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NEW VERSION.

God bless our native land,
May heaven's protecting hand
Still guard our shore.
May peace her power extend,
Ere be transformed to friend,
And Britain's power depend
On war no more.

Through every changing scene,
O Lord preserve the Queen,
Long may she reign—
Her heart inspire and move,
With wisdom from above;
And in a Nation's love,
Her throne maintain.

May just and righteous laws
Uphold the public cause,
And bless our isle.
Home of the brave and free,
The land of liberty!
We pray that still on thee
Kind heaven may smile.

And not this land alone,
But be thy mercies known
From shore to shore.
Lord, make the nations see
That men should brothers be,
And form one family
The wide world o'er.

Hickson's Singing Master.

From Friendship's Offering for 1839.

THE CONVICT'S BRIDE.

BY ELIZA WALKER.

It was a dark dreary morning in the December of 178.—The ground was covered with snow, and the bleak wind was howling in terrific gusts through the streets. Yet despite the inclemency of the weather, crowds of persons of all classes, and, amongst them, many of the weaker sex, might be seen hurrying towards the *Place de Greve*. It was the morning appointed for the execution of Victor d'Aubigny.

The circumstance which had called for this expiation of life at the altar of justice, are briefly as follows,—and, blended with the strong love of excitement, so universal amongst the French, account, in some degree, for the eager curiosity discernible in the multitude, now hastening to the awful spectacle of a fellow-creature, in the full flush of youth and health, being plunged into the gulf of an unknown eternity. The crime for which Victor d'Aubigny was doomed to suffer was forgery. Remonstrance, petitions, interest, all had been tried to avert the fatal penalty. The offence was one of frequent occurrence, and must be checked, even at the costly sacrifice of a human life. Fortunately in our days the law is satisfied with less than the blood of its victim. In every country apologists are to be found for guilt, and sympathy is more readily excited when the perpetrator is endowed with great personal or mental advantages, or fills a position above the ordinary level in society:—all these Victor d'Aubigny possessed; he had also the higher distinction of having, up to the period of his crime, borne a blameless character. From their earliest youth a close intimacy had subsisted between himself and Auguste de Biron. Similarity of age and pursuit—both being intended for the army,—united them more than congeniality of disposition; for the warm generosity of Victor bore little resemblance to the cold, suspicious, vindictive nature of Auguste. They were alike only in their pursuit of pleasure, though even in the prosecution of this, the taste of each took a different bias. The strong and feverish excitement of the gambling table too well suited the eager temperament of Victor. He who, in the midst of the most profligate capital of the world, had strength to resist all other allurements, fell a ready prey to that vice, whose fatal indulgence has often paved the way for the commission of almost every crime.

Auguste, on the other hand, shunning the dazzling salons of play, was a nightly visitant of the metropolitan theatres—not to enjoy the wit of Moliere, or the genius of Racine, but to watch the airy movements of some *figurante* in the ballet. As they advanced to manhood, the success of D'Aubigny in society called perpetually into play the evil passions of his companion, whose feelings gradually changed from friendship to dislike, and deepened into hatred implacable and bitter, on the refusal of his hand by a lady, who assigned, as the reason, a mad, though unreturned

passion, for his friend. Auguste controlled his resentment outwardly, and left Paris.

Victor at this period was betrothed to a lovely but portionless girl, and the day for the nuptials was fixed. A few evenings previous, he entered one of the gambling establishments with which Paris abounds. Enough; he was tempted to play, and in a short time found himself a loser to double the amount of all the ready money he could command. He rushed from the house in a state of phrenzy. The money must be paid on the following day. To whom could he apply? Auguste, who might have assisted him, was in England, whither he had gone to be present at the *debut* of a celebrated *danseuse*. He suddenly recollected that his friend had left a large sum at his banker's. Forgetful in the desperation of the moment, of every thing but escape from present embarrassment, he forged a cheque for the sum required. It was duly honoured—but his doom was sealed. He instantly wrote to apprise De Biron of what he had done; pleading in mitigation that they had often shared the same purse, and binding himself to return the money at the earliest possible period. No reply was given to his letter. The time flew onward,—the day for his marriage arrived. The bridal solemnity was over, when, as the party were leaving the church, D'Aubigny was arrested on a charge of forgery!

The trial and condemnation rapidly succeeded, and the day of execution dawned too soon. Victor met his death calmly and resignedly. But is it not with him our tale has to do,—it is with her, the beautiful, the bereaved one,—with Isabelle d'Aubigny the convict's bride. From the period when the promulgation of his sentence rung in her ears, to that moment in which the fatal axe fell on the throat of its victim, nor sigh, nor tear, nor word, had escaped her. Every faculty seemed suspended by misery. The last, long embrace of her husband—the wild choking sob which burst from him, as she left his cell the night prior to his execution—the thousand frantic passionate kisses which he showered on her marble face, at the foot of the scaffold, all failed to dissolve the trance of grief into which she had fallen. But the moment of awakening agony came at last!—When the guillotine had done its office, and the body of her beloved Victor lay bleeding and dead before her—sorrow, asserting its omnipotent sway over humanity, shivered the feeble barriers of temporary unconsciousness, and let the imprisoned mind free to contemplate the ruin of its only earthly hope, the extinction of all youth's sweetest visions. Then came the groan of anguish, the shriek of despair—the straining of the eyeballs, to assure itself of that which stretched every fibre of the heart with agony, till it almost burst with the tension. Then came that piercing look into future years; which so often accompanies calamity in its freshness; when all that would have sustained us beneath the heavy load, has been wrenched from us, for ever and ever!

Vainly the friends who surrounded Isabelle strove to tear her from the body of Victor. There was fascination in the gaze, though horror was blended with it. Her own, her beautiful, lay a mutilated corse before her,—he whom she had loved with an absorbing intensity, which would have defied time to lessen, circumstance to change,—with whom she had hoped to journey through existence, partner of his pleasures, soother of his griefs. And now she was alone and desolate! Then indeed did she feel, that fate had levelled its deadliest weapon; and henceforth every hour was stamped with stern, unchanging, dreary despair. Great misfortunes either strengthen or enfeeble the mind. When the grave had closed over the body of Victor, Isabelle,—the weak, the gentle, the timid Isabelle, returned to her lonely hearth, a calm, stern determined woman.

All the *elite* of Milan were gathered together in the magnificent theatre of La Scala. Beauty lent its attraction, rank its patronage, and fashion its influence, to grace the farewell benefit of "La Florida," the unrivalled *danseuse*, the boast of Italy, the idol of the Milanese.

It is not an easy task to rouse an English audience into a *furor* of ecstasy: an Italian one is composed of *materiel* of a more inflammable nature;—and demonstrations which would seem to us extravagant and absurd, only appear to them a meet homage to genius. To-night their wonted enthusiasm received double impetus, from the consciousness that it was the last public testimony they could afford, of the appreciation of their consummate skill, from the loveliness of the fair creature before them. The ensuing week would see her united to a wealthy noble, and this night witness her parting obeisance to an audience, of whom all the men were her worshippers, and even the women her partisans and admirers. The curtain rose, and certainly the appearance of the heroine of the evening was warranty enough for the burst of rapturous applause which followed. Her form, itself of the most faultless symmetry, acquired additional captivation from the display, and costliness permitted by theatrical costume. Her face too was one of surpassing beauty. Large deep-blue eyes, waves of the glossiest hair, and a skin of that clear transparent whiteness, which shews with such dazzling effect at night—all these attractions were in themselves enough to fascinate the sight. But there was that about "La Florida" which interested the feelings fully as much. The dreamy melancholy of her profound and passionate eyes,—the entire repose of her features,—the extraordinary expression about the small cherub mouth, which seemed formed for love and smiles, yet which none had ever seen relax into a smile,—this it was which lent such witchery to her beauty, and threw around her a kind of mysterious charm, even amidst the glare and frivolity with which she was surrounded.

Though assailed by temptation in every shape, so rigid and unblemished had been her conduct that the noble family, to which she was about to be allied, vainly sought in it a pretext to dissolve the engagement between herself and their relative. Yet she lived in utter unprotectedness, with only the companionship of a young girl who officiated as her attendant. With society she never mixed, nor left her home, except to attend her professional duties.

On this her last evening of public existence, all was done that could render her exit triumphant. The stage was literally filled with bouquets flung at her feet, accompanied by many a valuable and less perishing testimony to her worth and talent. When she made her farewell acknowledgments, each felt a pang of regret at parting with one so lovely and gifted, and many a bright eye was filled with tears—yet she, the cause, alone remained unmoved. There was gratitude in the graceful bowing of the head, and the meek folding of her hands on her bosom,—but the face was calm and impassive as ever. The curtain fell amidst an outbreak of such feeling, as shook the very walls of La Scala to their foundation, and Florida was seen there no more.

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"Now pray, Signora, on this your wedding-day, do look as if you were happy.—Heigho! if I were so beautiful, beloved too by the Marchese, I should be smiling all day long."

"My good Rosalia, I have long forgotten to smile or weep. In truth, poor child! you have had but a wearisome life, in attending on one in whose bosom the pulse of joy hath for ever stopped."

"O say not so, Signora; all the girls in Milan would be glad to wait on so kind, so gracious, so gentle a mistress,—ay, and so pretty a one too. For when I am braiding those long tresses, or fastening the sandals on your tiny feet, I feel quite proud in being permitted to serve La Florida, who, all Milan says, has borrowed the face and form of the famous Venus at Florence."

"Fie on thee, child! I would chide thee for this flattery, but that an unkind word ever sends foolish tears into thine eyes. But hasten, Rosalia; the time wears on. Give me my veil, and leave me."

The attendant did as she was bidden, Florida was alone. For awhile she sat in deep meditation, her small white hands clasped upon her brow, as if to still the tumult of feelings rushing through her brain. The day at length had come for which she had patiently waited for years; for which she had devoted herself to a profession she abhorred, and toiled in it laboriously and ceaselessly—and nourished a life, she would otherwise have allowed the mildew of grief to corrode and destroy. The hour was at hand, when the one purpose of her existence was to be realized,—the long recorded vow fulfilled. The near accomplishment of her wishes gave to the cheek of Florida a flush of crimson, deep as the sunset of summer, and lit up her lustrous eyes with almost unearthly brightness. As she contemplated herself in the mirror, arrayed in all the costly magnificence of bridal attire, vanity for a moment preponderated; but it was a transient weakness. An instant more—the brow resumed its look of calm, stern determination,—the beautiful mouth, its compressed rigidity. Having adjusted the orange wreath on her temples, and arranged the drape, of the long delicate veil, whose snowy folds enveloped her form from head to foot, she entered the conservatory adjoining her chamber, and taking from it a bouquet of choicest flowers, awaited the arrival of her bride's-maids and friends. In a few minutes the expected guests assembled, and leaning on the arm of the brother of her betrothed, she entered one of the carriages, and the party proceeded to the church of St. Ambrose. The nuptial rites were performed—and Florida was greeted as La Marchesa di Vivaldi.