and, if report spoke truly, they had not failed to push the advantages of their position to the utmost. These advantages were many and great. Not only the romantic nature of the prince's journey had tended to draw the curiosity of all Madrid upon himself, and every one belonging to him; but, as they were foreigners, they were supposed to be, to a certain extent, privileged persons, and were held excused from many of those formalities and regulations of etiquette which tend so much to throw impediments in the way of speedy acquaintance. It is possible, indeed, that this exemption was already granted by person who thought that there might be worse arrangements than their daughters to accompany the Infanta to England, as the wives of the prince's courtiers. At all events, there seemed to be a general understanding that the Englishmen were not expected thoroughly to conform to all niceties of Spanish etiquette—an understanding to which the young ladies were very willing to accede, and the courtiers contented not at all. It may be supposed, indeed, that these last could by no means highly approve of such arrangements; and they hated their visitors, therefore, with a very cordial and hospitable hatred. Indeed, the chief enjoyment which the cavaliers promised to themselves in this bull-fight, was that for once, they would be the sole objects of attraction, as their foreign rivals, of course, did not enter into the arena. "I wish to heaven they would," muttered one of the combatants; "they would then see the difference between a true Castilian and these northern savages." Perhaps, it may not be considered quite a fair ground of contempt, that the foreigners did not understand this peculiarly Spanish exercise; but, even in our days, the same spirit exists—an Englishman despises a Frenchman, because he cannot defend himself with his fists, and a Frenchman an Englishman, because he cannot fight with a rapier.

The Spaniards, in this instance, had reckoned without their host. That division of the gallery in which the court sat, attracted more eyes than ever court at bull-fight had done before; and it was not unnatural to attribute this to the presence of the prince and Buckingham, and of the gallant retinue by which they were attended. The seats in the arena were as dangerous, as skilful, and as gallant as usual; but the interest of the fair spectators in the vicissitudes of the fight was far less keenly excited. The cavaliers were furious, but it was quite natural—for bull-fights they saw frequently; but princess-errant and their train formed a sight most unusual indeed.

The Englishmen themselves, however, were warmly interested by the fine and daring spectacle which was passing before their eyes. As for its being cruel also, few people think the worse of any sport for that, even now. But then the very meaning of the term was not known by the great. Meynell alone saw but little of the fight. The bull made a splendid first rush, and as Sir Herbert was moving onward to get a fuller view of what would next happen, his eye lighted upon an object which put bull, and cavaliers, and

matadores out of his head in an instant. It was a young lady of about eighteen. She was seated just outside the space enclosed for the court and its followers. Being a little in front of where Meynell had been standing, he had not observed her till, as he was moving forward, a part of his dress becoming hitched upon the rail, he turned back to disengage it; and then his eyes rested full upon the loveliest face which, till then, they had ever beheld. The English court was, in the reign of James I., undoubtedly remarkable for the degree of beauty, which adorned it. But Meynell felt in an instant that anything so lovely as this he had never seen. A picture of this lady hangs in the gallery at Arlescot-hall; but it is, in several respects, different from what she was at this time. There was health as well as beauty in the cheek; and, in lieu of that deep and desolate sadness which strikes every one so vividly as existing in the eyes of that picture, there were the brightness and animation of an unclouded spirit, and the pride of a beauty, a noble, and a Spaniard—mitigated and qualified, however, by an expression both of sensitiveness and kindly feeling. She was speaking at the moment Meynell first caught sight of her, and pointing out something in the arena to a lady, who appeared to be her mother. The sweet, soft, and musical tone of her voice—the beauty of her lips as they moved in speaking, and displayed, from time to time, the exquisite teeth within—the formation of the rounded and delicate arm, as it was outstretched in the act of pointing—and, almost above all, the hand itself that pointed—the whole picture, in short, struck Meynell with the keenest admiration and delight—he stopped short, and, after a few moments, drew near to the rail—and sat down within a few paces of this enchanting vision.

Sir Herbert had, undoubtedly, been, to use a homely but expressive phrase, somewhat taken a-back by the sudden view of a creature so immeasurably lovely. But he was not a man to lose his self-possession—or, at least, not speedily to regain it—even under such circumstances as these. He looked, and looked again—to ascertain whether his first glance had deceived him: on the contrary, the more he gazed, the more he admired. His thoughts ran back to the memory of the English beauties whom he had wooed—but none could compare with this peerless Spaniard. He scanned the peculiar points of her national beauty, and thought them so many ingredients of perfection.

Meynell was not a man to let his admiration long remain unknown to its object. "I will wait," thought he, "a little while for an opportunity to accost her—and, if it does not occur, I will make one." It did occur, however, and that speedily.

The combat had been going on for some time, eagerly gazed upon by the lady, but not in the least looked at by Sir Herbert, who on the contrary, was occupied in watching the variations of her speaking face, as the events in the arena below fluctuated. On a sudden she turned pale as death, and uttered an exclamation amounting to a scream—and, at the same moment, there seemed to be a strong movement of anxiety and horror pervading the assembly. Meynell looked up, and saw that the bull was making a furious rush at a cavalier, whose horse was desperately wounded, and who was himself hurt. From the incapacity of the horse to move quickly, the destruction of the rider seemed inevitable; and, just as he disappeared from the sight of Meynell, in consequence of coming too near to the gallery in which he sat for his eye to reach the ground, it was evident that the cavalier was falling from his horse back-wards, the bull having already reached and attacked it in front. The lady leaped back in her seat, and covering her face with her hands, trembled violently. Meynell sprang forward, and, with some little difficulty, reached the edge of the gallery. He was just in time to behold the rescue of the cavalier. The bull had already stopped to gore him, when one of his comrades, rushing in at full speed, wounded the bull, and drew him off to another part of the arena.