

fairest court in Christendom—*King Charles was feasting at Somerhill!*

The minstrels remained invisible among the entangled garden-bowers; but the gay beings unto whom they addressed their flattering invocations were seen scattered in groups upon the closely-shaven turf, inhaling the rich fragrance of the bursting magnolia-flowers, or glancing from out the green-wood walks—gorgeous, and bright, and many-coloured as the hollyhocks that lifted up their stately heads beside them. Nature, as well as Majesty, had decreed that it should be a *jour de fête*; and smiles, music, and sunshine united to adorn the scene.

Among the gallant cavaliers dispersed over the lawn—some standing uncovered to listen to the prattle of "*la blanche Wetenhall*,"* or the graceful Chesterfield—others pointing out "*les promenades délicieuses du riant Somerhill*,"* to the maidens of the Queen—(a group as bright as the Pleiades themselves) one alone, the favourite—the cynosure—the observed of all observers, was missing. Grammont was there, with his flaunting fopperies—Hamilton, with his air of graceful nonchalance—the ail-conquering Jermyn—the handsome Sydney—Killigrew, in devoted attendance upon the thoughtless Lady Shrewsbury—and old Sir John Denham, following with equal assiduity the footsteps of his giddy wife, into whose willing ear his Highness of York was breathing "sweet honey words" somewhat closely;—but Charles, *Charles* was absent.

"Methinks," said George Hamilton, throwing himself at listless length upon a green bank, on which Sir Harry Brooke, the King's favourite page was already lying in solitary rumination, "Methinks 't is graceless enough in Rowley to abandon our crack-brained hostess, the Princess of Babylon, in this her own particular day and domain, in order to loiter with the mad-cap Stewart, by greenwood tree or mossy dell."

"Hush!" replied Brooke, laying a cautionary finger upon his lips, and glancing toward the thick hedge of bay-trees by which they were shaded. "How know you what birds may build in the neighbouring covert?"

"Tut, man!—the ears thou darest must

be as acute as those of *Fine Oreille* in the story, to render them dangerous. Rowley and his rattlepate ran laughing down yonder green alley, towards the stream in the hollow below; and, my life, to a silver penny! they are even now fishing for minnows with the lady's silken sash and *étui* pin. But thou lookest neither at brook nor dingle, Harry! What seest thou among the distant woods on which to gaze so earnestly?"

"I see the gleam of an ancient stone wall—I see a peaked roof rising above the dark chesnuts."

"And what then?"

"'Tis the roof of Wildinghurst!"

"Et puis?"

"Nay! nothing further," replied Brooke, turning away his moistened eyes. "'Twere dull sport, Hamilton, for a gallant like yourself to listen to a tale of poor and unhappy, although, God knows, of honest and faithful love!"

Hamilton raised his eyebrows to the utmost stretch of wonder and admiration, and a significant smile began to illuminate his handsome countenance, when a single glance towards his friend suddenly checked his rising mirth. "Beshrew my heart, Harry," exclaimed he, "I guessed thee not for so stricken a deer! But, since, 'tis thus with thee in sober sadness, speed me thy love-tale, man! the how—the wherefore—the when. Trust me," he continued, extending his hand in friendly cordiality, "I have both sympathy and counsel at thy service. What of Wildinghurst? and who dwelleth beneath yonder peaked roof, Harry, that moveth thee so strangely?"

"One who holds courts and courtiers as equally vile and worthless; the more especially, that he was forced to abandon both the one and the other, through lack of Rowley's good countenance—even old Sir Mark Willoughby."

"And wherefore should the name of a worn-out cavalier—a *frondeur*, whom all the world besides hath forgotten, bring tears into thine eyes?"

"Simply, because he hath one fair daughter."

Hamilton's eyes brightened and his lip curled again.

"My story is as easily ended as begun,"

* Grammont's Memoirs.