

gold as high as our church steeple," said Dolly, gasping for breath at the grandeur of her own ideas.

"That would be rather too elevated a station," said the Knight, laughing, and right glad to turn the conversation from Dame Monica and Dolly's jealous reproaches. "The Queen is a thin, gaunt woman, with a long pale face—broad at the forehead and peaked at the chin. Her eyes are small and brown, with a very cross, vixenish expression; and her hair is red. Poets and courtiers call her beautiful, but her beauty is all romance. Had she been born a village maid she would have remained one, for no man would have sought her company."

"But fine feathers make fine birds," said Dolly. "Is she not very grand?"

"All the jewels in the world would never make her fair or amiable," returned Fenwick. "To me she is as ugly as a witch. But my neck would scarcely escape a halter if she heard me say so. She hates every woman that is handsomer than herself, and every honest man who cannot stoop to flatter her."

CHAPTER XV.

The dull heavy gray dawn of a November day, spread slowly over the wooded dingles of Conway Park, without dispersing the fog which hung in the low bushes; and a soft drizzly rain fell silently upon the collecting leaves, which discharged the moisture collected upon their surface, in large heavy drops, which glittered like pending diamonds from every spray.

It was a chill, comfortless morning, in which thoughts of mortality and decay would intrude themselves into the gayest heart, and damp the lightest spirits. To add a deeper gloom to surrounding objects, the heavy toll of the death bell struck painfully upon the ear—that sullen chime which to the living appears to link time and eternity into one.

The sound of that bell roused the poor mourner from the heavy lethargy into which she had fallen. It told her that the hour of separation from the beloved had arrived; and that she had a sad duty to perform. Anticipating the anguish of that last glance at the dead, Sir Miles, during her brief slumber, had ordered the coffin to be fastened and removed to a lower apartment, and thus spared the poor widow the vainly coveted, but severe trial. Master Hubert Vincent, too, was there, to offer the consolations of religion to the bereaved. Strengthened by his pious exhortations and prayers, Monica at last gained courage to make one in that mournful procession. Every eye was turned upon her and her babe, with kindly sympathy;

and those of the women were moist with tears. Alena, clad in deep mourning, carried the son of Brandon, and Sir Miles himself, deeply affected, supported on his arm the slight bending figure of Monica. The path to the old gothic church was lined with spectators, from the town and neighbouring parishes. The men stood with uncovered heads, as the melancholy procession moved slowly past. There was but one woman among that crowd, whose heart was untouched by the sight of that young mourner and her orphan babe. With a scowl of malicious satisfaction, Dolly Snell regarded Monica. Her face, it is true, was concealed by her lawn handkerchief from her rival's envious gaze; but she saw that the eyes of her lover, who had fallen in among the train of mourners, were fixed upon her elegant form; and she cursed her in her heart, and secretly devoted herself to work her ruin.

The pealing tones of the organ, as the requiem for the dead floated through the pillared isles of the church, and the solemn and holy service, which was followed by an eloquent funeral sermon, pronounced by Master Vincent, produced a salutary effect upon the young widow. When he dwelt upon the character of the deceased—his blameless life, his unaffected piety, his extensive charities, and the holy faith which had supported him through his last painful illness, Monica's tear-swollen eyes were raised to the preacher's face, and lighted up with an expression of pious gratitude and resignation. It was not until the first clouds sounded upon Brandon's coffin, that her fortitude gave way, and with a low convulsive sigh, she sank insensible into the arms of Sir Miles, and was carried in that state to the Hall.

Sir Walter, after making many enquiries about Dame Brandon of Sir Miles, and expressing the deepest sympathy in her grief, which he hoped would be conveyed to her, left the church, greatly dissatisfied that no glance of recognition had passed between him and her, for whom his visit had been especially intended: and unable to bear the cutting sarcasms of the vulgar Dolly, he saddled his horse and returned to London, determined never to visit Leicester again, until he came in the character of a wooer for the hand of the widow.

We will pass over a period of eighteen months. Monica's first deep anguish had softened down into a calm and sacred sorrow, cherished but too fondly in secret, but bearing an outward semblance of cheerfulness, when superintending her household, and attending to the wants of her little son. Visitors were never admitted to the house, and she was never seen in company. This reserve, at first tolerated on account of her desolate situation, at length gave offence, and that