

preternatural fancies and associations, and, having been joined by Alice and Rhoda, they remained watching it for an hour, while every moment some new appearance assumed by the flames, heightened its wild and picturesque fascination.

CHAPTER XLV

Up from the far south west,
A breath begins to move,
From heaven to earth the rich behest,
Of ever-living love.

COUL COPPAGEN.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds,
Admit impediments.

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

THE following night, as every night at that delicious season is, was beautiful as ever imagination painted. The full-orbed moon shed her charmed light over the peaceful valley of Leafy Hollow, and gave to the brilliant colors of the woods a more romantic softness and richness of hue. The clustering constellations appeared scattered at intervals over the deep pure blue of the heavens; the dew tinged by the moonlight glittered on every object like a veil of air-dissolved silver, and the wild plaintive whistle of the whip-poor-will fell with a melancholy sweetness on the ear. Helen and her sister, with Max and Rhoda, were in the stoup before the cottage. Max had been playing some of the beautiful music of his native land, and the spirit voices of the wood and lake had returned back the notes with redoubled melody and sweetness. Mr. Blachford and Dr. Lauenfeldt had that day gone to the nearest town, and as the hour approached when their return might be looked for, Alice, who hoped to receive letters from Ernest Tennyson, proposed a walk to the gate that they might listen for the expected waggon.

"I will go," cried Rhoda, "but let Max and Helen stay where they are, for I am quite tired listening to them talking about Goethe and Schiller and Deutschland, and I want you to tell me about England. I intend to marry an Englishman, and go to live there some day or other. Perhaps your friend Ernest, Max."

"Ernest would not have a giddy elf like you," said Max, laughing.

"Is that true, Alice?"

"I don't know—people sometimes, I believe, fancy their opposites—"

"What! fancy some one so wise that he would scold me from morning till night for my folly—that would never do!" cried the gay girl, as she drew Alice down the steps.

"Do not go," said Max to Helen, hurriedly, and the agitation of his tones communicated itself to

her; "let us enjoy the beauty of the hour together a little longer; together gaze upon the eloquent stars," and he softly repeated:

"Now she looks upon them as I look,
Methinks a being that is beautiful
Becometh more so as it looks on beauty,
The eternal beauty of undying things."

"I would I knew what thoughts those mystic heavens awaken in you now."

"Thoughts of the past," she answered.

"Oh! that *past*!" exclaimed Max; "I tremble when I think it may have charms for you which make the present hateful."

"No," said Helen, thoughtfully, "on the whole, I think I have been happier since I left my native land than I ever was before."

A thrill of intense delight agitated the heart of the young painter. "Oh! Helen!" he said passionately, "your words give me life—I must speak now. How often have I longed to pour forth all my heart to you, but the dread of your anger or coldness kept back the wild words that were trembling on my lips—but now I can no longer restrain them—Helen, I love you!"

It was in vain Helen attempted to reply, and as her lover leant against the pillar of the stoup, hushing his very breath to catch her answer, she felt that had it been possible, gladly would she have dissolved into the elements around her rather than have spoken the words which yet she was determined to say.

"Speak to me, Helen! say but one word, or lay this dear hand in mine as a sign that I may hope!"

The thought of suffering Max to remain any longer in error was not to be borne, and Helen at last found utterance.

"Don't hope—don't ask me for love; I have none to give. Esteem, admiration, friendship, I can give you, but nothing else." Such were her words, but there was a soft and trembling agitation in her manner, which seemed to contradict their cold import.

"Esteem, admiration, friendship," eagerly repeated the young painter, "and are not these the truest ingredients of love? Oh! Helen, do you honour me with these, and cannot you add to them a deeper, tenderer feeling, and make me happy beyond my wildest dreams of bliss till I knew you."

"It is impossible, Max; and yet to give you pain, is to me worse than death."

"Then why say those bitter words, Helen?" whispered Max, drawing closer to her—"If you knew the depth and power of the love I bear you, you could not, I think, despise it. The first instant