

tre of our lawful kingdom. But what flower is this that ye deck with your hard-won diamond?" added he, glancing towards Madeline; and, without waiting a reply, he turned to the Countess, saying, "Is she of thy suite, dear coz? She hath a fair face, worthy the handmaiden of Beauty's Queen."

The countess liked not his enquiries; but, nevertheless, was flattered by the compliment with which he concluded; and she replied, that she was the orphan daughter of her father's friend, and the worshipful divinity of Sir William. The other combatant now approached also; and kneeling in front of the dais, raised his visor.

'Aubrey!' exclaimed the monarch.

"My brother!" cried Madeline, starting to his side.

"Your brother?" responded Sir William.

"What! my little Madeline, a woman?" replied the stranger. "Bless thee, my own sister!"

"What!" exclaimed the monarch, "the paragon of our tournament, the sister of bold Aubrey!—And you, too, the combatant against her chosen champion! Had ye spilled blood on either side, this days sport might have spoiled a bridal. But whence come ye, Aubrey, and when?"

"My liege," replied the other, "having arrived at Knarcsborough on the day after the departure of your Majesty I hastened hither to inform your grace that France lies open to our arms, and our troops are eager to embark."

In a few days, Edward left Wark, leaving behind him a powerful garrison for the Castle, but he had left it desolate to poor Madeline, for he had taken to accompany him, on his invasion of France, her betrothed husband and her brother. That brother whom she had met but three days before, she had not seen from childhood—nor was she certain that he lived—for he had been a soldier from his boyhood, and his life had been spent in the camp and in foreign wars, while she had been nurtured under the protection of the Countess of Salisbury.

It was about seven years after the events we have alluded to had occurred, that Edward, covered with all the fame of a conqueror, if not the advantages of conquest, returned to England. During his victories and the din of war, however, he had not forgotten the beauty of his fair cousin, whose glances had bewildered him at Wark Castle; and now, when he returned, his admiration was renewed, and she appeared as the first favour-

ite of his court. He had provided a royal banquet for the nobles and the knights who had distinguished themselves during the French wars. A thousand lights blazed in the noble hall—martial music peeled around—and hundreds of the brightest eyes in England looked love and delight. The fairest and the noblest in the land thronged the assembly. Jewels sparkled, and studded the gorgeous apparel of the crowd. In the midst of the hall, walked the gay and courtly monarch, with the fair Joan of Salisbury resting on his arm. They spoke of their first meeting at Wark, of the siege and the tourney, and again they whispered, and hands were pressed, and looks exchanged; and, when they walked together, a blue garter, decked with gold, pearls, and precious stones, which, with a golden buckle, had fastened the sandal of the fair Joan round the turned ankle in the hall, became loose and entangled among her feet. The Countess blushed; and the monarch, with the embarrassment and politeness of a practised gallant, stopped to fasten the unfortunate ribbon. As the nobles beheld the sovereign kneel with the foot of the fair Countess on his knee, a hardly suppressed murmur ran through the assembly. But observing the smile upon the face of his nobles, the monarch rose proudly, and, with the garter in his hand, exclaimed, "*Honni soit qui mal y pense*!—Shame be to him who thinks ill of it!" and buckling the garter round his left knee, he added—"Be this the order of St. George, and the proudest monarchs and the most valiant knights in Christendom shall be permitted to be honoured with the emblem of thy garter, fair coz."

Scarcely, however, was the royal banquet ended when the voice of lamentation was heard in every house, though the mourners went about the streets; for the living feared to follow their dead to the sepulchre. The angel of death breathed upon the land—he stretched out his wings and covered it—his breath the land sickened—beneath the shadow of his wings the people perished. The green fields became as a wilderness and death and desolation reigned in the market places. Along the streets moved cavalcades of the dead—the hearse of the noble and the car of the citizen; and the dead bodies of the poor were picked up upon the streets! The churchyards rose as hills, and fields were turned up for the dead! The husband fled from his dying wife; the mother feared to kiss her own child; and the