

improve thy beauty. What think'st thou of our court taste?

The lady cast a sidelong glance upon the great mirror as they passed it by, and then said, 'I know not how it is, but I think not of my own person, while I look at the reflection of thine. Sit thou there,' she said, as they approached the chair of state, 'like a thing for men to worship and to wonder at.'

'Ay, love,' said the earl, 'if thou wilt share my state with me.'

'Not so,' said the countess; 'I will sit on this footstool at thy feet, that I may spell over thy splendour, and learn, for the first time, how princes are attired.'

And with a childlike wonder, which her youth and rustic education rendered not only excusable but becoming, mixed as it was with a delicate show of the most tender conjugal affection, she examined and admired from head to foot the noble form and princely attire of him who formed the proudest ornament of the court of England's Maiden Queen, renowned as it was for splendid courtiers, as well as for wise counsellors. Regarding affectionately his lovely bride, and gratified by her unrepressed admiration, the dark eye and noble features of the earl expressed passions more gentle than the commanding and aspiring look which usually sat upon his broad forehead and in the piercing brilliancy of his dark eye; and he smiled at the simplicity which dictated the questions she put to him concerning the various ornaments with which he was decorated.

'The embroidered strap, as thou callest it, around my knee,' he said, 'is the English Garter, an ornament which kings are proud to wear. See, here is the star which belongs to it, and here the Diamond George, the jewel of the Order. You have heard how King Edward and the Countess of Salisbury—'

'O, I know all that tale,' said the countess, slightly blushing, 'and how a lady's garter became the proudest badge of English chivalry.'

'Even so,' said the earl; 'and this most honourable Order I had the good hap to receive at the same time with three most noble associates, the Duke of Norfolk, the Marquis of Northampton, and the Earl of Rutland. I was the lowest of the four in rank—but what then?—he that climbs a ladder must begin at the first round.'

'But this other fair collar, so richly wrought, with some jewel like a sheep hung by the middle attached to it, what,' said the young countess, 'does that emblem signify?'

'This collar,' said the earl, 'with its double fusilles interchanged with these knobs, which are supposed to present flint-stones sparkling with fire, and sustaining the jewel you inquire about, is the badge of the noble Order of the Golden Fleece, once appertaining to the House of Burgundy. It hath high privileges, my Amy, belonging to it, this most noble Order; for even the King of Spain himself, who hath now succeeded to the honours and demesnes of Burgundy, may not sit in judgment upon a knight of the Golden Fleece, unless by assistance and consent of the Great Chapter of the Order.'

'And is this an Order belonging to the cruel

King of Spain?' said the countess. 'Alas! my noble lord, that you will dote your noble English breast by bearing such an emblem! Bethink you of the most unhappy Queen Mary's days, when this same Philip held sway with her in England, and of the piles which were built for our noblest and our wisest, and our most truly sanctified prelates and divines—And will you, whom men call the standard-bearer of the true Protestant faith, be contented to wear the emblem and mark of such a Romish tyrant as he of Spain?'

'O, content you, my love,' answered the earl; 'we who spread our sails to gales of court favour, cannot always display the ensigns we love the best, or at all times refuse sailing under colours which we like not. Believe me, I am not the less good Protestant, that for policy I must accept the honour offered me by Spain, in admitting me to this his highest Order of knighthood. Besides, it belongs properly to Flanders; and Egmont, Orange, and others have pride in seeing it displayed on an English bosom.'

'Nay, my lord, you know your own path best,' replied the countess. '—And this other collar, to what country does this fair jewel belong?'

'To a very poor one, my love,' replied the earl; 'this is the Order of Saint Andrew, revived by the last James of Scotland. It was bestowed on me when it was thought the young widow of France and Scotland would gladly have wedded an English baron; but a free coronet of England is worth a crown matrimonial held at the humour of a woman, and owning only the poor rocks and bogs of the north.'

The countess paused, as if what the earl last said had excited some painful but interesting train of thought; and, as she still remained silent, her husband proceeded.

'And now, loveliest, your wish is gratified, and you have seen your vassal in such of his trim array as accords with riding vestments; for robes of state and coronets are only for princely halls.'

'Well, then,' said the countess, 'my gratified wish has, as usual, given rise to a new one.'

'And what is it thou canst ask that I can deny?' said the fond husband.

'I wished to see my earl visit this obscure and secret bower,' said the countess, 'in all his princely array; and now, methinks, I long to sit in one of his princely halls, and see him enter dressed in sober russet, as when he won poor Amy Robsart's heart.'

'That is a wish easily granted,' said the earl, '—the sober russet shall be donned to-morrow, if you will.'

'But shall I,' said the lady, 'go with you to one of your castles, to see how the richness of your dwelling will correspond with your peasant habit?'

'Why, Amy,' said the earl, looking around, 'are not these apartments decorated with sufficient splendour? I gave the most unbounded order, and methinks it has been indifferently well obeyed—but if thou canst tell me aught which remains to be done, I will instantly give direction.'

'Nay, my lord, now you mock me,' replied the countess; 'the gaiety of this rich lodging