

quothe the page, reddening angrily. "Grace Willoughby and myself were playmates in childhood—lovers in youth—self-confident—and self-betrothed. But Sir Mark, who hath endured unworthy neglect at his Majesty's hand's would not for the worth of the Exchequer bestow his daughter upon a minion of the court; and he hath accordingly closed his door on my farther visits."

"In order that thou mayest find admission through the casement?"

"No!" replied Brooke, haughtily. "He gave me a fair choice, between his daughter and my loyal service."

"And thou didst gallantly prefer a livery and court servitude, to freedom and the fair Grace?"

"The livery I wear," said Brooke looking down on his embroidered sleeve, "is that of my sovereign; and my *seigne* waits upon the noble descendant of a line of princes, to whom that of my forefathers has been devoted for centuries."

"Spoken with right earnest delivery and notable emphasis, like many other fustian rant!"

"In sober English, then," rejoined Brooke, warmly, "I love Rowley. Despite his whimsies and vagaries, there lives not a nobler gentleman—a kinder friend. Born at Cologne, while my parents shared his exile, I have scarcely left his side since I was high enough to buckle his garter; and not even the love of my precious Grace shall tempt me to throw back his favours in his teeth. I have lived *for* him—with him—and I trust to die so."

"Praying that time and our Lady's grace may remove old Willoughby's prejudices. Well, well, I shall marvel no more at the staid gravity of thy demeanour, nor at the philosophical coldness with which thou receivest the bright glances I have seen levelled at thee from behind her Majesty's chair. But we must up and away, Harry, for the hall-bell sounds boardward;" and the two young men, after hurrying towards the stately gallery of Somerhill, in which the groaning tables were sumptuously spread, scarcely reached the upper end in time to assume their posts, as the gay monarch entered from the garden; and by his high-bred

courtesies and cheerful gallantry, soon appeased the wounded pride of his irate hostess—the absurd and far-famed Lady Muskerrey.

It was some days after the festivities at Somerhill that, one evening towards night-fall, two travellers were seen riding at a brisk pace along one of the numerous green lanes between Tunbridge and Knowle. They were habited alike, in sad-coloured suits, and appeared to belong to the class of poorer gentry; while the horses on which they were mounted might have laid claim to a higher pedigree. "Yonder is the house, if my memory serves me," said the elder of the two, as they crossed the high road towards a plantation that appeared to surround a mansion of respectability. The other, immediately dismounting, opened an entrance gate, and as they passed into a small wood, the moon shone out brightly through the thickly interwoven branches, and cast a Mosaic-like reflection upon the wild flowers with which it was carpeted. The weeping birch, that "Lady of the woods," hung garlanding their winding road, while the majestic pines, that rose with a protecting air in the interior of the shrubbery, sent forth a spicy fragrance as the heavy night-dew clung to the "medicinal gums" of their spreading branches. There was not a breath stirring to wave the festoons of wild honeysuckles, that flung their scattered blossoms from bough to bough.

A brighter radiance soon shone through the receding trees; and reaching a second gate, the travellers suddenly came upon an open platform, in the centre of which rose the sequestered Hall of Wildinghurst. It was a low, stone mansion, after the fashion of the early manorial houses—half-castellated—belonging to no order—and boasting few ornaments, save the carved masonry of its porch. The strangers having advanced within the screen of open-stone-work fronting the house, the younger hastened to set the great bell of the Hall in vigorous motion, till its clang broke inharmoniously upon the soft and slumberous effect of the moonlight stillness around. The heavy portal soon swung upon its hinges; and out bounded two gaunt, active blood-hounds, eager to prove their instinctive discrimination of