

A SONG OF ARRAN.

O for the Arran breezes!
O for the sunny glow!
O for the glens and mountains
Of just ten years ago!
I see it all in fancy.
As I lie with half-shut eyes,
And fairer still in dreamland,
When slumber o'er me lies.

Where are the happy voices
That gladden'd all the day,
And rose in songs at evening
From boats across the bay?
Where is the fading splendour,
That linger'd, like a smile,
Upon the peaks of Goatfell,
And on the Holy Isle?

Not in my heart is envy
That youth returns once more
In other forms and voices
Than those I loved of yore:
Yet all my heart is craving
For pleasures that are fled,
For voices of the distant,
And voices of the dead.

The mist comes down on Arran,
Rich in its purple dyes:
I see that mist no longer,
A mist is o'er my eyes.
O for the Arran breezes!
O for the sunny glow!
O for the loves and friendships
Of just ten years ago!

D. BROWN.

HER GRACE, LETITIA.

IN THE TIME OF QUEEN MARY AND WILLIAM.

Bradfax Chase it is called. The mansion is almost a palace, and its owner's style regal.

The true greatness of the house began only in the reign of William III., when the first Duke fought with that sovereign in Ireland.

In early life the Duke had lived very precariously, sharing the exile of Charles II. and his Court; but when the Stuarts were done with, and William of Orange reigned, his estate was flourishing. He had many years before married one of the wealthiest heiresses in all England.

In the year when Mary, Queen of William III., died, there was not a more prosperous nobleman or man in all England than the Duke of Bradfax, and most men who knew his Grace envied him.

But he was sad and melancholy, especially when his daughter, the Lady Letitia, caressed him.

She was his only child. The Lady Letitia followed her mother in beauty, and that lady, by the maternal side, was of the blood of Southern France.

Her father, an Englishman of vast wealth, the architect of his own fortunes, had married a French woman, and their only daughter had gained by her united wealth and beauty the hand and title of the first Duke of Bradfax, then twenty years her senior.

Letitia was their only child.

By the time the Lady Letitia was of marriageable age, the French grandmother and millionaire grandfather slept with their forefathers, but the Duchess of Bradfax still kept up communications with her French relations, and rare was the year that did not see several dark, bright and keen-eyed visitors arriving at Bradfax Chase, who, if truth must be said, enlivened it very materially.

But why was the Duke melancholy and solitary? Why, more especially, was he markedly sad when his daughter, the Lady Letitia, actuated by her partially French blood, caressed him openly before the world—that is to say, the world of Bradfax Chase, for the family never went to town?

No one knew. But this fact became evident, as time went on, to all the Duchess's Court—that the best news which ever reached Bradfax Chase made its master droop his head yet the more.

It was this: The Duchess, undesirous that the title should die out, used all her influence at Court to obtain the royal permission to continue the peerage to the husband of her daughter, the heiress, so that the dignities of the house should be continued.

The Duchess, a clever, and, if the truth must be admitted, artful woman, spared neither trouble nor treasure to gain her ends; and in the last year of his life, William III. decreed that the husband of Letitia, only daughter of the first Duke of Bradfax, should take the title upon the death of the Duke, but with this condition—that the husband should be noble before marriage.

The intelligence rejoiced greatly the heart of mother and daughter, but the Duke showed no sign of joy, and gave no word of welcome to the news.

Suitors now poured upon Bradfax Chase, for marriage with Letitia meant not only the possession of a young and beautiful wife, but the enjoyment of the highest title but one in the land, with the possession of an immense fortune.

Before Queen Anne was proclaimed at Winchester and St. Paul's Cross, the news circulated at Court that the Duke of Bradfax's daughter had accepted the hand of Lord Bellamars.

Wise King William shook his then dying head, and said it was a bad choice.

The Duchess, not Letitia, decided upon this alliance.

Letitia, rather a French than English daughter, in thorough obedience, offered no opposition,

and she and her father yielded to the well-meaning Duchess.

The bridegroom was polished, well born, better bred, but cold and repellant.

He had no passions. Now, in the first year of Queen Anne, a virulent disease broke out in England, and the Duke was one of the first to be seized with it.

Nothing would prevent Letitia, Lady Bellamars, from nursing her father. Neither the mother's nor the husband's authority prevailed, and for the first time in her life her really imperative nature asserted itself.

On the third day, when his Grace feared that delirium was setting in, he called his daughter to him, and she learnt why habitually he drooped his head.

How long he talked, what particulars he gave, need not here be told.

Suffice it to say, when the paid nurses, hearing certain strange cries, entered the room, they saw the Lady Letitia cowering from her father's bed, and evidently not mistress of her senses.

Twelve hours afterwards, the physician who attended the father pronounced the daughter to be seized with the epidemic.

When Lady Letitia recovered consciousness, she was bewildered.

"Where am I—who is there?" "Do not be afraid, my lady!" said a pleasant voice. "You have been very ill, but your Grace is now better."

"Grace!" she said, with the quick apprehension of her Southern blood. "If you call me Grace, my father, the Duke, is dead!"

"No, no!" replied the servant, panic-stricken at the unintended disclosure she had made. "I—"

"Do not deceive me!" she entreated. "Tell me the truth, good woman!"

"Ay, the noble Duke is dead!" said the woman.

"Where is the Duchess, my mother?"

"Fled to France, your Grace."

"And the Duke, my husband?"

"He is with her Grace."

For so it was, that, while the epidemic raged, the dearest relations fled and left their loved ones to the care of hired servants. Ten days after, her Grace Letitia was in a fair way to renewed health.

But within another week she became the mother of a son, who was heir to the dukedom.

Strangely enough, gentle creature as she was, she shrank from the poor child, who was safely born, though the mother had passed through the valley of the shadow of death.

Evidently she loved the child, but yet she seemed possessed of an aversion for it.

She wrote a long letter as soon as she was strong enough, and over which she spent hours.

This letter was dispatched to France.

From that country came a soothing letter, written by the husband and mother, while a second was addressed to the family physician, asking him if the Duchess was wandering in her mind.

Her Grace Letitia was evidently suffering from deep mental anxiety.

The great withdrawing room was not wide enough for her pacing all through that long succeeding winter, and it came to be her habit to walk up and down the painting gallery, which had been founded by an ancestor when Charles I. brought galleries of paintings into fashion. Up and down her Grace would pace for hours, her velvet train rustling, and her pearls now and again clinking.

The epidemic had very slightly, if at all, injured her imperious style of beauty; and the black hair was as thick, the dark eyes as bright, the olive skin as brilliant, as in the days when she went a not unwilling bride to the altar.

When her mother and husband returned to Bradfax Chase, in the spring, they were accompanied by a distant cousin of the dowager's, a French woman, some years the elder of Letitia, in whose veins ran some of the old Italian Medici family blood.

The Duchess showed some anxiety to consult with her mother and husband, and as really the head of her father's family, the others displayed absolute deference to her.

When the three were alone, she said almost immediately, "My lord, you are not the Duke of Bradfax, neither am I its Duchess, nor our son its heir: for my father was married, and no widower, before he wedded with my mother, and I am but his natural daughter, and not you, my mother, nor you, my husband, nor I, have right to remain in this house."

"She is mad!" cried the Dowager Duchess.

"And yet I think we are well established here," said the Duke, with a curious smile.

"Daughter, speak more plainly," cried the dowager.

"My mother, on the third day of the Duke's illness he called me to him, and saying he was convinced he should die, he must relieve his mind of a terrible secret. Twenty-five years since he married a poor girl whom he was ashamed to own. He was then poor, and when he became rich he was a coward—a coward! Mother, no sin is upon your soul!"

"He was wandering in his mind when he spoke," gasped the dowager.

"No! no!" replied the Duchess. "He told me their names—where they lived, and gave me the key of the secret place where I should find the proofs—here, in the Chase. I have the key!" and here she drew one from her bosom. "But I have forgotten all—all!—where are the mother and son—where are the proofs—all! But, mother, they must be found, even if we pull

down the Chase. We are intruders here, and we must go out and give up all!"

The mother and son-in-law looked at each other, and they beheld a mutual determination to oppose the honest lady, her Grace Letitia, so-called Duchess of Bradfax.

One whole year went past, she withdrawing herself more and more away from the company of her mother and her husband, and even dreading to look upon her child, whom she held as an innocent thief.

Gradually, throughout the district, it came to be believed that the witch-looking beautiful Duchess of Bradfax was insane.

Who first spread the report?

Was it the foreign woman, Catherine Concini, the dowager's cousin, who had taken up her residence at the Chase, and who was so frequently seen riding, hunting, and fishing with the Duke?

This French-Italian woman, upon one day as the year was drawing to a close, said carelessly to the Duke, as they rambled through the late autumn leaves, "My lord, should my lady die, would her fortune, so far as you are concerned, die with her?"

"What a strange question, Rina!" he replied—Rina being the derivation of her name.

"As well such a question as any other."

"No; I should possess her fortune for the use of our son."

"And if he were to die?"

"Then the title and estate would pass to the next of kin, and I have nought but a moderate annuity."

"Then," said Rina, "by your wife's death your fortunes would not suffer, while by your son's death you would be ruined?"

"Tis very much as you say, my Rina; but why these strange questions?"

"Your English law of land and marriage is so interesting to us poor foreigners, who have so few acres of our own to lose."

In the following winter the end came.

That her Grace Letitia's heart became affected by her anxiety concerning her unknown half-brother's existence may be accepted as certain.

In vain she sought to remember what her father told her—in vain she bade her woman watch her in her sleep, and bear in mind such words as she spoke in slumber; for, as the weeks passed on, she often muttered when no longer wearily awake.

The servants either spoke falsely, or she never in her sleep gave by word or mouth a clue to the secret which was wearing away her life.

Neither her mother nor her husband openly opposed her, but both were determined not to give up their titles unless they were compelled.

Ah! had worldly position so gripped them, that they were glad when the end came, and her Grace Letitia was silent, tongue-tied evermore?

For in that winter she died.

She had been again pacing the great picture-gallery for an hour, when suddenly she was seized with what appeared to be a fainting fit.

As she fell in the brilliantly-lit gallery, a servant, stationed at one end, gave the alarm.

But before he reached the Duchess, the demoiselle Catherine Concini had hurried from a side door in the gallery, and was stooping over her.

Ten minutes afterwards, when the physician-in-ordinary attached to the house had been found and approached, he had only this intelligence to submit—the Duchess was dead!

She still lay in Rina's arms.

One of her Grace's hands was covered with a kerchief.

To his great surprise, when the physician began to busy himself about the dead lady, he found that the hand upon which the handkerchief lay was arched over a large circular piece of solid ice.

In the hurry and agony of that moment no one thought to ask himself whether that fragment of ice came—whether or not it could have anything to do with the death.

Yet it was strange how it got there from without the house upon that winter night—a solid, rounded lump of clear ice, over which the dead lady's right hand lay arched, when the physician removed the kerchief.

The faculty of that day were quite incapable of finding a cause for death.

The jury summoned found a verdict in accordance with the evidence.

And after laying in state some days, her Grace Letitia, second Duchess of Bradfax, was placed in the tomb of her father's ancestors, and close to that shroud which enclosed the late Duke and all his secrets.

A year afterwards, the Duke married Catherine Concini, third Duchess of Bradfax.

But sad was her life, for her husband went to Court and left her lonely at Bradfax Chase.

Slowly, but surely, she aged, but grew fearfully weary of her lot.

At last she fled, after some terrible and unknown fright, to her own people in the South of France, and never again was she heard of. Her ambition had ended in her own complete wretchedness.

At Bradfax the grandmother now alone remained watching the grandson.

When the boy was ten, his father was killed in a duel in Leicester Fields, by London City, and near Westminster, and the boy became third duke.

He was thirty when his grandmother died, full of years.

Never once had he heard of his mother's secret.

And he lived and died, leaving a son, and the

generations went on, and so in the fullness of time it became the reign of Victoria.

II.

IN THE TIME OF QUEEN VICTORIA.

The Chase had not altered much in all those years. The scenes were a little more rounded—the portions built of brick somewhat mellowed—that was all.

The same pictures hung in the great gallery, and even the sconces in which the wax candles were set were as in the time of Queen Anne.

In the great drawing-room, adjoining the painting-gallery, sat the reigning Duke and his mother. She was fair and fresh-looking, but her son, the last and youngest descendant of the first Duke, and therefore of her Grace Letitia, second Duchess, inherited much of that dark and beautiful woman's attributes.

He was dark, his eyes were eager, his olive skin rich in easily rising choler, and his pale lips were ever ready to wreath themselves.

The fair English lady, his mother, was calmly watching the fire, for it was winter time. But the young Duke (his years were about 24,) was reading a book eagerly.

"Tudor," she said, "what do you find so very interesting in that book? Let me look at it!"

"No, my lady, it is scarce fit reading for you."

"Oh, you are very considerate, my son! It is 'Balzac,' I suppose?"

"Yes, mother, dear Balzac—always Balzac; there is nobody in the world worth Balzac. I hope always to be reading him slowly, and never to read him through."

"What a singular fancy, my dear Tudor! Which of his books are you reading?"

"'Vautrin.' No woman could understand it, and not one man in a thousand."

"Ah, I suppose you are a thousandth?"

"I sincerely hope so."

"But what so interests you in the book now?"

"A wonderful page. Mamma, Balzac says that if the palms of the hands be bound over two lumps of ice, death must ensue, unless the constitution is wonderfully strong, within twenty minutes."

"How horrible!"

Suddenly the young Duke shivered.

"Mother," he said, "do you recall that it is history in our family that Letitia, the second Duchess, who died in the painting gallery most mysteriously, was found, after she was dead, to have a large fragment of ice in one of her hands?"

"Oh, you dreadful boy! Do you mean to infer—"

"That the woman, Catherine Concini, destroyed her? Certainly I do; and, depend upon it, that was the means she used. She came of the Medici; and there was not any secret made of producing death unknown to that family."

"Nonsense! You have read those ugly yellow-covered French novels until you have injured your judgment."

"No, your Grace; nothing of the kind. The Bradfaxes have always paid considerable attention to French literature, probably because of their descent from Letitia's mother, who, you know, was thoroughly wealthy and partly a French woman."

"But, Tudor, how do you know all about these strange tales in your family to which you so often refer?"

"Oh, many of the servants have as long a descent in the family as I have! Half a dozen of the old men and women here can tell a deal more about our predecessors than I myself, and their children are learning all about it from them. Of that I have no doubt."

Her Grace was startled. Indeed, in the first years of her marriage she heartily repented of her entry into the lugubrious family of the Bradfaxes. She came of a cheerful English house herself, which had never had a phantom, or even the ghost of one, in the family.

"Why, mamma, dear, I can recapitulate the occasions upon which the shade of her Grace Letitia has appeared here at Bradfax Chase. She never is seen except when one or more of the family are in danger. She first appeared in '45, when the eldest son of the house was furiously about to join the cause of the Young Pretender. He was, happily, warned. Upon the second occasion the head of the family was about to marry a woman of infamous character; this was in 1780, and the marriage was never solemnized. Then, in January, '93, she prevented Tudor, sixth Earl, from going to Paris, where his intended travelling companion, who went alone, being seized as an aristocrat and a spy, was beheaded. On the fourth and last occasion, the seventh Earl was about to join the conspiracy for the recall of Napoleon from Elba; he was a real Bonapartist. He bowed to the guardian Letitia."

"And do you believe all this, dear Tudor?" asked his mother.

"As firmly as I believe I live."

"Do you really think that if you were in danger she would appear to you?"

"Yes; if the danger were of my own seeking, and which, by the use of my own will, I could avoid."

Here the door was tapped, and the footman, upon entering, stated that "Miss Bradfax had arrived at the Chase."

"Miss Bradfax," ejaculated the young Duke. "Yes," said the amiable and smiling Duchess