

LA DERNIERE FÉE.*

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF M. DE BALZAC.

BY T. D. P.

Abel remained stunned. This second visit had developed in the young man the sentiment, which from the first had floated indistinctly through his mind : but it was not love in the strictest sense of the word, because hope was wanting. After the departure of the fairy, Abel thought of every movement and expression ; he remembered, and was puzzled by, the inexplicable embarrassment which had appeared for a moment on her countenance ; he remained for a long time plunged in deep meditation, and when Caliban entered, he was in the same posture as he had been left by the fairy.

" Ah ! Caliban, she tells me she cannot lengthen your life."

Caliban looked sadly down to the ground, and when he raised his head again, Abel saw the big tear rolling down his wrinkled cheek.

" Ah ! Abel, then I shall quit thee—promise me that thou wilt put me by the side of thy father."

Abel promised.

A few days afterwards the fairy came again ; she told Abel he would run great hazard if he went to see the palace in which she lived, but he replied that nothing would have power to daunt him with such a hope in view ; the fairy then gave him her wand of mother-of-pearl, which for this time only, she said, would obey the will of a stranger, and she added :

" To-morrow, Abel, when all nature shall be buried in a deep sleep, when the village clock sounds the hour of midnight, then thou must strike with this wand upon the stone monument which you will find about a hundred paces from this cottage : it will open and show thee a gulf, down which thou must throw thyself. When thy feet touch the ground, walk bravely on until thou seest a light visible only to thee ; it will guide thee to my palace."

The fairy again disappeared as before. Abel held in his hand the magic wand ; he kissed it again and again, because his fairy had touched it ; he knew not what to do with it—he put it

in this place, then in that, then returned to see if it was still there.

At the time when Napoleon held all Europe bent under his powerful hand, and appeared to men surrounded by an almost superhuman glory, he confided his portfolio to a young Secretary. The young man knew not what to do with his treasure ; he consulted every body.

" How shall I carry the portfolio of an Emperor ? In what private and precious case can I lock it up ?"

He dared not take his eyes from it ; he felt as if Napoleon or his genius were in it. If any body passed by it, he was uneasy. If any one came to see him, he showed them the portfolio, and repeated to every body that he carried the Emperor's portfolio. At last he became insane upon this point. It was almost so with Abel and the wand, and it can well be imagined with what impatience he waited for the hour, named for his adventure, to arrive.

Caliban insisted upon accompanying him, and when the clock sounded the midnight hour, they were both standing by the stone, and ere the last echo had died away, Abel struck the slab with the wand. It opened immediately and flames burst forth ; Caliban looked at Abel with affright, but the intrepid young man, closing his eyes, sprang into the centre of the little volcano, and Caliban followed him. They fell upon some soft and pliable substance, and so received no injury ; they heard the stone close upon them with a crash, and found themselves in the most frightful obscurity. Abel rose, and putting his hand before him walked courageously on, calling upon Caliban to follow, but this faithful servant heard not ; he sought to find him, but in vain, and he decided to go on.

He went on for some distance without meeting any obstacle ; the most profound silence reigned, and darkness brooded upon every thing. The road was long, but he pressed on ; soon a horrible noise sounded above and around him ; the very vault under which he walked seemed to