

"My name stands where my peers placed it—I trust their influence will keep it there."

"My lord, your peers are few in number," said the prince, with asperity. "It is the voice of that brave people whom you speak of with such contempt which must decide that matter. Ha, there! Bring wine and refreshments, and let us drink a health to Poland's future king. Rolof, give us one of your best songs."

The old harper modestly complied with his master's request :

Fill, fill, high the goblet, ye patriot band,
Let us drink to the health of the lord of the land !
The lips of the people shall echo the sound,
And dim eyes grow bright, as the wine cup goes round.

Here's a health to the oak, which no storms can o'er-
throw,
Which stands most sublime when the hurricanes
blow ;
May it's root never wither, it's leaf never fade,
Whilst the people securely rejoice in its shade.

"Rixa, will you away with us to hear the Herald's proclamation?" said the Weyvode, turning to his daughter, who had remained silent during the foregoing scene, her arms folded, and her eyes bent intently upon the ground. The voice of her father appeared to recall her wandering thoughts. She expressed a warm interest in the result of the coming contest, and retired with her maidens to her own apartments, to change her dress, which she considered soiled with the dusty journey to the city.

"Your highness looks pale today," said her favourite tire-woman, as she arranged the long fair locks of the princess, and confined them beneath a golden net. Your journey has fatigued you. Had you not better wear the rose-coloured velvet robe and turban ; it will cast a glow upon those colourless cheeks—what says my Lady Azilla ?"

The young and very pretty woman, to whom the tire-woman had appealed, turned from contemplating her own charming face in the mirror.

"I do not agree with you, Minna. The splendid red velvet will make our beautiful princess look still paler. I should prefer the white brocaded silk, flowered with gold. Which will you wear, sweet lady ?"

"Neither," said the princess, bursting into tears. "I do not wish to go."

"Not wish to go!" exclaimed both the females at once. "What is your highness dreaming of?"

The princess flung her arms about Lady Azilla, and hiding her head upon her bosom, continued to sob audibly. After a few minutes of passionate weeping she raised her head, and looking both her companions earnestly in the face, said in a mournful

voice : "Oh, this hateful marriage, it will break my heart!"

"Do not say so, my lady coz," returned the Lady Azilla. "He is a brave and high-born cavalier."

"But he is so ugly," replied Rixa, "and so disagreeable—if he were the King of Poland tomorrow, I should feel no pleasure in sharing his crown."

"You did not think thus basely of your noble lord, fair Rixa, yesterday?"

"This morning's ride made me alter my opinions. I was disgusted with his treatment of that handsome peasant. Which of the twain think you, cousin Azilla, was the nobleman?"

"They admit of no comparison."

"I think not," returned the princess.

"Why, my dear lady—you surely would not name my Lord of Cracow and yon peasant in the same breath?"

"I confess it would be paying the blacksmith a poor compliment," said the princess, colouring. "In spite of his humble garb and occupation, I never saw a nobler looking man—he might be called one of nature's gentlemen."

"Your highness is in a merry mood today."

"Nay, but I'm perfectly serious."

The Lady Azilla held up her hands and exchanged glances with the tire-woman : "What would my Lord Lechus say to this?"

"Who cares what he says."

"And your father?"

"Would agree with me," said the princess. "The Lord of Cracow is no favourite of his—state policy alone made him choose such a son-in-law."

"But he may be chosen king."

"Not while my father stands upon the same list," said the princess, with a frown. "But even if such should be the case, I have no ambition to share his crown."

"Your highness talks as if you had a choice?"

"My father will not force me to marry Lord Lechus without my own consent."

"You forget, my dear cousin, that that consent was given some months ago. You are no longer a free agent."

"Oh, it was forced upon me," said the princess ; "I did not love him—I had no preference for another—I did it in obedience to my father's wishes ; you well know that I was a mere child just out of the nursery, and you all told me that it was a great match for me. Had I known aught of my bridegroom, I would rather have died than suffered such betrothment."

"Hark, my lady, there's the Herald's trumpet," said Minna ; "I hear the trampling of the horses in the court-yard beneath. You will be too late."

"I am ready," said the princess, wrapping her gorgeous riding mantle round her stately figure, and casting one long glance in the mirror ; and, smiling at her own beauty, she swept from the apartment.