

A LOVE SONNET.

AMONGST the sheaves, when I beheld thee first,
That happy harvest-morn a year ago,
A thought crept through my heart with sudden glow,
That never sunny mountain-top had nurst
A fresher, fairer flower—the very air
Kissed thy dear face and seemed to feel it fair,
And the serene, deep, summer heaven above
Leaned down to gaze on thee with looks of love . . .
Oh! child-like woman, that hast kept thine heart
So pearly with morning dew—my flower, my flower!
How passing dull my thought was in that hour,
Owing thy beauty, yet devoid of art
And insight to discern, that by God's grace
My life's best angel met me face to face.

T. WESTWOOD: *Gathered in the Gloaming.*

TWO NIGHTS.

[Translated from the German of HACKLAENDER for THE WEEK.]

THE SECOND NIGHT—1848.

SHALL we acknowledge that it was only a pleasant memory which in reality impelled our hero to quicken his pace? Ah, he thought, the chances of war have fallen near her home, nay, in her home, else should I be going there now? His fancy pictured in bright hues on the gray landscape, his arrival in Pusterlengo and sudden appearance before the astonished girl. "Dear Teresina, you would not let me come before, but now you see I must—it is the fortune of war; four years is such a long time, you will be glad now to let me stay, Carissima." Then she will smile, he thought, and as the place is filled with officers and men she will give him a tiny little room whose window looks through heavy grape-clusters out over the garden behind the house. Will she be changed? Perhaps grown taller! But in her eyes there will be the same deep, plaintive expression, on her lips the same sweet smile as of yore. So musing, he rode as quickly as possible past the artillery train. The soldiers drove their horses moodily forward, and the officers, wrapped in their long mantles, preserved an unbroken silence, not a word, not a laugh,—no sound but the heavy breathing of the horses and the clanking of the couplings. Presently he came up to a train of pontoniers; further on passed long, close columns of infantry; and at last reached the head of the detachment, exchanged a few words with the commanding officer, then rode more rapidly over the stretch of empty road before him.

In the west the heavy clouds had somewhat lifted to show a streak of pale yellow just above the horizon; Pusterlengo could not be very far away now, and a vision of dry clothes, to be followed by a cup of delicious coffee, floated before his "mind's eye," and made him impervious to the chill morning air.

And Cecco! he must be a big boy now, and my forage cap is in shreds by this time, I suppose. How strange to see them all again after four years. Presently the way was again filled with moving forms, and by the dim light he saw a party of chasseurs advancing towards him. Although the discipline is lighter in this corps than in any other, and laughing and talking is not prohibited, even they seemed to succumb to the general depression, and rarely spoke. At the head of the battalion walked a couple of Uhlan patrols, and between them a man, evidently belonging to the class of well-to-do farmers, with his hands bound behind his back; his clothes were torn and dusty; he wore no hat, and the long, black hair hung over his face; his eyes on the ground, and apparently utterly indifferent to the ankle-deep mud, he trudged stolidly on.

As Count S. rode past he heard a laugh, and then a voice call "halt"! It was no other than his friend the hussar.

"Grüss Gott," he called. "This is fine weather for meeting old friends in, eh? I have caught an abominable cold since yesterday, and am consequently not in the best of humours."

"Wait a moment. If my water-tight case proves what it pretends to be I will cure you with a good cigar."

"No soldier like a hussar!" exclaimed the other. "You shall be repaid with a draught of purest 'Kirsch.'"

The leather case justified its water-proof qualities, and cigars and "Kirsch" were interchanged.

"Where are you going to. Surely you have not been on horseback since last evening?"

"Very nearly. I changed my horse and stole an hour's sleep, but have been riding all night in the storm."

As they stopped for an instant to relight their cigars, the Uhlans walked on with their prisoner.

"Whom have you there?" asked Count S.

"A spy. A wretched fellow who would have been the cause of not a little bloodshed had the Piedmontese been more courageous. They are taking him to the headquarters in Pusterlengo."

"What proofs did they find on him?"

"More than enough to condemn him. He will be shot. Yesterday the body of a postilion was brought in; he had been stabbed and part of the despatches he carried were found on this fellow; evidently he killed him out of pure hatred to us and not for a reward from the enemy, *tant pis*." The hussar shrugged his shoulders but at the same time looked compassionately at his prisoner.

"After all, it is sad to see any one led to death in cold blood—even a spy; but he is already sentenced; there is no escape. They are marching him into Pusterlengo partly to hear the people's opinion there; perhaps somebody will have a good word for him."

Quickening their pace the two officers rode on in advance to the village. Meanwhile the yellow streak on the horizon had brightened, the masses of grey clouds divided and daylight broke again over the earth; but it was a feeble, sad light, dimmed by the floating clouds that still hung sombrily over the fields. The trees and bushes bent beneath the strong wind, showering heavy rain-drops upon the ground. The corn-fields seemed to shiver as with cold.

Both men laughed as they now looked at each other by the morning light and beheld the destruction in their personal appearance—their white mantles had a wide border of brown, the horses were bespattered with the saddles, and boots, spurs, and swords were covered inch-thick with mud.

On entering the village they encountered more regiments; the streets were fairly barricaded with soldiers. The headquarters were in a long rambling building in the centre of the place. About an hour passed before the despatches were ready and Count S. could again mount and ride over to the other side of the town in search of the posting-house. The rain had ceased; whole rows of infantry stood in the streets, and the villagers were bringing them food and drink—indeed on the entire route to Milan the country people greeted the Austrian soldiers as "our deliverers"—an expression denoting as much an anxiety for the end of hostilities as adherence to the imperial family.

At last the posting-house, here the house, there the stable, lay before Count S. A group of guardsmen were putting up their horses in the latter; the postilions were assisting them, and one came forward to hold his horse as he dismounted and asked for the posting-master's family.

The postilion glanced hesitatingly towards the windows and shrugged his shoulders. "There is the house, Signor, and the door is open; you may enter, though I cannot tell if you will find any one there; but there will be a place where you can hang up your dripping mantle. I'll just put your horse up and then go in and make a fire."

"No one at home! Are you sure?"

"I cannot tell, Signor," came the same answer, "but you may go in."

Quickly he strode toward the door. On the threshold lay the great dog he remembered so well; the creature looked at him, wagged his tail, then rose and slowly followed him. Count S. walked down the entire length of the corridor, knowing that the little room at whose window he stood on that night, which now seemed so remote, must be quite at the end of it;—right, and opening the door, he entered.

The window overlooking the garden stood open, and now, as then, the grape vines grew around it, only now, instead of the mild moonlight, the grey light of a misty morning crept through them and raindrops fell sadly from their leaves upon the window-sill below.

In the room were two children; one, a child of six, was trying to make the few embers on the hearth burn brighter, the other, a baby of not more than two, sat on the floor, its wee hands tucked for warmth under its thin little dress. The first was a boy, the other evidently a girl—her baby-girl, with the mother's every feature, even to her great shining eyes! "Teresina"! At the name the child turned and smiled at the young officer. Great confusion reigned throughout the room and Count S. shuddered as he glanced around, why, he scarcely knew. The boy—Cecco of course, the child Teresina had upon her knee that memorable night—assured him frankly and fearlessly that he would make the fire burn in a minute!

As he spoke the old postilion entered with an armful of wood.

"Are these children all alone in the house?" asked Count S. "Where is the posting-master? And—"

The postilion threw the wood down beside the chimney-place and asked: "Was the Signor ever in the house before?"

"About four years ago."

"Ah."

"At that time I remember seeing—while waiting for fresh horses—a very beautiful young girl here."

"Teresina!" the postilion's voice grew grave. "That is her child on the floor."

"And she?"

"She, Signor, she died a year ago, happily. She had a hard time of it with him, poor child!"

"With whom? Her father?"

"No, no; he died some time ago—I mean her husband, our present master," and as he spoke he shuddered.

"Yes, yes, the posting-master's son from Piacenza," continued the Count in a low tone.

"The Signor knew him?"

"No, but I have heard of him."

"I can believe that! But he deserves all he will get; such a brave, such a good and beautiful wife! Her father forced her to marry him, and, wretch though he was, she clung to him so faithfully. But it's no more than right, although hard on the poor children, no more than right."

"But what has become of him, then?" asked Count S., his heart contracting with sudden, painful foreboding.

"Just this, Signor: he has been creeping round the country in his mysterious way and at last they have caught him, proved him to be a spy, and sentenced him to be shot. Surely the Signor must have heard this; he was just brought into the village. No one can save him now, not even the field-marshal himself."

With deep compassion Count S. gazed at the little maiden who had