

THE COLONIAL PEARL.

POLITE LITERATURE, SCIENCE AND RELIGION.

"FANCY AND FACTS—TO PLEASE AND TO IMPROVE."

VOLUME FOUR.

HALIFAX, N. S. FRIDAY MORNING, JANUARY 10, 1840.

NUMBER TWO.

SCENES IN THE LIFE OF MARY DE MEDICIS.

Lyons, one of the most commercial towns in France, was filled with the enthusiasm likely to affect a people on the first reception of one who presented herself as their queen, and the wife of their beloved Henri Quatre. The whole of the journey of Mary de Medicis, since she had left Florence, had presented a scene of gorgeous display, and even more than regal magnificence.

On the ninth of December, 1600, at the hour of supper, surrounded by her attendants, sate a lady, "beautiful exceedingly;" tall, and exquisitely formed, and of a commanding yet winning presence.

Suddenly, at the head of the spacious room, was heard a bustle. "The king, the king!" was whispered—"Room for his majesty of France!" Henri, who had only just arrived, had given orders that he was not to be recognized; but finding them disobeyed, he quietly disengaged himself from the throng; and had it not been for a sweet confusion which overspread her countenance, it might not have been known that Mary had caught a glimpse of his fine form as it retired, or heard him say, "Gentlemen, I did not think it was so difficult not to be a king." She withdrew to her chamber as soon as etiquette would allow.

Here, after dismissing her attendants, she mused on the picture which Henri had presented to her through his minister, M. de Frontenac; and, while absorbed in contemplating the features of him to whom she had resigned all, she was aroused by a light step behind her. Some one was looking over her shoulder; she felt the warm and glowing breath pass over her cheek, and a voice, mild but manly, said:

"Will Mary of Medicis pardon Henri of France for so flattering a copy of a poor original?"

Mary turned quickly round, and, rising, threw herself at the feet of her monarch husband.

"Rise, rise, dearest lady," exclaimed Henri, and he lifted her gently to her seat. For a time he gazed upon her almost enraptured. "You are beautiful," he said, as he seemed to be drinking in her exquisite loveliness; "beautiful even as your painted resemblance, and that seemed more than mortal!"

"Let us hope we have many a happy day before us," said Mary, entranced with the devotion indicated.

"But," continued Henri, "if our land be less lovely than that of my sweet Florentine, at least our people are not less loving, and the idol of Henri's heart shall be the idol of the heart of Henri's people."

"And," replied Mary, "how gay will be the scene when the chivalry of France strive for the meed of renown, from the hands of their Italian queen."

"True," replied Henri, enthusiastically, as he thought with pride on the long list of valiant hearts that presented themselves to the imagination; "we have brave knights and true—chevaliers sans peur et sans reproche, who will proudly lift a lance for the wife of their monarch."

And thus met for the first time the gallant Henri Quatre and the fair Mary de Medicis: Who could dream the fate in store for these young and joyous spirits!

Three years have elapsed—three short years—since the meeting of the bridegroom and his bride. Jealousy was established where love once had been. He who had vowed eternal constancy to Mary had returned to his former intercourse with the Marchioness de Verneuil, who, hated by the queen, sought every opportunity to annoy her.

"My dear Sully," he exclaimed on one occasion, when distracted with the contending interests, "I am half mad—mad with the queen on one side, and Henriette on the other! I would as soon be the meanest of my subjects as their king."

"And what, sire, can I do?" was the calm response of Sully, who discouraged his intimacy with the marchioness.

"See one or both of them—tell Henriette that I have done with her—I love her, Sully, still; but night and morning am I beset by the queen to dismiss her, and I cannot any longer refuse."

At this moment a messenger arrived from the queen, requesting an audience of his majesty. When Mary entered, it was sufficiently evident that something had occurred to ruffle her. Scarcely glancing even at Henri, she exclaimed: "Monsieur de Rosny, as a noble and a gentleman, I appeal to you—am I for ever to submit to the impertinence of a subject? must I tolerate that woman in my court who claims to be the lawful wife of Henri—I, who am the wife of his bosom, the mother of his child!—answer me—must I bear this crying iniquity?"

"Behold," continued Mary, "this paper, the copy of one the marchioness, his mistress, now holds, given to her at the very time he sought my hand, and promising marriage to his vile minion! All ties of affection are disregarded. My love is made a mockery; my name, no doubt, a sport to amuse his hours of dissipation. What can I expect from him who, at the moment of professing an ardent attachment to me, was shamefully wooing her whose name shall not pollute my lips?"

"This is too much, madam," exclaimed Henri.

"What," pursued the enraged queen, who lost all moderation, "what can I expect from him who came to meet his youthful bride, warm from the embraces of another!"

"I pray your majesty," said Sully, "be calm."

"Calm! With all the outraged feelings of a woman, how can I be calm? I, whose birth should have commanded respect, whose sex claimed it, am made the jest of a wanton court."

"Nay, madam, not so—"

"I, whose dowry," she pursued, "was worthy even a De Medicis; whose person, now disregarded, was sought by many—I, who once loved you, Henri—"

"Once, Mary?" said Henry, moved by this latter touch of feeling.

"Ay, once; but that is passed by. You have dishonoured me; and for the sake of my child—our child, Henri—I demand that the original of that deed be delivered to me."

She burst into an agony of tears. Reproaches would only have hardened the resolution of the king; but tears overcame him, and approaching her, he said:

"Dear Mary, do not weep."

"If tears of blood could bring back your pure love and your first earnest affection," was her reply, "I would drain my very heart to shed them."

"Be tranquil; all that I can do, I will. If possible, it shall be delivered to you—at least," he added, "I will ask it of her."

The task which Henri had undertaken was by no means a trifling one. The Marchioness de Verneuil determined to keep his promise, as some check upon him.

Nothing could exceed the rage of the queen at not receiving the paper, on which she had set her whole soul. In vain her husband represented the impossibility of wresting it from the marchioness. Her reproaches grew so furious, that the infatuated monarch, after declaring to Sully that "she gave him no peace," sought once more, in unlawful caresses, to forget the reproaches levelled at him by his queen.

The blood of Henri had been drained by the dagger of an assassin, and the vicissitudes subsequently known by Mary had been great. Hated by her son, despised no less than hated by his minister, her estates were sequestrated, and her person imprisoned. And now, in an old and even decayed mansion in Cologne, and which bore no outward signs that there resided one who had been great, lay the mother of the reigning monarch of France, and the widow of the murdered Henri. Here she, who had founded hospitals and endowed charities—she who had brought a princely dowry to her husband—lay in indigence, withering under the influence of disease, yet not subdued in spirit, and even now was engaged in one of her numerous plots, by which she hoped to overthrow Richilieu's power, and re-establish her ascendancy over the king. Turning her eyes restlessly to the door, as though expecting some one—

"Has no one come?" she demanded impatiently; "no messenger? No, no; the poor, and sick, and infirm, must wait, though waiting is torture. Oh! for one hour of the bounding steps of youth, what, what would I not suffer! Ha! what noise is that? Now, sir, your news," she exclaimed, as a messenger quickly entered her chamber. "Nay, kneel not; I am no sovereign now. Quick—quick! lives Richilieu still?"

"He does."

"Then has the evil one not forsaken his servant?"

"All, madam, is discovered. The king is incensed; the cardinal, yet more firmly established in power, vows implacable vengeance."

"And they who risked all for us," asked Mary anxiously, "how fare they?"

"The axe, the gibbet, and the scaffold, will be their portion," was the melancholy reply.

"But how didst thou escape from the hands of this merciless man?"

"Through the cardinal's mercy."

"And what price didst thou pay?"

"A message to your majesty was given by Richilieu."

"Speak on, sir; I fear not to hear it."

"Say unto her who sought my life," was the message of his eminence, "that her plot has failed, and that Cardinal Richilieu yet lives, to see Mary de Medicis die by the hands of the headsman."

"It is false—false—proud man! the hand of a mightier than thou art is on me, even now." Bear, for love of me, but one more message; and, supported by such of her attendants as yet were true to her, she rose in her bed. "Tell him," she said, "that in the hour of her dissolution, amid racking pain, and with hot and fevered lips, Mary—his mistress—rejoices to die; for it proves him false—false!" and her head sank again on the pillow, exhausted, with her emotions. Yet a few days; and she was no more!

THE RECLAIMED.

"Most merciful!"

Will man's hard heart be never touched with all
Th' overflowing of thy love, and yield itself
To the gentle sympathies, till we shall learn
The noble joy of pouring happiness
Upon the heart of sorrow, and how sweet
The pleasure is of shedding bliss abroad!"

"Ugh! ugh!" coughed I, as I buttoned my surtout closer about me, and drew down my chin into its ample fur collar; "Heav'n pity those who have no shelter for their heads to-night."

"Heav'n pity them, indeed!" answered a voice close to my ear; "for small is pity shewn to the houseless man."

I turned my head: A miserable, half-clad, shivering wretch, stood by my side. His hat was slouched over his eyes, but not sufficiently to hide a face on which the traces of loathsome intemperance and debauchery were distinctly visible. His fragments of a coat was buttoned as closely around him as its scattered buttons would admit, but not closely enough to conceal the want of a vest and shirt beneath. Sad rents in his other garments told too plainly that their days had not been few nor exempt from evil; and his feet were scarcely protected from the frozen ground by a pair of tattered shoes. Such a picture of extreme loathsomeness and misery I had never seen; and half involuntarily I thrust my hand into my pocket with the intention of contributing a few pence to his immediate relief. "But he is intemperate," said I to myself; and the small change which I had grasped was dropped. "He may perish with cold," whispered my better nature; and my fingers clutched the coin. "He'll spend it for grog," interposed my worldly prudence; and I drew my hand empty from my pocket.

It was a bitter cold night in the middle of December. The mercury in the thermometer stood below zero, and the white frost glittered in the clear starlight like countless crystals, whose minuteness impaired not their wonderful brilliancy. There was no breath of wind abroad, but the whole atmosphere was filled with infinite small particles of ice, which pierced the skin with their sharp points, like the invisible spears of a troop of fairies. Arrayed as I was from head to foot in flannel and fur and broadcloth, with all the paraphernalia which an old bachelor deems necessary to enable him to resist the cold, I yet felt as if my blood was curdling in my veins, and my whole man becoming a pillar of ice, in the potent presence of "Old King Frost." Business of an imperative nature had called me, late in the afternoon, to the suburbs of the city; and now my task accomplished, picturing to myself the hearth and hot toast which awaited my return, I was making all convenient haste for home, when my reverie was interrupted by a fit of coughing, and the interruption of the stranger. Now I had always prided myself upon my charities to the poor—the deserving poor—and when Widow Johnson's house was consumed with fire, and all her property, I headed a subscription paper for her benefit with the exceedingly generous sum of five dollars, which I paid in the presence of half the town, who had assembled at the bar-room of the village inn, to talk over the catastrophe, after they had stood to see the house consumed, and had laboured with great zeal to quench the burning chimney after the roof and walls had fallen in. When Philip Brown lost his only cow by a stroke of lightning, I contributed fifty cents to assist him in the purchase of another, although in this case I had some qualms of conscience arising from the manner in which he had been bereft of his property. Many a time and oft have I "forked out" a few pence for the relief of suffering merit, and had in the process of time, come to the comfortable conclusion that I was a particularly charitable man, in which opinion sundry of my neighbours had told me they fully coincided. But here was a new case, evidently differing from any I had ever relieved. I had always felt for the suffering, but it was the suffering of the meritorious. I was ever ready to relieve