

the reproach of her glorious race, she sunk beneath the load of shame and remorse, and sought in the grave the only refuge from despair.

'Eoward! why follow not her steps? Why should this hand not expiate my guilt? Come forth, thou keen sword, oft so fatal to my foes; do justice on the foe to Egwina.'

'Hold!' cried Earl Robert, as he started from his couch, 'forbear from the impious deed. Had thy repentance not appeared the wrath of my soul, this hand, not thy own, should have humbled thee in the dust: for I am the champion of Egwina, and I the avenger of her wrongs.'

'But gird on thy arms; for the sun appears in the horizon, and gilds with reflected light these tottering ruins. Rouse all thy wonted valour, for the hard adventure of the day; and appease the injured spirit of Egwina, by assisting her brother to recover the dear maid whom the ruffians have forced from his arms.'

Abashed, in silent reverence Fitzcary obeyed. He suppressed the deep sigh that was labouring in his breast; and concealing the confusion of his soul, prepared for the bold exploit.

Again the neglected cuirass burnished his manly breast; the glittering cuish flamed upon his thigh; the greaves adorned his legs and the gauntlet defended his determined hand; the shield was clasped to his arm, and in his strong right hand, he shook his massive spear. Then forth rushed the hero, with Earl Robert the bold; as the stag by the side of the youthful fawn trots over the verdant pastures, in his pride, and instructs him to knit his young sinews in the race.

CANTO III.

Who now shall give unto me words and sound

Equal unto this haughty enterprise?

Or who shall lend me wing, that from the ground

My lowly voice may loftily arise,

And lift itself unto the highest skies.

SPENSER.

THE heroes fought not in vain the retreats of the banditti. The sword of Earl Robert had been powerful in the fight; and they traced the ruffians by their blood, even to the entrance of their cave.

'Here pause brave Lord Robert,' said the valourous knight—'here let us awhile debate. Not worthy of fame is he who rushes on destruction, and leaves those he should succour without hope of relief: but he who attentive to the dictates

of Reason, gives effect by discretion to the valour of his sinewy arm.

'If unassisted we assail this subterranean castle, what can the courage of two avail against a host? Repair then, brave youth, to the castle of thy father, on the borders of Selwood forest; rouse up thy bold knights to assist in the adventure, and the virgin of thy heart shall be restored to thy arms. I myself will remain and watch the entrance of the cave—if aught may be learned to advantage the attack?'

Lord Robert applauded the advice. Instant he departed to summon his knights, and promised to return ere the blaze of noon. But a secret design laboured in the bosom of Fitzcary, and thus he commended with his heart:

'Alone will I essay this hardy adventure, and expiate by my death the wrongs of Lord Robert's house. When returning with his knights, he shall emancipate the mistress of his heart, and shall find that Fitzcary has perished in the attempt, a tear shall he drop on my tangled corpse, and own that my repentance was sincere. But my spirit shall fly in quest of Egwina, and boast what I have done in atonement for my crime.'

Then seized he a ponderous stone, and whirling it with resistless force, burst open the cavern door; the concealing briars protested it in vain, and its pillars of rocky stone. The centinels started at the noise; but he slew them with his sword, as they arose. Then disguising himself with their arms, he passed, unobserved through the subterranean labyrinths: for the wearied banditti were retired to their pallets, and sleep lay heavy upon their eyelids.

The adventurer arrived at a lofty cavern, whose sullen walls were faintly illuminated by dying embers, which revealed the separate caves of the murderous train. His bounding heart exulted in the prospect of unhoped success. Yet how should he discover the object of his pursuit? How explore the apartment which witnessed her woes!

Troubled was his soul with the anxious thought, till casting his eyes around, he beheld a centinel, with a lighted torch, at the extremity of the cave. 'Yonder,' said the knight, 'must the captives reside, by the caution which guards the pass.'

Then approaching the guard, as a trained spaniel his prey, with fair seeming smiles he concealed his design, and demanded the fair captive to be yielded to his hands, that he might lead her to the captain's couch.

'Traitor! stand aloof,' cried the centinel aloud, and brandished his opposing sword.

'Caitiff!'