

The sentinel-cock upon the hill-side crew—
Crew thrice, and all was stiller than before,—
Silent till some replying warder blew
His alien horn, and then was heard no more.

Where erst the jay, within the elm's tall crest,
Made garrulous trouble round her unfledged
young,
And where the oriole hung her swaying nest,
By every light wind like a censer swung;—

Where every bird which charmed the vernal feast
Shook the sweet slumber from its wings at
morn,
To warn the reaper of the rosy east,—
All now was songless, empty, and forlorn.

There was no bud, no bloom upon the bowers;
The spiders wove their thin shrouds night by
night;
The thistledown, the only ghost of flowers,
Sailed slowly by, passed noiseless out of sight.

Amid all this, in this most cheerless air,
And where the woodbine shed upon the porch
Its crimson leaves, as if the Year stood there
Firing the air with his inverted torch;—

Amid all this, the centre of the scene,
The white-haired matron, with monotonous
tread,
Plied the swift wheel, and with her joyless mien,
Sat, like a Fate, and watched the flying thread.

She had known Sorrow,—he had walked with her,
Oft supped, and broke the bitter ashen crust;
And in the dead leaves still she heard the stir
Of his black mantle trailing in the dust.

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Long, but not loud, the droning wheel went on,
Like the low murmur of a hive at noon;
Long, but not loud, the memory of the gone
Breathed through her lips a sad and tremulous
tune.

At last the thread was snapped,—her head was
bowed;
Life dropped the distaff through his hands
serene,—
And loving neighbors smoothed her careful
shroud,
While Death and Winter closed the autumn
scene.

THE PROBATION.

THE Vale of Taunton, Somerset, is celebrated for its charming residences, its time-honored families, its beautiful girls; and nowhere, some thirty years ago, were these attributes to be found in more felicitous combination than at Oak Hall, the seat of Archibald Merivale, Esq., major of yeomanry and deputy-lieutenant, throughout the wide arch-deaconry. This will be readily believed if I can contrive to give but a faintly-faithful sketch of the Merivale family, as, grouped around its head one summer afternoon, they eagerly anticipated the contents of a letter, bearing the postmark, that had just arrived.

Mr. Merivale, who might be a trifle under fifty, was a well descended, sufficiently wealthy, country gentleman and magistrate, of active habits, and considerable keenness of intellect. His self estimate as to this latter quality was rather an exaggerated one; piquing himself, as he did, upon a profound knowledge of the world, and power of dealing successfully with it, in all its tricks, shifts, maskings, and devices: a stern, inflexible man, too, when he had once determined on any particular course of action; yet, withal, a thoroughly kind and affectionate husband and father, and considerate, as well as just, landlord and master. Mrs. Merivale, on the contrary, was one of the gentlest, most flexible of human beings, the fine impulses of whose womanly tenderness required, and yielded to, the masculine support and firmness of her husband. They had three children—daughters—at this time, of the respective ages of twenty, eighteen, and sixteen. Eleanor, the eldest, was a finely-formed person, with calm, brilliant, Diana-like features, and perfectly-shaped head, set magnificently upon the polished shoulders of a Juno. Agnes, the next in age, though nothing like so handsome as her superb sister, was a very attractive person; and her mild, kindly eyes, to my mind, possessed a fascination quite as effective as haughtier and more dazzling ones. Of Clara's beauty—scarcely disclosed as yet—I shall only say that its swiftly brightening dawn gave promise—more indeed than promise—that in its perfect development would be in a high degree combined and blended the varied charms and graces of both her sisters. This, to the general reader, may seem a highly-colored portraiture; whilst those who recognise and remember the family to whom I give the name of Merivale,—and there are many still living who will readily do so,—it will, I am quite sure, be pronounced to be but a faint and spiritless sketch of the three widely celebrated Graces of Oak Hall.

"This letter, girls," Mr. Merivale, at length giving way to their importunity, is saying—"This letter, girls; well, it is no doubt, as you say, from Francis Herbert; and stamped, I perceive, 'too late,' or it would have been here yesterday. Let me see,—'highly delighted,'—'with the greatest pleasure,'—'have taken the liberty,' etcetera and so on. The upshot is, young ladies, that my ward, Francis Herbert, not only accepts mine and your mother's invitation to pass a month at Oak Hall, but brings his and our acquaintance young Sir Henry Willoughby. Eleanor, love, surely you have not taken to rouge thus early;—there—there, don't be angry; the color, I see, is quite a spontaneous and natural one. They will be here on—on Wednesday in time for dinner. Why, zounds! that is to-day. And as I am alive," continued Mr. Merivale, stepping quickly to the window, "here comes a post-chaise up the avenue. It is them, sure enough," he went on to say, after drawing up the blind. "Francis has his body half out of the chaise-window, eager, no doubt, to obtain the earliest possible glimpse of his respected guardian—don't you think so, Eleanor! Hey! what, all suddenly vanished! I understand: the exigencies of dress and dinner have set both dame and damsel flying. But here come these interesting visitors."