

[From the Ladies' Book.]

CHIDIOC TICHBOURNE.

AN HISTORICAL TALE.

It was a festal night in merry England, in the period when she best deserved that name, the splendid reign of Elizabeth. Christmas, with its luxurious feasts, its lavish gifts, and its grotesque gambols, had passed by, and Twelfth-night had come to close the festivities, and, like the last night of the Carnival, to outdo its predecessors in extravagance and mirth.

In one of the noblest mansions of London this night was observed with unusual magnificence. Every window was illuminated till the whole building seemed one blaze of light; busy menials, in gala dresses, were hurrying to and fro; gay knights and courtly dames were thronging in the lofty apartments; and to complete the splendour of the scene, the Queen graced the *fete* with her presence. It was the bridal of the heiress of that noble house, the lovely and loved Agnes Courtenay.

On one side of the central room a temporary throne had been prepared, whose crimson hangings lent a becoming flush to the Queen's somewhat faded features, and Elizabeth, as she seated herself beneath them, had deigned to compliment her noble host upon the exquisite taste displayed in the garniture of his apartments. Seeing her in this gracious mood of gratified vanity, the obsequious courtiers hastened to proffer their customary adulation; but, as the bridal train entered and swept round before the throne, their gaze of habitual admiration was irresistibly withdrawn from the Queen to rest on the surpassing beauty of the young bride; a beauty which is thus described by one of the minute chroniclers of that time. "The Ladye, Agnes Courtenay, was of an exquisite loveliness, being so light of form and of so rare a grace, that she seemed to be a silphe, rather than of mortalle flesh: a rope of orient perles would have bound her dark locks, but that they mocked at such restraynt, and fell abundantlye over her neck and shoulders, whose whitenesse made the envious perles grow dimme. Was she stille, the light of her hazell eye was milder than the moon's beams on a lake in the summer time, but it flashed as a ray from the sunne, when she smiled. When she moved, you looked to see her float up above the groser ayre by her own etheryallnesse; and when she spake, all harmonies in earth and ayre were hushed, to hear the musicke of her words.— That should had need be a jewell of pryse, that

did not shaine so cunninglye framed a caskett."

And truly, the Lady Agnes was all in purity and intellect, that her peerless beauty declared her; nor could there be easily found a higher proof of a lofty soul, than that she gave in her marriage. Young, beautiful, the heiress of a name so noble that royal blood flowed in her veins,* the daughter of the Earl of Devonshire—rising above the aristocratic prejudice so general even now, but universal then—bestowed her hand on one who bore no other title than that of "a true and noble-hearted gentleman." Chidioc Tichbourne was descended from a family, respected indeed through many generations for worth of heart and mind, but which counted not among its members, one so distinguished by military prowess, or civil policy, as to have achieved even the simple honours of knighthood. But his was a character that needed no inherited distinction to give it lustre; the foil that imparts brilliancy to the meaner gem, adds no ray to the diamond.

To shield his child from the blandishments of the court, the Earl of Devonshire had caused her to pass her early years with his widowed sister, in a sequestered mansion at Southampton; and there she had known and loved Chidioc Tichbourne, and had learned, for his sake, to prize a noble and cultivated intellect, lofty principle, and refined feeling, above the distinctions of rank and power. "I do not stoop, my father," said Agnes, when the Earl opposed her union with one so far her inferior in rank; "had I yielded my heart to one wanting in any noble quality, you might say your child had forgotten the dignity of her descent; but when I love one who is, in all but birth, the peer of earth's noblest sons, I feel that I elevate myself. Oh, my father, if you would wed me to a title, you should have kept me amid the false glare of the court, instead of sending me to learn truth in the simple bosom of nature."

"Nature teaches the same lesson that I read you," replied the Earl; "no noble creature herds with a meaner: the eagle mates not with the hawk."

"You say well, my Lord," said Agnes; "but it is their nature which distinguishes them, not their external trappings. Many a hawk wears gay hood and tinkling jesses, while the eagle flies unnoticed."

The lady won her suit, though not till the powerful interposition of the Queen was added

* "Hugh Courtenay, Earl of Devonshire, married Margaret, the grand-daughter of Edward the First."