

## THE PORTRAIT.

IT was only a head, and was perhaps the smallest picture in the gallery. At first I took it for a Murillo, but learned afterwards that it was by his great master, Velasquez. It was the portrait of a lady between eighteen and twenty, surpassingly beautiful, but of a beauty essentially Spanish. The complexion, though dark, was so incomparably clear, that it charmed the eye far more than the pearl-like fairness of northern climes. The classical severity of a brow and forehead over which the hair was plainly braided, was tempered by the sweet expression hovering round the mouth. If it had not been for the deep, sad, subdued expression of the full eyes, the general expression would have been almost haughtily commanding. But those eyes so large, so lustrous, so finely formed, so expressive of the sorrow-stricken emanations of a lofty and sensitive soul, few could gaze upon them without tears dimming their own.

The magic touches of the master's pencil had been limited to the face and the upper part of the neck. It was left to the imagination to supply the graceful form of the fair original—the bust and arms moulded on some perfect Grecian statue, and fingers like those of the vestal who stirs up the ashes of the sacred fire with a golden bodkin.

Blonde northern beauties, fair girls, and stately matrons, blue-eyed and golden-haired, hung either side of the lovely Iberian, like lilies of the field around some rare exotic; and immediately above it, attached to it by a black silk scarf, was the portrait of a cavalier-looking fellow with a courtly air, and the love-locks of Charles the First's time. The interest inspired by those eloquent eyes was heightened by this strange companionship, and a wilder tale of human passion than that which explained it seldom falls within the sober limits of truth.

When that "bright accidental star," Queen Elizabeth, departed this life, and James of Scotland reigned in her stead, strange tidings of matrimonial negotiations with the most ultra-Roman Catholic Court in Europe disturbed the British householder. The Nonconformist preachers improved the occasion to adorn their harangues with visions of Smithfield fires relighted, Jesuits guiding the helm of state, and an inquisition sitting *en permanence* at Whitehall. By-and-by it was whispered from mouth to mouth—and this time the rumour chimed in with the popular taste—that their young prince, disdaining Court etiquette, aspired to win his bride like some knight-errant of old. Poetry and romance still lingered on English ground. A great change was approaching, and already loomed in the distance, but as yet the puritan element was overawed by the gallant and chivalrous spirit that Spenser had clothed in flowing numbers, and Sidney and Raleigh in deeds of heroic daring. So when the Prince of Wales sailed from England with a flowing sheet, and it was bruited abroad that he had adventured a perilous journey for the love of a lady fair, the people applauded, and, despite the drum ecclesiastic sounding through the land, drank success to the Spanish alliance.

At the time this journey to Madrid was planned, one of the most devoted and favoured adherents of the Duke of Buckingham was Sir Edward Listowel. His father had been a favourite of King James, and one of that monarch's earliest customers when he took to speculating in baronetries. In due course of time he died, leaving vast possessions to his only son. Much to Buckingham's chagrin, the King refused to include Listowel in the personal suite of the Prince, and persisted in limiting the number to three: Sir Francis Cottington, Sir Richard Graham, and Endymion Porter. It was therefore finally arranged that Sir Edward should join them in Madrid with Lord Denby, Lord Kensington, Lord Cecil, Lord Howard, and the other young nobles who were to form the Prince's Court. These cavaliers were specially chosen for their gallant bearing and showy accomplishments; yet even among them the apt pupil of the courtly Buckingham, who had acquired both the winning manners and the views of his patron, was almost unrivalled.

In the month of July, 1623, a bull fight was

held in Madrid, for the purpose of displaying the national pastime to the Prince of Wales. These spectacles were always eagerly welcomed by the fair Iberians. The galleries of the bull-ring were the arena for the display of their charms and their toilettes—better adapted to the national character than the ball-room and opera of modern times. Like the fair dames in some tournament of old, they smiled approval upon the gallant feats of their preux chevaliers in the enclosure, and their full Cleopatra-like order of beauty, most effective when in repose, was suited to the position. The Spanish cavaliers were not sorry for an opportunity of eclipsing for the nonce their English rivals who had attracted far too much attention. The romantic errand of the Prince had turned the heads of the young ladies in Madrid, and his retinue fell in for no small share of his popularity. As foreigners, they were to some extent regarded as privileged persons, and held excused from many of the niceties of Spanish etiquette, so adroitly framed to throw impediments in the way of speedy acquaintance. It may easily be supposed that the Spanish *Hidalgos* by no means approved of these arrangements; indeed the chief enjoyment they promised to themselves in this bull-fight was that for once they would be the sole objects of attraction.

The eventful day arrived. The sun, fast sinking towards the west, shone upon the magnificent appointments of the cavaliers, superbly mounted on Andalusian steeds, as one by one they entered the arena. The galleries were filled with all the beauty of Madrid. Jewels flashed, plumes waved and bright eyes sparkled. But, alas for the cavaliers! it soon became painfully evident that the attractions of a bull-fight could not compare with the novelty of a Prince-errant, and that glances which ought to have rewarded the prowess of the champions were monopolised by the gallery assigned to the Prince and his attendants.

As for the strangers, they were warmly interested in the spectacle, and enthusiastically applauded the superb horsemanship and cool daring of the combatants. No one was more engrossed by the scene than Sir Edward Listowel, until, leaning eagerly forward to get a better view of a close encounter between the infuriated bull and one of the cavaliers, he caught a glimpse of a face partly turned towards him, so beautiful even in that crowd of lovely women, that bull, cavaliers, matadores, and everything else, were at once forgotten. The English Court in King James the First's reign was remarkable for the degree of beauty that adorned it; but Listowel felt in an instant that anything so lovely as this he had never seen. It was a young lady between eighteen and twenty. She was speaking when he first caught sight of her. The sweet musical tone of her voice, the beauty of her lips as her words overflowed, to use Homer's metaphor, the pearl-like enclosure of her teeth, the graceful lines of her figure, resolving themselves with every moment into new and ever-charming combinations, exceeded his wildest ideal of female loveliness. She was the original of the portrait; but then there was health as well as beauty in the cheek, and brightness and animation in the eyes instead of that deep and desolate sadness which strikes the spectator so vividly in those of the picture.

For a few moments Listowel was completely bewildered. But he was not a man to lose his self-possession for long. Habitually cold and cautious, he looked again and again to make sure that his first glance had not deceived him. He scrutinized carefully and critically the peculiar points of her national beauty, mentally reviewing at the same time the ladies of the English and French Courts most celebrated for their charms, and the more he gazed the more he found to admire. "I will wait a little while," thought he, "for an opportunity of addressing her, and if none should occur I must make one." For he it known that Listowel was not one of those lovers who are satisfied with worshipping their divinities at a distance; nor had it ever been his habit to let his admiration remain long unknown to its object. An opportunity, however, did occur, and that shortly.

The combat was progressing vigorously; the bull made a succession of splendid rushes, and the interest of the spectators was excited in a

corresponding degree, when suddenly a thrill of horror appeared to seize the vast multitude, causing it to surge to and fro in wild and uncontrollable excitement. The sparkling countenance of the fair girl whose variations Sir Edward had been admiringly watching became blanched with terror, as she fell back in her seat, and covered her face with her hands. He looked up and sprang to the edge of the gallery to ascertain the cause of the sudden excitement. The bull had cleared with a bound the palisade between the arena and the humbler portion of the spectators, who fled in all directions. But promptly to the rescue came a matadore. One moment his long knife gleamed in the air, the next, the huge animal staggered and dropped at his feet. Loud "Vivas" rent the air; the crowd, more frightened than hurt, gathered round the foam-covered carcase, and Listowel, as he returned to his seat, addressed the young lady in a few appropriate words, begging her to calm her agitation, as the danger was over and no one injured. She withdrew her hands from her eyes, and raising them to the young Englishman, whom she had observed springing forward at the first alarm, answered, "Are you certain, sir? I thought I saw the terrible animal trampling down all before him."

"Fair lady, the sport is over as far as that bull is concerned, and before he could do any mischief he was despatched by one of the matadores."

The conversation once begun, Listowel took good care not to suffer it to languish. He spoke Spanish fluently. His accent, it is true, was unmistakably English, but that very circumstance, indicating that he was attached to the Prince's suite, was, as he knew full well, more likely to advance his suit with any lady in Madrid than if he had been a grandee of the first class. He did not yet know Olivia de la Pena, or he would have felt how little impression things of that sort made on her mind. Donna Olivia was most curious about England and the English, their manners, and modes of thought.

"And they are all heretics?" she asked, crossing herself.

"By far the greater part," answered Sir Edward; "but," he added, for he did not relish the tone in which she had spoken, "those distinctions are things of the past: religious animosities are forgotten; and our Prince is now come over, like some knight of old, to woo the King's sister, whilst the Pope himself is about to sanction their union."

"But still he is a heretic," persisted Donna Olivia, rather giving utterance to her own thoughts than addressing her companion.

"Sits the wind in that quarter," thought Listowel, "it is hard, but I can trim my sails to meet it. He has been educated in the reformed faith," he replied, "but one of the distinctive features of our doctrines is, that they sanction, and even encourage, inquiry. Our religion is instilled into us in youth, but if the judgement of maturer years rejects it, we never hesitate to recant our errors."

"Oh indeed!" exclaimed Olivia; and her cheek kindled, and her eyes flashed, as she turned them upon her companion with an eager, searching look.

Listowel avoided the glance, but he felt it, and thoroughly read its expression.

It was a little more than a month after the scene at the fight, that the light of the waning moon, as it streamed through the trellised entrance of a grotto in the palace-garden of Don Felix de la Pena, discovered a lady and a cavalier. The gentleman was speaking in low and earnest tones. The lady eagerly listened.

"Remember, Olivia," he said, "all that has happened since we met. Through you I have abandoned the faith of my ancestors, and now you would have me act in direct hostility to my Prince. Bitterly opposed as your father is known to be to this marriage, how can one of the Prince's suite demand your hand? No, my love," he continued, softening his voice as he spoke, "our union must be secret. A few months passed, and these negotiations terminated, I can call you mine in the face of the world, and carry you to England, where you will reign the queen of beauty in the Court, and the mistress of my home and happiness."