

THE BALCONY.

ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH,

BY EDMOND HUGOMONT.

[WITH AN ENGRAVING.]

I.

EMILIE DE VALLORIN ought to have been born three hundred years ago, at least. When other girls of her age were dreaming of operas, balls and milliners, Emilie's imagination revelled in ideal tournaments, jousts and festivals of the olden time. She would have doated on an old castle, full of sliding pannels, secret staircases and gloomy dungeons; nay, we would not venture to assert that an assassination or two might not have had some charms for her, provided they were skillfully performed by an individual in a large picturesque cloak and black mask. But Fortune, as we have hinted, was unkind; Romance is a rare commodity in the nineteenth century, and no where rarer than within the bustle of a large town.

At eighteen Emilie had married the Marquis de Vallorin, who inhabited a handsome villa in the immediate neighbourhood of Paris; but all the comforts and luxuries of modern civilization, lavished with no sparing hand, failed to satisfy his romantic wife. Even in the extensive pleasure grounds attached to the villa, she found no pleasure, although the wealthy Marquis had spared no pains in their improvement and embellishment. In one retired nook alone, where a stone balcony overlooked a small quiet dell, did she seem to find any satisfaction. Here she would pass whole days; sometimes in deep musing; sometimes in the perusal of her favorite romances, from which she would at times rise, and, gazing forth upon the little dell, fancy it some well fought field of tourney, strewn with splintered lances, and herself enthroned as Queen of Beauty, to dispense the meed of honour to the victor in the lists. After the death of her husband, the old Marquis, which happened shortly after their marriage, she became more attached than ever to this spot: not that she pretended any violent grief for her deceased spouse, whom she had wedded at her father's will, but that her visions of the days of chivalry craved more indulgence the more they were indulged.

One evening, about three years after the death of the Marquis de Vallorin, Emilie was seated in

this balcony, and near her the Baron de Lircas, one of the few whom she suffered to intrude there. The eyes of the Marchioness were fixed on her "tourney-field;" those of the Baron rested, with an expression of earnest affection, on her finely-moulded features.

"Tell me, Baron!" she said, suddenly turning round to him; "do you not think these old baronial castles, with their towers and battlements, their moats and dungeons, much preferable to our modern white-washed mansions? Some of the country-houses of the middle age have a certain picturesqueness about them, that may make them enduring, but the square boxes which they call houses in the present day, I detest!"

"Ah! madame!" replied the accepted lover, for such he was; "why will you speak but of castles and houses, when I would have you speak of love? I have an infinite respect for the ladies of the middle age; but I prefer modern beauties by far. I fear, fair widow, you will even forget that our marriage is to take place this year—this very day you promised to fix its date."

"There is time enough," cried the Marchioness, gaily; "this is but the end of March, and there are three hundred and sixty-five days in the year."

"That means, I suppose, that you would have it postponed till the thirty-first of December. To speak frankly, madame!" cried the Baron, with increasing warmth; "I feel certain that some rival has robbed me of your affections."

"A rival!" repeated Emilie, and she laughed scornfully. "A rival amongst the young men of the nineteenth century! I esteem you, Baron, but more I cannot do for you, or any one of these degenerate days. Would you have me fall in love with one of those ball-room candles, whose love lasts no longer than the wax-light that illuminates the hall; or with one of those grave gentlemen who limit their affection to words, and never strive to show it by gallant deeds? Ah!" she added, pensively, "I could have loved, with all my heart's devotion!"

"Whom?" interrupted the Baron, impatiently.

"Rolando, the nephew of Charlemagne, or some of his brother paladins!"