

the dancing mood,—if not, I can choose another partner."

"Do as you like," said De Valette, carelessly; "strangers are often preferred before tried friends."

"Yes, when tried friends are unreasonable as you are now," said Lucie gaily; "so fare thee well; there is a plump damsel, with eyes like Juno—I commend her to thee for the dance."

She turned lightly from him, and giving her hand to Stanhope, they joined the dancers together. De Valette remained standing a moment in moody silence; but the exhilarating strains of the violin were as irresistible as the blast of Oberon's horn, and selecting the prettiest maiden, he mingled in the dance, and was soon again the gayest of the gay.

CHAPTER VI.

"I deemed that time, I deemed that pride
Had quenched at length my boyish flame—
Nor knew, till seated by thy side,
My heart in all, save hope, the same."

LORD BYRON.

"THEN you do not think Miss De Courcy very beautiful?" asked De Valette, detaining Stanhope a few moments after the family had retired.

"Not exactly beautiful," replied Stanhope; "but she has,—what in my opinion is far more captivating—grace, spirit, and intelligence, with beauty enough, I admit, to render her—"

"Quite irresistible! you would say," interrupted De Valette; "but in good truth I care not to hear you finish the sentence with such a lover-like panegyric! You see I am frank, and my admiration is very openly avowed."

"And it is very exclusive, too, it seems," said Stanhope smiling; "but you should not ask an opinion which you are not willing to hear candidly expressed."

"Oh! as to that," he replied, "it is pleasant to hear her praises from any lips; I can only marvel that, having once known her, you could voluntarily absent yourself from her, for so long a period."

"Your inference is drawn from false premises," said Stanhope, laughing; "but at any rate, the love or friendship which cannot stand the test of absence must be very frail indeed."

"I think there are few who would care to try it," said De Valette, evidently wishing to penetrate Stanhope's real sentiments; "and one must have perseverance indeed, who could remain constant to Miss De Courcy, through all her whims and disguises."

"Her gaiety springs from a light and innocent heart," replied Stanhope, "and only renders her more piquant and interesting. But, speaking of disguises, how long, may I ask, has she played page, and for what purpose was the character assumed?"

"It was at the suggestion of Madame La Tour, I believe, and Lucie's love of frolic, induced her readily to adopt it. You know the fort was seriously threatened before our return, and Mad. La Tour, who had few around her in whom she could confide, found a little page extremely useful in executing divers commissions, which in her feminine character could not have been achieved with equal propriety."

"I do not think a fondness for disguise natural to her," said Stanhope; "but she seems to have sustained her borrowed characters with considerable address."

"Yes; she completely deceived me when I first met her, and this evening again, I lost the use of my senses, and took her for the sauciest knave of a priest, that ever uttered an *ave-maria*."

"Long as it is since I last saw her," said Stanhope musingly. "I think I could have sworn to that face and voice, under any disguise."

"The night wanes, and it is time for us to separate," said De Valette abruptly, and not quite pleased with his new friend's pertinacious memory; "I must go abroad and see that all things are quiet and in order, after this unusual revelling."

De Valette then quitted the house, and Stanhope gladly sought the retirement of his own apartment. He threw himself beside an open window, and looked out on the quiet scene, in that wilderness of nature. The noise of mirth and music had passed away, and the weary guard who walked his dull round of duty, in solitude and silence, was the only living object that met his eye. No sound was abroad, but the voice of the restless stream, which glittered beneath the starry sky; the breath of midnight fanned him with refreshing coolness, and the calm beauty of the lonely hour restored the tranquillity of his mind, which had been deeply moved by the singular events of the last few hours.

Stanhope had most unexpectedly encountered the object of a fond and cherished attachment, but the circumstances in which she was placed filled him with perplexity and doubt. More than two years had elapsed since he first saw Lucie De Courcy, then residing in the north of England, whether she had accompanied a maternal aunt, the widow of an Englishman of rank and fortune. Madame Rouville, who was in a declining state of health, had yielded to the importunity of her husband's relatives, and left her native land for the