

exceeds my imagination as much as it does my desert. But shall not your wife, my love,—at least one day soon,—be surrounded with the honour which arises neither from the toils of the mechanic who decks her apartment, nor from the silks and jewels with which your generosity adorns her, but which is attached to her place among the matronage, as the avowed wife of England's noblest earl?

'One day?' said her husband,—'Yes, Amy, my love, one day this shall surely happen; and, believe me, thou canst not wish for that day more fondly than I. With what rapture could I retire from labours of state, and cares and toils of ambition, to spend my life in dignity and honour on my own broad domains, with thee, my lovely Amy, for my friend and companion! But, Amy, this cannot yet be; and those dear but stolen interviews are all I can give to the loveliest and the best beloved of her sex.'

'But why can it not be?' urged the countess, in the softest tones of persuasion.—'Why can it not immediately take place—this more perfect, this uninterrupted union, for which you say you wish, and which the laws of God and man alike command?—Ah! did you but desire it half as much as you say, mighty and favoured as you are, who, or what, should bar your attaining your wish?'

The earl's brow was overcast.

'Amy,' he said, 'you speak of what you understand not. We that toil in courts are like those who climb a mountain of loose sand—we dare make no halt until some projecting rock affords us a secure footing and resting-place—if we pause sooner, we slide down by our own weight, an object of universal derision. I stand high, but I stand not secure enough to follow my own inclination. To declare my marriage were to be the artificer of my own ruin. But, believe me, I will reach a point, and that speedily, when I can do justice to thee and to myself. Mean-time, poison not the bliss of the present moment by desiring that which cannot at present be. Let me rather know whether all here is managed to thy liking. How does Foster bear himself to you?—In all things respectful, I trust, else the fellow shall dearly rue it.'

'He reminds me sometimes of the necessity of this privacy,' answered the lady, with a sigh; 'but that is reminding me of your wishes, and therefore I am rather bound to him than disposed to blame him for it.'

'I have told you the stern necessity which is upon us,' replied the earl. 'Foster is, I note, somewhat sullen of mood, but Varney warrants to me his fidelity and devotion to my service. If thou hast aught, however, to complain of the mode in which he discharges his duty, he shall aye it.'

'O, I have nought to complain of,' answered the lady, 'so he discharges his task with fidelity to you; and his daughter Janet is the kindest and best companion of my solitude—her little air of precision sits so well upon her!'

'Is she indeed?' said the earl; 'she who gives you pleasure must not pass unrewarded.—Come hither, damsel.'

'Janet,' said the lady, 'come hither to my lord.'

Janet, who, as we already noticed, had discreetly retired to some distance, that her presence might be no check upon the private conversation of her lord and lady, now came forward, and, as she made her reverential courtesy, the earl could not help smiling at the contrast which the extreme simplicity of her dress and the prim demureness of her looks made with a very pretty countenance and a pair of black eyes, that laughed in spite of their mistress's desire to look grave.

'I am bound to you, pretty damsel,' said the earl, 'for the contentment which your service hath given to this lady.' As he said this, he took from his finger a ring of some price, and offered it to Janet Foster, adding, 'Wear this for her sake and for mine.'

'I am well pleased, my lord,' answered Janet demurely, 'that my poor service hath gratified my lady, whom no one can draw nigh to without desiring to please; but we of the precious Master Holdforth's congregation seek not, like the gay daughters of this world, to twine gold around our fingers, or wear stones upon our necks, like the vain women of Tyre and of Sidon.'

'O, what! you are a grave professor of the precise sisterhood, pretty Mistress Janet,' said the earl, 'and I think your father is of the same congregation in sincerity. I like you both the better for it; for I have been prayed for, and wished well to, in your congregations. And you may the better afford the lack of ornament, Mistress Janet, because your fingers are slender, and your neck white. But here is what neither papist nor puritan, latitudinarian nor precisian, ever hoggies or makes mouths at. E'en take it, my girl, and employ it as you list.'

So saying, he put into her hand five broad gold pieces of Philip and Mary.

'I would not accept this gold neither,' said Janet, 'but that I hope to find a use for it, which will bring a blessing on us all.'

'Even please thyself, pretty Janet,' said the earl, 'and I shall be well satisfied.—And I prithee let them hasten the evening collation.'

'I have bidden Master Varney and Master Foster to sup with us, my lord,' said the countess, as Janet retired to obey the earl's commands; 'has it your approbation?'

'What you do ever must have so, my sweet Amy,' replied her husband; 'and I am the better pleased thou hast done them this grace, because Richard Varney is my sworn man, and a close brother of my secret council; and for the present I must needs repose much trust in this Anthony Foster.'

'I had a boon to beg of thee, and a secret to tell thee, my dear lord,' said the countess, with a faltering accent.

'Let both be for to-morrow, my love,' replied the earl. 'I see they open the folding-doors into the banquetting-parlour, and as I have ridden far and fast, a cup of wine will not be unacceptable.'

So saying, he led his lovely wife into the next apartment, where Varney and Foster received them with the deepest reverences, which the first paid with the fashion of the court, and the second after that of the congregation. The earl returned their salutation with the negligent