

THE EVE OF ALL-HALLOW'S.

BY MORDUE.

It was the Eve of All-Hallows and the old forest lay still and dark, save where the moonbeams penetrated.

The bells from a distant tower had hardly ceased ringing midnight when the stillness was broken by a shrill whistle, which was repeated at intervals from different parts of the forest, till the place became alive with sound. Strange shadowy forms now began to flit by, all hastening in the one direction, which leads to a wide open dell, where the moon pours down a flood of silver light. In the centre of the dell is a roughly made dais.

A strain of mournful music is heard, and from the forest they gather at the place of meeting; they approach the dais and range themselves around, while one seats himself upon it. Waiting till all are in place, he thus addresses them:

"Oh! my comrades, why do we thus sadly meet where but a year ago we met in mirth and gladness! Why this gloom which like a nightmare seems to hang upon each brow. Woe, woe, has come upon us! A traitor is among us. What say ye, my brave comrades, shall he suffer the penalty or no?"

Like an angry sea when tempest tossed rolled the answer from the crowd: "He shall bear the penalty!"

"Then bring forward the prisoner and let him hear the crimes charged against him and the doom which awaits him."

Near the confines of the forest stood the beautiful old manor house of the Selbys. Built in the time of wars and direst happenings, it had withstood several sieges.

The lofty hall was ablaze with light, while sounds of mirth and music came from the open windows, for it was the birthday of Dorothy Selby, the only daughter of the house. Young, beautiful and rich in lands and money, she was much sought after, and to-night she was the life and soul of the merry party gathered there to celebrate her birthday.

In a distant part of the old house sat an aged woman. Late as the hour was she made no effort to retire, but remained rocking her bent body to an fro and muttering from time to time aloud:

"Fun and frolic, fun and frolic, and it is the Eve of All-Hallows, the saints preserve us!"

At length the distant sounds of mirth died away and quietness settled down. Then up rose the old dame, and passing through several corridors, came to Dorothy Selby's sleeping-room. She listened for a moment and then opening the door of a small ante-room, she glided noiselessly in and crouched in a corner of the room.

In the stillness she could hear the light breathing of the fair sleeper.

"It is well," she muttered. "So far naught has come to disturb her. Oh! that the saints may protect her through the remainder of the night."

Suddenly the light, even breathing, gave place to short, quick gasps, as though the sleeper was labouring under some strong feeling, and then came a piercing shriek. In a moment the old dame was on her feet and hurrying towards the bedroom, pushed aside the tapestry, and looked within, and what a scene met her eye. In the centre of the room, in the midst of the flood of light which was pouring in through the casement, stood the tall figure of a man enveloped in a travel-stained cloak. On his head he wore the plumed hat of an officer. One hand was raised and pointed through the window to the forest, while the other beckoned to the young girl, who was sitting up in bed with her fair hair falling about her shoulders and her gaze fixed in an affrighted manner on this strange apparition, which gradually grew dimmer and dimmer and then vanished. Through the parted lips of Dorothy Selby came a low moan of terror, and sinking back upon the pillow she swooned.

"It has come at last and she must obey the summons. I had hoped she might escape, but it is to be and she must go."

The old dame bent over the still form of her young mistress and applied restoratives. Soon the blue eyes opened and fixed themselves upon the old dame, who began stroking her hands and murmuring soothing words. But as she recovered her senses the terrified look returned, and she said in a low whisper:

"Nurse, I have seen an apparition. You told me I might some time on the Eve of All-Hallows. I only used to laugh. But, oh! Nurse, it has come," and she grasped hold of the old dame's hand, while she shuddered violently.

"I, too, saw it, and, my mistress, you must obey it. Arise and dress for we must follow in the direction where it pointed."

Wrapt in their cloaks, the two stole into the forest and took the way pointed out.

"What think you, Nurse, it meant?"

"I know not. Only that, as thou wert born on All-Hallows eve, — The saints preserve us! what was that?" and the old woman crossed herself fervently.

"I saw nothing," answered the other, looking nervously round. "But it is strange, Nurse, I feel that I have no will but to go in this direction. See, here are two paths, and yet I am led by some mysterious influence to follow this one."

The old dame crossed herself as she said: "May the holy saints preserve you, for the charm is working."

"Think you danger threatens me?"

"Nay, my darling mistress; I hope not, for it would ill

befit the saints to let one so beautiful fall into the evil spirit's hands. I think thou art wanted for — Hist! what noise is that?" and catching hold of the young girl's arm she pulled her back into the shade, and bending forward listened. "Hearest thou anything?" she asked, turning to Dorothy.

"Yes, I hear a noise like the sound of many angry voices. It grows louder and louder. Hasten, Nurse, that same unseen power urges me onward."

The two now hurried along with redoubled speed—the elder, seemingly endowed with youthful vigour, as she followed the fleeing steps of Dorothy.

Meanwhile the noise grew louder, and presently a turn in the path brought them to the open dell, and before them lay that scene of which mention has already been made.

In the centre of a clamorous crowd stands the prisoner — head and shoulders above the rest he stands immovable amidst the surging crowd about him. With head thrown back he looks straight before him, seemingly regardless of the flashing swords which are pointed toward him.

"Look! there he is; the same one who appeared to me but a short while ago. See! he is looking this way; and oh! Holy Mary, they will murder him!"

Down on her knees fell the nurse and prayed for the protection of her mistress, as with swift step she made her way across the dell into the midst of the flashing swords, whose points were already touching that calm figure. Then above the clamour rose her voice:

"What! Would ye be such cowards as to slay a defenceless man?"

So suddenly did she appear in their midst that they started back affrighted and gazed with terror-stricken looks upon her as she stood there with her fair hair falling like a golden mist about her tall and queenly figure with her arms uplifted as though she would drive them back. Then there rose a murmur: "Was ought so lovely ever seen? Surely she belongs to the gods! A daughter of the gods! A daughter of the gods!" was now heard on all sides, and, quickly crowding round, they all with one accord knelt before her.

"Ask what thou wilt thou beautiful being and it shall be granted thee," they said.

Then quickly answered she, "I ask for his life."

A silence fell upon them which was broken by the one who sat upon the dais saying:

"O! thou daughter of the gods, ask not that, for he is doomed to die this night. Ask anything thou wilt, but not that."

"What has he done that he merits a death so terrible?"

"He has turned traitor to us—his comrades."

Still, urged by the same mysterious power, Dorothy pleaded earnestly for the life of the stranger,—pleaded so earnestly that he, who had spoken and seemed to be the leader, answered:

"It shall be granted thee, but only on one condition, and that is, that thou shalt go with us. Our ship rides at anchor near by and we will bear thee away to our island home—a home fit for thee, thou beauteous being. What say ye, my comrades, shall it be so?"

And that crowd, so inflamed with passion but a while ago, laughed and sang in glee:

"Thou sayest well, our captain. We will bear this lovely one to our island-home in the Mediterranean, and his life shall be spared for her sake."

Then the old nurse stole to her Mistress' side and whispered: "Art thou afraid?"

"I have no fear," she answered. "The same influence is working mightily upon me and I have to go."

"Then go, my Mistress. Thou canst not choose but to obey, and may the blessed Mary keep thee in her care."

Soon all were hastening from the forest to the shore, and there riding at anchor in a small bay lay the ship—a curious looking craft and built for speed, which she proved when, with every sail set, she sailed out of the bay and scudded over the waters.

A twelvemonth had come and gone and once more it was the Eve of All-Hallows. Standing on the shore of a small island, which rose like an oasis from the Mediterranean, was a young girl watching the rich after glow of the sunset. The air was heavy with the perfume of aromatic herbs and myriads of flowers. From the trees which drooped to the water's edge a melody of song was being poured forth by Nature's own songsters—the evening vespers of praise daily rendered by them; their only way of expressing their sense of gratitude for the surpassing loveliness of Nature. As the last note of praise died away and the rich colour began to fade from the sky, the girl, with one long, last look, turned and slowly climbed the path which led from the shore to a house half hidden amidst a wealth of foliage. As she reached a turn in the path, where a small summer-house was built, she stopped, hesitated for a moment, then turned and entered the place. As she did so, the figure of a man glided forth from the shadow of some trees, where he had been watching, and followed her within. Dorothy, for she it was, though so pale and fragile looking that she seemed like the ghost of her former self, turned quickly as she heard the step behind her, gave one look of startled surprise and then said:

"At last! At last! You have come."

"Yes, at last, I have come," he answered. "So closely guarded have I been that I could find no opportunity to come to you till this evening. Most of them left this morning for a long sail, and so, hearing of this, and knowing that the captain was away, there would be less vigilance kept up, I succeeded in drugging my guard and here

I am, if possible to save you, and so repay life for life. But I hear a step. Somebody comes this way!"

"It is but my old nurse; she is ever with me. We are quite safe; nobody intrudes here."

"Have they used you kindly?"

"They have treated me with every consideration, lavished every luxury upon me; but the one wish of my heart is refused. They will never free me from this place."

"The holy saints! with whom does my mistress speak! Ah! it is you; that mysterious stranger seen not since last All-Hallows Eve. Oh! comest thou to set my poor mistress free. A little while and she will be no more. Then turning to her mistress she continued: "How didst thou meet him; has the same strange influence been upon thee. I had hoped that all that wast required of thee had been fulfilled."

"Nay, nurse, thou knowest that this is the Eve of All-Hallows and something warned me that on its approach I would once more be under the spell. All day I have felt it, and as I came up the path it deepened and led me here; but it works not so powerfully as twelve months ago, and this time I have no fear, only," and here her voice became very faint, "I feel as though my very life was slipping away."

As she finished, the stranger who had bent eagerly forward listening with deep attention to her words, murmured: "It is wonderful! I cannot understand this dreadful mystery! But let us away. If aught is to be done it must be done quickly. I have a small ship hidden in the cove near by. Three sailors who are friendly to me wait for us. Let us go."

Tenderly lifting the half-fainting Dorothy, he made his way down the path followed by the old nurse. Not a word was spoken, as with noiseless speed the sailors weighed anchor, and with every stitch of canvas spread, the ship was got underway and soon was standing out to sea. Three days they sped before the wind, but on the fourth the idle flapping of the sails told that the wind had died away. On the deck beneath a screen, which protected her from the fierce blaze of the sun, lay Dorothy Selby. Already hope had banished the despairing look from her eyes, and the colourless cheeks showed signs of returning health. All that day the ship made but little headway, but towards evening a breeze sprang up. Once more the sails were filled and the ship bounding through the water.

"Why do you look so earnestly in that direction?" asked Dorothy, who had been watching the stranger as he stood glass in hand scanning the distant horizon.

"Because I have noticed for some time a ship bearing this way, and from her build she looks like one of ours."

"Think you she is pursuing?"

"I fear so; but do not be alarmed, we have a good start of her, and, if this breeze keeps up, we will soon be far out of reach."

Nevertheless, in spite of his hopeful tone, she noticed that he grew more anxious-looking as the hours went by, and she could not but perceive that slowly and surely the ship was gaining on them.

As night came on he urged her to go below; but she felt she could not sleep while uncertain whether or no they would be yet able to escape from their pursuers. At the first glimpse of light all eyes were turned anxiously in the direction of the pursuing ship. There she was, not a quarter of a mile away, bearing down upon them. With blanched faces they looked into each other's eyes.

"There is no escape. Fight we cannot. Our number is too small," said the stranger, as he stood by Dorothy's side.

Then one of the sailors came forward and whispered something into his ear. The stranger thought a moment, and then turning to Dorothy he said:

"If we fall into their hands our death will be horrible, for they will be roused at our attempting to escape. The man says there is powder enough to blow up our ship. Shall we do it before it is too late?"

"Yes," was all she answered. Presently there came a sudden roar like thunder, and all was over.

Lines Suggested.

How happy was the world before it knew

About "bactaria,"

Or of the thousand ills that wait

Upon "malaria."

Before we knew the shape and size—

The general bearing—

And tubal tendency of "germs" inhaled

In every airing.

When childhood reveled in the dirt

Happy and healthy,

When apoplexy was unknown

Save to the wealthy.

When young life on the hills cried out

"O mundi gloria,"

Unconscious that all was not composed

Of "infusoria."

Broad blooms the future of the "germ" M.D.;

We soon shall see him perched high,

With telescopic lenses to reduce

The morning stars to "fungi,"

The leech has got firm; we can

Not ostracise him.

Lord love the heathen, let us pause before

We civilize him.

The Châlet, Annapolis, N.S. IRENE ELDER MORTON.