

In the preface to the Tragedy, Sergeant Talfourd remarks :

In endeavouring to present, in a dramatic form, the feelings which the scene and its history have engendered, it has been found necessary to place in the foreground domestic incidents and fictitious characters ; only to exhibit the chief agents of the treachery, so far as essential to the progress of the action ; and to allow the catastrophe itself rather to be as affecting the fortunes of an individual family, than exhibited in its extended horrors. The subject presents strong temptations to mere melo-dramatic effect : it has been the wish of the author to resist these as much as possible ; but he can scarcely hope with entire success.

We quote a scene, which will give a fair idea of the whole. It is that in which *Halbert* declares his affection for *Helen Campbell* :

HALBERT.

Was not that Helen ? Wherefore should she fly
Upon my coming ? But her absence serves
My purpose now. I come to talk of her.

LADY MACDONALD.

Of her ? Sit down ; you look fatigued and ill :
I'll fetch a draught of wine.

HALBERT.

Fatigued and ill !
My looks belie me, then ; I scarce have felt
So fresh in spirit since I was a boy,
And the sweet theme I come to speak of needs
No wine to make it joyous. It is marriage.

LADY MACDONALD.

My son !

HALBERT.

Why, *you* look pale ; I thought my wish
Was also yours. I know a common mother,
Who, having lost her husband in her prime,
Seeks from a grateful son some slight return
For love that watch'd his infancy, may feel
Her fortune cruel, when a new regard,
With all the greediness of passion, fills
The bosom where till then affection reign'd,
Which answer'd, though it could not rival, hers :
But we have lived so long as equal friends
With love absorbing duty, that I thought,
And I still think, increase of joy to me
Must bring delight to you. I could have lived
Content, as we have lived, and still prolong
The lingering ecstasy of fearless hope,
But that the licence of the time, which brings
A band of loose companions to our glen,
Requires that I should claim a husband's right
To shield its lovely orphan.

LADY MACDONALD.

You mean—Helen ?

HALBERT.

Whom else could I intend ? If you have been
Perplex'd by fear that I might mean to seek
Another's hand, no wonder you grew pale.
But still you tremble ;—what is this ?

LADY MACDONALD.

My son,
Are you assured she loves you ?

HALBERT.

As assured
As of my love for her. In both, one wish,
As she has glided into womanhood,
Has grown with equal progress.

LADY MACDONALD.

Have you sought
Of her, if she esteems it thus ?

HALBERT.

By words ?
No ; for I never doubted it : as soon
Should I have ask'd you if a mother's love
Watch'd o'er my nature's frailties. If sweet hopes
Dawning at once on each ; if gentle strifes
To be the yielder of each little joy
Which chance provided ; if her looks upraised
In tearful thankfulness for each small boon
Which, nothing to the giver, seem'd excess
To her ; if poverty endured for years
Together in this valley do not,—do not breathe
Of mutual love, I have no stronger proofs
To warrant my assurance. Mother, speak !
Do you know anything which shows all this
A baseless dream ?

LADY MACDONALD.

My Halbert, you have quell'd
Fierce passion by strong virtue ; use your strength ;
Nay, do not start thus ; I do not affirm
With certainty you are deceived, but tremble
Lest the expressions of a thankful heart
And gracious disposition should assume
A colour they possessed not, to an eye
Bent fondly over them.

HALBERT.

It cannot be ;
A thousand, and a thousand times, I've read
Her inmost soul ; and you that rack me thus
With doubt have read it with me. Before Heaven,
I summon you to witness ! In the gloom
Of winter's dismal evening, while I strove
To melt the icy burthen of the hours
By knightly stories, and rehearsed the fate
Of some high maiden's passion, self-sustain'd
Through years of solitary hope, or crown'd
In death with triumph, have you not observed,
As fading embers threw a sudden gleam
Upon her beauty, that its gaze was fixed
On the rapt speaker, with a force that told
How she could lavish such a love on him ?

LADY MACDONALD.

I have ; and then I fancied that she loved you,

HALBERT.

Fancied ! Good mother, is that emptiest sound
The comfort that you offer ? Is my heart
Fit sport for fancy ? Fancied !—'twas as clear