

picture, brighter, and softer, and more splendid, which only the study of well-instructed and inventive thought can bring to the surface. We possess, in the fastnesses of the Hudson Highlands, a collection of the choicest pictures that ever gleaned in the glory of immortal beauty, and which, if they could be transported to the walls of European palaces, would be covered with gold by rival sovereigns contending for their ownership. Could we but sell our perceptions with our pictures, we should be richer than the Rothschilds.

The Fatal Joke.

BY HELEN C. GAGE.

I was once present where a small party of young persons were warmly discussing the subject of practical joking. After a long and interesting debate, the question seemed about to be decided in its favour, when a gentleman, whose melancholy and dejected air at once attracted our attention, related the following story:

In my younger days I was remarkable for my fondness of practical joking, even to such a degree that I never allowed a good opportunity to pass unimproved.

My orphan cousin, Robert, to whom I was fondly attached, was of a different nature from this. He was sober, sedate, graceful, and very thoughtful, almost to a fault. This stupidity, as I called it, was often a check upon my natural gayety, and it was seldom that I could induce him to join my boyish sports, though he sometimes did, merely to gratify me. Poor Robert! The green turf of his native valley, on whose bosom the fairest flowers that New England could boast of have blossomed and withered, and passed away to eternity, leaving behind them a lasting impress of their loveliness, now covers his mouldering ashes. Yes, Robert is dead, and I am the cause of his untimely end—the circumstances of which will serve to convince you of the folly of “practical joking.”

It was late one evening in September, that Robert and myself retired to our room to talk over the exciting scenes of the day, for it was the night after the election, and a

fine holiday it had been to us. I had just returned from a visit to some friends in the city, and had of course brought with me many curious things which Robert had never seen nor heard of. Among them was a mask, the use of which I explained to my unsophisticated cousin, who laughed, and wondered why the people could wish to look horribly enough to wear one.

I was in my gayest mood, just ready for an adventure, and seeing he was disposed to make fun of my mask, I proposed an experiment.

“What?” exclaimed my cousin, “you do not intend to wear it to bed, do you?”

“Far from it,” I replied; “it is you should wear the mask, not I—I am quite apt enough without it.”

“A very just remark indeed,” he observed, gravely.

I had never seen him in better humour, and I thought it best to unfold my plans at once. At our next door lived a wealthy gentleman, with whose daughter my bashful cousin was already smitten. That very night as we passed by, on our return from the village, he had called and bade her good night, and received in return one of the sweetest smiles from the happiest eyes and most charming lips I ever beheld. I was his bosom friend, and to me he always entrusted his secrets, (alas! how little have I deserved such confidence,) yet, he always blushed when I spoke of Julia.

Some evil spirit—I know not what else it could have been—prompted me, when I proposed to have a little sport at her expense. My plans were these;—he was to dress himself in a suit of clothes to correspond with the mask, which, by the way, was the most frightful looking thing I ever saw, repair to the dwelling of his friend, and call her to the door by tapping. I was to stand near to witness the result and participate in the joke.

He blushed, hung his head, and, of course, refused. I had expected this, but flattered myself that I could easily persuade him to the contrary. It was, however, a harder task than I had anticipated, for his unwillingness seemed greater than ever. The reason I readily understood.

I poohed, pshawed, and finally threatened to expose to all the boys his cowardly disposition, as I pleased to term it, and tender feelings to Julia, which, as yet, none of them