

COLONIAL PEARL.

A VOLUME DEVOTED TO POLITE LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION.

Published every Friday evening, at 17s. 6d. per Annum.

VOLUME THREE.

FRIDAY EVENING, AUGUST 2, 1839.

NUMBER THIRTY-ONE.

ORIGINAL.

For the Pearl.

ALICE WARE.

The town of Southampton is beautifully situated on a low gravelly peninsula formed by two small rivers—the Itchen, which flows past the ancient city of Winchester, in whose cathedral sleep several of England's Kings, bounds it on the east; and the Teste, which rises near Whitechurch, on the west. Its quays are washed by the waters of the narrow channel which separates this part of England from the Isle of Wight, whose wooded hills—fruitful fields—and pleasant country seats, bound the water views to the south. It was Sunday afternoon—I had strolled through the town, which is not compact, but remarkably clean, extending over, without covering, a great deal of ground,—having some streets as handsome as almost any in London; and, in the quarter most distant from the sea, some remarkably fine and very fashionable crescents and squares, built in the best style of modern domestic architecture. I had strolled round these, inspected the Bar Gate, one of those ancient entrances, that, with the remains of the old walls of which it forms a part, indicate the mode of defence, and the boundaries, of the ancient city—and was enjoying the cool breeze from the sea upon the promenade that extends along the water side; and which, being railed in, planted with trees, and supplied with seats, is a favourite rendezvous of the good citizens in their hours of leisure. To the right the New Forest (new in the days of William Rufus) stretched away with a beautiful and almost unbroken depth of shade, calling up pictures of a dying King and flying Noble, such as I had seen in all the histories of England from childhood upwards,—to the left there was Netley Abbey, one of the finest old ecclesiastical ruins in the kingdom, embosomed in ancient trees, and wrapt around with traditions, the most recent of which had an older date than the first dawn of Christianity in the country from which I came. Over the very spot on which I stood the gallant army that won immortal renown in the field of Agincourt, had filed for embarkation—and upon the beach beyond the chair of Canute had been placed, when he read that undying and admirable lesson to the sycophants of his court.

It is not to be wondered at, if in such a scene, and surrounded by such associations, I should have been wrapt in my own thoughts, and paying but little attention to what was passing around me. I know not how long I had stood with my arms folded, looking seaward, and indulging in the excitement of rapid, varying, and agreeable reflections—or how long I should have stood, had not the words "it is," uttered in a tone that seemed half sob and half whisper, recalled my scattered senses, and braced me up to that kind of artificial tension which we assume when fearful that there has been some witness of mental abstractions that may have betrayed us into an oddity of expression or attitude. As I turned round a woman—I might have said a young one, for she was not past thirty, though she appeared much older—was standing about two yards from me, and gazing into my face with an earnestness that for a moment rivetted my eyes upon hers, and deprived me of all power of utterance. It was evident that there was something more than mere idle curiosity in the steadfast glance with which she eyed me; and there seemed to be some mental conflict going on within, as though the words her lips were about to form, lingered for some sanction of the judgment, before they should give any utterance to the strongly excited feelings, by which they were evidently prompted.

My name, pronounced in a clear but timid tone, were the first words that escaped her. "Mr. B., I believe"—she repeated, curtly, and approaching half a pace nearer. If the conduct of the person had excited curiosity, I was a thousand times more astonished at the use of my name, in a strange town, where I had been but a few hours—where I did not know a soul, and in which I would have asserted but a minute before there was not a human being who could even have guessed from what part of the world I came.

"You have the advantage of me," said I, at length breaking silence, after vainly endeavouring to give a local habitation and a name to the form and features before me.

"You should remember me, sir," she replied, "we have met at the same board—danced in the same ball room, and gathered flowers, on at least one May morning, at the foot of the same tree."

The mystery began to thicken—there was something so droll in my meeting an old acquaintance in a place and at a time when I least expected it, that I could have laughed outright, if it had not

been for something so earnest and so melancholy in the countenance and voice of her who had thus suddenly broken in upon my musings. I eyed her steadfastly for several moments before speaking again, and summoned up every form and feature that my memory had treasured, that I might if possible find something to assure me that her words were true.

"You have altered a great deal—but the change has been a natural one, and such as the labours and cares of life would properly produce—but agony has probably given a different expression to my features from what they once wore, as you do not seem to know me—I should have known you anywhere, and yet many years have passed since we met."

"We have met, that's certain," said I, for there is something in the tone of your voice that comes back upon the ear, like one of the sounds of childhood, which only the instrument that produced it can ever recall."

"We have not met very often, for we were not intimate, but yet sometimes, as all the children of the better class of tradespeople used to meet of old in Halifax, on holidays, and at places of public and private resort. Music still perhaps echoes through the Masons' Hall: would to heaven I were as I was when we last stood in the same dance beneath its festooned pillars."

"That is a vain wish—the tide of time rolls on with us, and we change with every dash of the waves. The present is ours,—and—"

"The wretched have no present," said she, bursting into a flood of tears; "they live upon the past, which yet is painful, and dread a future that has no hope."

"You are too young to care nothing for the present hour, and too handsome" I would have added, for there were the remains of much beauty upon her countenance, but there was something in the sad expression of her features, and in the heaving of the handkerchief around her bosom, that chastened my own thoughts, and forbade all jesting with misery which, whatever might be the cause, appeared so evident and overpowering."

"The world measures time by machines which cannot feel, and whose errors are easily rectified—its true measure is the human heart,—the hours and minutes what we have done and suffered—if you knew all you would acknowledge that my life has been a long one, tried by that standard, and yet I am not older than yourself, and the world counts you still a young man."

"Why not tell me all, then—or at least let me know your name," said I, with some eagerness, for my curiosity was most effectually aroused, and I longed to know something more of the stranger—or rather, as it appeared, the old acquaintance, who stood beside me. "Who are you?"

"Look again," said she, holding back the ringlets from her face and brow, "is there no trace of my girlish features left?"

"There are some," said I, not wishing that she should think that time and misery had made greater ravages than the self-love which never leaves us, would like to acknowledge—"there are some—but the lines are faint and broken,—taking me back to the past, but to no period, or scene, which would enable me to call you by name."

"Surely you remember ALICE WARE," said she, in a voice of tremulous agitation, and after a pause, in which the same mental conflict that I had before observed, seemed going on within—as though her reason shrunk from sanctioning the disclosure which her feelings prompted her to make.

"Alice Ware," said I, stepping back a pace, that I might take in the whole figure more distinctly, and then advancing that I might extend a friendly grasp to what remained of her who my memory associated with the name. "Alice Ware you are indeed," said I, holding out my hand—"altered certainly—but I am very glad to see you."

"Have a care," said she, "this place is public, there are persons on the promenade, and you must not be seen shaking hands with an outcast like me."

"I care not what else you may be, you are my countrywoman at least, and an old acquaintance," and as I pressed the thin white fingers which she reluctantly placed in my hand, I added, "and nobody but yourself knows me here. I am a stranger in Southampton—have been in it but a few hours, and leave for London in the morning."

"So soon—but, perhaps I am intruding upon you now—the few hours one passes in a strange place have many draughts upon them, if the heart is light, and you have probably some engagement—something to see or to enjoy."

"I have not, I assure you—and if I had, I could not break away from one having so strong a claim as you have upon my lei-

sure—and it would appear, upon my sympathy also. Our fortunes have perhaps been different—but the same soil nourished us—the same green fields and bright waters gladdened us in childhood; and sinful and wretched as you say you have been, what right have I, who have often greatly erred where the temptation was perhaps less, to shrink from communion with you?"

"You are very kind," said she, looking up into my face—but we had better step aside from the thoroughfare, that we may not attract attention—there is a seat further on, where we may converse unobserved." And she turned and led the way to the left.

I followed her, in silence—but pained and agitated beyond expression, while contrasting Alice Ware, as she then appeared, with the light-hearted and beautiful girl of my boyish days.

The first time that I ever saw her, was, when a child, she was brought by her father into the school at which I gathered the first elements of knowledge, and took her seat, after a brief negotiation between her parent and the worthy pedagogue, on one of the lower forms of the half of the school which was appropriated for females—for in those primitive times, a broad entrance leading up to the master's desk divided a school into two portions, each sex having its own, and one person instructing, in alternate classes, girls and boys. But little impropriety I believe arose out of this arrangement, although some juvenile flirtations went on at times from the ends of the benches next the division line, when a kind word or a meaning glance was the innocent reward for the loan of a ruler or slate pencil, or the still more important favour of detecting an error or adding up a difficult sum. I remember, as distinctly as though it were yesterday, the hesitating and timid step with which little Alice followed her father up the aisle, while dozens of urchins on both sides were standing on tip toe, or peeping from behind their copy books to catch a sight of the new comer. I remember her being consigned to the care of two of the older girls on the form where she was to sit, who did the honours in the usual way—and I think I can see her, before me now, as her dark hair fell in curls upon her neck, when the straw bonnet was removed, and hung up carefully by the green ribbon that trimmed it; and a glowing cheek was turned first to one and then to the other new acquaintance, and a little laughing eye looked out from those long silky eye-lashes which only children with dark eyes ever appear to have.

I left school soon afterwards, and the next time I saw Alice Ware, or rather the next time that she attracted my attention, was at a dancing school exhibition, which in those days were held at least once a year, and were looked forward to with various emotions—the agile being anxious to show off, the awkward wondering how they would get through; and these feelings being shared by papas and mamas, and numerous friends on both sides. Alice took part in one of the bower dances, in which each dancer was provided with a hoop wreathed with artificial flowers, and the steps and combinations of which bore some resemblance to the more chaste exhibitions of the modern ballet. The moment at which my eye rested upon her was that in which she was dancing with her flower-hoop above her head—her young brow raised with something of conscious pride in her own powers—her eye beaming upon the friends that stood around her, and the excitement of the scene and the exercise together giving to her form an expansion and to her features a glow which made her look perhaps a year older than she was.

Several years after this I was retreating, with many others, from the supper room of some militia or fire company ball; and, as I turned to pass up the eastern side of the large room, the centre of which was still filled with dancers, Alice Ware was sitting on a sofa in the corner with an officer reclining beside her. She was then in the full bloom of girlhood—her ringlets dark as the wing of the raven, shading her beautiful brow and drooping upon her neck—her head thrown back upon one small white hand, while the other was employed in pulling to pieces, leaf by leaf, a rose bud which formed part of a bouquet that lay in her lap. She was evidently flattered—excited—happy—for her cheek was flushed, her eye sparkling, and her fair bosoms, a little too much exposed, rose and fell like "billows of joy," agitated by those gentle gales of flattery which the friend beside her seemed to be breathing with consummate art. I passed on, for there was nothing so very striking or peculiar in the affair as to fix the attention—it was only one of those cases of ardent flirtation, which occur in most public ball rooms towards the end of the evening; and the scene, therefore, though it made a distinct impression at the time, from the extreme beauty of Alice, soon faded from my mind, and certainly would never have been revived by any thing less exciting than the strange rencontre I have described with my very old acquaintance, on the promenade at Southampton. In fact I had lost sight of the girl for