

'She should consider,' said Varney, smiling, 'the true faith I owed my lord and master prevented me at first from counselling marriage—and yet I did counsel marriage when I saw she would not be satisfied without the—the sacrament, or the ceremony—which callest thou it, Anthony?'

'Still she has you at feud on another score,' said Foster; 'and I tell it you that you may look to yourself in time—She would not hide her splendour in this dark lantern of an old monastic house, but would fain shine a countess amongst countesses.'

'Very natural, very right,' answered Varney; 'but what have I to do with that?—she may shine through horn or through crystal at my lord's pleasure, I have nought to say against it.'

'She deems that you have an oar upon that side of the boat, Master Varney,' replied Foster, 'and that you can pull it or no, at your good pleasure. In a word, she ascribes the secrecy and obscurity in which she is kept, to your secret counsel to my lord, and to my strict agency; and so she loves us both as a sentenced man loves his judge and his jailor.'

'She must love us better ere she leave this place, Anthony,' answered Varney. 'If I have counselled for weighty reasons that she remain here for a season, I can also advise her being brought forth in the full blow of her dignity. But I were mad to do so, holding so near a place to my lord's person, were she mine enemy. Bear this truth in upon her as occasion offers, Anthony, and let me alone for extolling you in her ear, and exalting you in her opinion—*Ka me, ka thee*—it is a proverb all over the world—The lady must know her friends, and be made to judge of the power they have of being her enemies—meanwhile, watch her strictly, but with all the outward observance that thy rough nature will permit. 'Tis an excellent thing that sullen look and bull-dog humour of thine; thou shouldst thank God for it, and so should my lord; for when there is aught harsh or hard-natured to be done, thou dost it as if it flowed from thine own natural doggedness, and not from orders, and so my lord escapes the scandal.—But hark—some one knocks at the gate—Look out of the window—let no one enter—this were an ill night to be interrupted.'

'It is he whom we spoke of before dinner,' said Foster, as he looked through the casement; 'it is Michael Lambourne.'

'O, admit him, by all means,' said the courtier; 'he comes to give some account of his guest—it imports us much to know the movements of Edmund Tressilian—Admit him, I say, but bring him not hither—I will come to you presently in the Abbot's library.'

Foster left the room, and the courtier, who remained behind, paced the parlour more than once in deep thought, his arms folded on his bosom, until at length he gave way to his meditations in broken words, which we have somewhat enlarged and connected, that his soliloquy may be intelligible to the reader.

'Tis true,' he said, suddenly stopping, and resting his right hand on the table at which they had been sitting, 'this base churl hath fathomed the very depth of my fear, and I have been un-

able to disguise it from him.—She loves me not—I would it were as true that I loved her!—Idiot that I was, to move her in my own behalf, when wisdom bade me be a true broker to my lord!—And this fatal error has placed me more at her discretion than a wise man would willingly be at that of the best piece of painted Eve's flesh of them all. Since the hour that my policy made so perilous a ship, I cannot look at her without fear, and hate, and fondness, so strangely mingled, that I know not whether, were it at my choice, I would rather possess or ruin her. But she must not leave this retreat until I am assured on what terms we are to stand. My lord's interest—and so far it is mine own—for if he sinks, I fall in his train—demands concealment of this obscure marriage—and besides, I will not lend her my arm to climb to her chair of state, that she may set her foot on my neck when she is fairly seated. I must work an interest in her, either through love or through fear—and who knows but I may yet reap the sweetest and best revenge for her former scorn?—that were indeed a masterpiece of court-like art!—Let me but once be her counsel-keeper—let her confide to me a secret, did it but concern the robbery of a linnet's nest, and, fair countess, thou art mine own!' He again paced the room in silence, stopped, filled and drank a cup of wine, as if to compose the agitation of his mind; and muttering, 'Now for a close heart, and an open and unruffled brow,' he left the apartment.

## CHAPTER VI.

The dews of summer night did fall,  
The moon, sweet regent of the sky,  
Silver'd the walls of Cumnor Hall,  
And many an oak that grew thereby.\*

NICKLE.

FOUR apartments, which occupied the western side of the old quadrangle at Cumnor Place, had been fitted up with extraordinary splendour. This had been the work of several days prior to that on which our story opened. Workmen sent from London, and not permitted to leave the premises until the work was finished, had converted the apartments in that side of the building, from the dilapidated appearance of a dissolved monastic house, into the semblance of a royal palace. A mystery was observed in all these arrangements: the workmen came thither and returned by night, and all measures were taken to prevent the prying curiosity of the villagers from observing or speculating upon the changes which were taking place in the mansion of their once indigent, but now wealthy neighbour, Anthony Foster. Accordingly, the secrecy desired was so far preserved, that nothing got abroad but vague and uncertain reports, which were received and repeated, but without much credit being attached to them.

On the evening of which we treat, the new and highly decorated suite of rooms were, for the first time, illuminated, and that with a brilliancy

\* This verse is the commencement of the ballad already quoted, as what suggested the novel.