

THE FORAY OF QUEEN MEAVE.

(IN TWO PARTS.)

PART I.

I shall tell you a pretty tale.

—*Coriolanus*.

I was Dryden who asserted that a serious play is the representation of nature ; but it is nature wrought up to a higher pitch, and the plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimilitude. An intellectual hoisting process, in its nature almost identical with that described by the great English poet, differentiates the modern story in prose from the modern tale in verse. The "Marion" and "Lady of the Lake," of Scott ; the "Lalla Rookh," of Moore ; the "Corsair," "Giaour," and "Parisina," of Byron ; the "Eve of St. Agnes," of Keats ; the "Earthly Paradise," of William Morris, abundantly exemplify the poetic method of telling a story, and, if we compare it with the manner in which the great prose narrators of our language deal with their materials—Sir Walter Scott in "Waverley," Dickens in "Copperfield," Thackeray in "Esmonde," Blackmore in "Lorna Doone," and George Eliot in "Silas Mariner," for example—it will, I think, appear quite obvious to all that the utterance of Dryden is a correct one. Homer and Virgil, therefore, were as great story-tellers as Boccaccio and Cervantes, only they used different forms of expression ; the latter prose, the former versification, which is one of the criteria that distinguishes poetry from prose, but not the sole mark of distinction nor even the chief one. The poet, instead of simply relating the incident in the fewest and simplest words, strikes off a glowing picture of the scene, and exhibits it in the most lively colors to the eye of the imagination. The novelist not only works on more various elements, he appeals to more ordinary minds than the poet ; but this is nothing more than a strong practical proof of his essential inferiority as an artist, since his devices