

From the Lady's Book.

CHARLES BRANDON.

"Truth is strange, stranger than fiction."

"Do you remember Charles Brandon?" asked my friend. I was sitting at the window lost in reverie, and gazing listlessly at the eddying waves of a November fog, which had for hours been clinging to the bosom of our common mother, like remorse to the heart of a dying sinner. "Do you remember Charles Brandon?" My day dream was dispelled, and with that name unheard for years, came thronging to my heart bright visions of early days.

The green fields of childhood glowed around me, and 'mid the dear familiar faces of friends long departed, that seemed to smile once more in mine, flashed again with all its wonted fire, the soul-speaking eye of the ill-starred Brandon. I see him now just as he looked when with his young orphan sister he first became a resident of our village. His handsome features wore the high stamp of intellect, and his dark brown hair turned gracefully from a broad and polished forehead. His complexion was clear, though dark, and his keen hazel eye, shining at one moment with surprising and almost fearful brightness, then unexpectedly assuming an expression of alluring softness, won at once the unresisting heart. His presence often inspired a kind of awe in others, for which they vainly endeavoured to account; and, ever and anon, a sarcastic smile played about his face, and when his path was crossed, the very essence of pride and scorn was visible in the contemptuous smile which wreathed his curling lip. As a successful lawyer his name spread far and wide, and each day graced his brow with some new laurel. Possessing great suavity of manners, among his friends he held the rank of general favourite.

And his sister—with what reverence of affection did she bow to this, the guardian spirit of her youth—acknowledging no law but his opinion, and seeking no higher reward than his approving smile. How careful should we be of the influence we exert on others, and doubly cautious should those be on whom God has bestowed a power of intellect to sway at will their fellow men.

Brandon was a sceptic, and the writings of Paine, Voltaire, and Rousseau, were too often the companions of his leisure hours. His moral character, however, stood fair, and for acts of disinterested benevolence no one might win a brighter name. But what avails the semblance of purity, when the heart is corrupt; the veil soon falls, and the character appears in all its deformity.

'Twas midnight, and Caroline Brandon sat alone anxiously listening for the coming footsteps of her brother. The clock struck two, her heart already oppressed with strange forebodings, died within her. She knew no cause for this delay, and his absence at such an hour, was a thing too unusual to leave it in her power to await the issue calmly. I was sad to mark the mental anguish which betrayed itself in the quick changes of that lovely countenance. Why is it that the young heart must be thus torn with either the real or imaginary dangers of its friends? Why must the rosy cheek grow pale, and the sparkling lustre of the eye be dimmed, with so often watching the sinking star, which guides the destinies of those we love? But so it is, and although the next morning saw Charles Brandon at the side of his sister, apparently as gay as ever, still the half-suppressed sigh, the flushed brow, the absent thoughts and the unbidden horror, which often convulsed him, soon revealed to the keen eye of affection, a mind but ill at ease. From that day a cloud rested on the spirit of Caroline Brandon: the subsequent burst of which was like the lightning's flash, that levels the pride of the forest. Fearful to her was the interval which now ensued. Anxiety, apprehension, and dread, shook her whole frame. To interrogate him she could not—she dare not.

At length the village court house was filled. Every countenance told that a cause of terrible interest was hastening on. The prisoner was announced, a thrill of anxiety ran from heart to heart throughout the crowded audience, and when Charles Brandon took his place at the bar, his erect mien, his dignified step, and the clear marble paleness of his brow, which the gay breezes of heaven had

not fanned for months, with the saddened smile which lingered about his features, awakened in every heart a sympathy strong beyond expression, and inspired a hope next to assurance, that in his bosom guilt had no hiding place. Had that heart been unfolded to them as a page to read, they would have learned that at the very moment while he stood thus before them, remorse was busy there, and his soul was writhing under the horrors of guilt—the dread of inevitable disgrace—and the hastening certainty of his doom. The trial proceeded with the usual forms, and after a laborious, patient and thrilling investigation, the counsel on either side poured forth a torrent of burning eloquence. The judge solemnly and feelingly charged the jury. The assembly dispersed, and the jury retired, with the fate of a fellow mortal pending on their decision. As the sun that night went down in the west, methought his last beams shone sadly forth, as if conscious of the fatal verdict to be determined and pronounced, ere he again illuminated with his ascending rays the cold realities of earth.

Twilight had scarcely disappeared: when the distant light of the court room but too plainly told that the die was cast, and the destiny of Charles Brandon irrevocably fixed. Again the prisoner was led forth, and again he appeared with the same proud air that marked his first entry. Calmness and sadness had alike fled from his features and in their place sat firm determination and unqualified scorn. Yet those who knew him could well read in that quick and restless eye, a tear of the agonizing suspense, which was then weighing down his heart, and thrilling wildly on his burning brain.

At that moment he would willingly have offered up his stained life a sacrifice on the altar of virtue and principle. But the decisions of justice could not be stayed. A death-like stillness reigned throughout the anxious multitude—not a creature moved—the verdict—the fatal and appalling verdict was declared—and Charles Brandon stood forth, a murderer!

Brandon had played *once—twice*—his funds were exhausted—*thrice*—his sister was beggared. How dreadfully did he retrieve his fortunes. Temptation met him; and for the paltry sum of a few thousands he became a murderer! As the word "guilty" fell from the lips of the foreman, a slight confusion stayed for an instant the melancholy proceedings of that august court, and, quick as thought, Caroline Brandon was at the side of her brother. Whatever might have been in the soul of Brandon, he had not shrunk before the crowd, but the sight of his sister at such an hour as this, was like a dagger to his heart; his stern lip quivered: and a tear trembled on his eyelid; for there she stood pale and motionless. Her eye first rested on him, then turned imploringly on his judges, till suddenly starting like one in the bewilderment of a dream, she exclaimed,—

"Charles, let us fly this horrid place." But soon the dark reality seemed again to come over her, and like a bird "stricken in its upward flight," she bowed her head in silence, and covering her face with her hands, knelt at his side. The court paused not long. The formal question dictated by law was put upon the prisoner. He deigned them no reply, but proudly raising himself, the haughty flash of his eye seemed to dare the utmost shafts of fate. Sentence accordingly passed, and Brandon was conducted a convicted murderer, back to his gloomy cell.

Caroline had imbibed the sentiments of her brother, and was herself a wanderer from her God. Yet successfully did the Christian minister show her, in this dispensation, the overruling hand of an all-wise Providence and with tears besought the prodigal's return. She groaned, and wept, for sorely was she stricken.

"Pray for me," she sobbed. He did pray for her, and that prayer, so deep, so fervent, ascended like incense before the throne of God and descended like balm upon her wounded spirit.

'Twas a black day, but the warring of the elements sounded gratefully upon the ear of Brandon, for it accorded well with the storm that was raging in his soul, and as he gazed upon the fatal drag, still in his possession, he smiled bitterly and triumphantly at the idea that his life

was yet in his own power, and a moment's brightness passed along his brow. Then thought chased thought—could he again look upon the death-like countenance of his sister—must the last tie that bound her to earth be broken? And remorse for the wreck he had made, worked madness in his brain.

The sheriff had visited the various cells under his charge and returned to his room absorbed in deep meditation. The dreadful duty yet devolving on him, weighed down his whole soul. It was a duty, the thought of which filled him with agony, and tears, scalding tears, flowed powerfully down his manly cheek. A rap echoed from his door, and Caroline Brandon accompanied by a priest, stood before him. He paused as in the presence of a superior spirit—well he knew her errand. She had come to bid adieu to all that was dear to her on earth. Charles was the last of her race, but the deadly Siroc of guilt had breathed upon him, and they must part. As she thus stood, the light that beamed from her dark eye, her calm manner, and her firm tone, all testified that the bitterness of parting was past, and the unconquered spirit

"Rising o'er the load
That crushed till then, looked forth from its abode,
And o'er the storms and passions of the earth,
Shed the deep calm of its immortal birth."

The door turned harshly on its hinges, but she heeded it not, and with a hasty step, she soon reached the cell of her brother. He was lying on a bed in one corner of the room, his face buried in his pillow. She called his name. He answered not. She gently raised his pillow,—lest she should too suddenly break his slumbers. His ghastly features startled her, and placing her hand upon his forehead, she shrieked! She fainted! Her brother was dead—yes, Charles Brandon was dead. And there, the haughty being who had trampled alike on the laws of God and man, lay, a thing of naught!

Months have rolled away. The tolling of the bell announced that a spirit has gone from the earth. The priest stands at the head of the grave. Strangers surround the bier. The solemn rites are finished, and Caroline Brandon sleeps by the side of her ill-fated brother.

THE FEMALE MANIAC.

Separated from the rest stood one whose appearance had something of superior dignity. Her face though pale and wasted, was less squalid than those of the others, and shewed a dejection of that decent kind which moves our pity unmixed with horror; upon her, therefore, the eyes of all were immediately turned.

The keeper, who accompanied the visitants, observed:—This is a young lady, who was born to ride in a coach and six. She was beloved, if the story I have heard be true, by a young gentleman, her equal in society—but by no means her match in fortune. Her father would not bear of their marriage, and threatened to turn her out of doors if she ever saw him again. Upon this the young man took a voyage to the West Indies, in hope of bettering his fortune, and obtaining his mistress;—but he was scarce landed, when he was seized with one of the fevers common in those islands, and died in a few days, lamented by every one that knew him. The news soon reached the young lady, who at the same time was pressed by her father to marry a rich miserly fellow, who was old enough to be her grandfather. The death of her lover had no effect upon her sordid parent: he was only the more earnest for her marriage with the man he had provided for her; and what between her despair at the death of the one, and her aversion to the other, the young lady was reduced to the condition you see her in. But God would not prosper such cruelty; her father's affairs soon went to wreck, and he died almost a beggar."

Though his story was told in very plain language, it had particularly attracted Harley's notice; he had given it a tribute of some tears. The unfortunate young lady had till now seemed entranced in thought, with her eyes fixed on a little garnet ring she wore on her finger; she now turned upon Harley. "My William is no more," said she, "do you weep for my William? Blessing on your tears! I would weep too, but my brain is dry, and it burns!" She drew near to Harley.—"Be comforted,