

may to that, and I think I'd have done differently; for if love be such as they say it is, I'd die rather than give up my right to keep faith where I loved. We don't hang our hearts for every gallant to pluck at, nor do we cast them down unsought; but once taken captive, sure it is only maiden modesty to be steadfast to the death."

Her brother listened to this rhapsody with a changing countenance; for an instant a smile sprang up, then that died away, and a bitter sneer curled his lip under the long silken moustache as he answered,—

"You argue like one with experience, Mistress Avice; 'tis a pity Rose had not borrowed somewhat of thee. I met her master (for I'll call him nought else, so never from at me)—I met her master, I say, on the course, and heard him bragging of what he had done at Newmarket, and how the king trusted him before all men to buy a horse, or choose a wench; and then he vowed all women had their price. My blood was up, boiling like molten lead; and had it not been that Dick dragged me away, there would have been a sinner less in the land by this, and fair Mistress Rose might have had another chance in the market."

"Thanks be to God and Mr. Skelton!" said Avice, fervently, clasping her pretty hands. "You are too hot, Percy."

"Nay, sweetheart, I am cold enough now; feel how my hand shakes. But let's to supper; to-night I must eat, drink and be merry; to-morrow I'll pay my debts, and sit on thy hearth, a pauper."

When Avice sought her bed-room that night, she had no inclination for sleep. She was uneasy about her brother: his flushed face and trembling limbs warned of more than mental suffering; she had heard from him the story of his losses, too; then, again this love proposal of Dick Skelton's. Dick was her brother's largest creditor, and one word from her would cancel all debts. She had but to say this little word "Yes," and Dick, who had the finest property in the North Riding, would turn over all she held of the old place, and forgive her brother's debts. Avice was thinking, as she could not but think, of all this; thinking, too, that had the same emergency risen a month before, there would have been no difficulty, but that Dick Skelton would have won a willing bride. Only a month ago—four short weeks, and all this was changed! Four weeks ago Avice would have married Dick, simply because she knew him well, respected him well, and cared for no one (except her brother) better. Four weeks ago Avice had only known one love and the little heart now thrilling and sinking with its own weight and happiness, lay quiet and unfelt. Four weeks ago, during a long ramble, and while resting under an old hawthorn-tree, a stranger had passed her; a pair of dark blue eyes had looked into hers, and up sprang the heart to life. Day after day she had thought of the eyes, night after night they had haunted her in sleep; until, some fortnight after, they had met hers again, and since then scarce a day passed but at some point or other of her walks the mysterious stranger had suddenly sprung up, bowed, and passed on. So it came about that Avice talked of "truth unto death," and sat in the bay-window of her bed-chamber, gazing out into the moon-lit park.

A very sweet and English view was that seen out of the bay-window; first a deep moat, carpeted over with water-lilies, whose bright flowers starred the dark surface of the water; and fringing the moat, a thick underwood of many kinds of shrubs; beyond, a wide expanse of park-land, dotted with great oak and elm trees. Above all this, sailed the moon, to-night at the full, looking down with a clear watchful eye upon the sleep of Nature; not a leaf moved, and an intense silence reigned everywhere—so intense that Avice fell into a half-dreamy state, and sitting with her eyes fixed upon an opening in the copse where the moonbeams made a silvery path of light, let her thoughts weave such fairy-like romances as they listed.

But suddenly the listless look vanished; her

cheeks flushed, and leaning forward, she gazed with eager eyes upon a tall, dark figure which standing full in the centre of the path, seemed framed in that mysterious silver light. For a few seconds the man stood with his face towards the house; then he walked up to the verge of the moat and bent over, gazing down into the deep water. Avice's heart beat fast, and her cheeks paled; what could he mean? why did he bend over the water? and almost a shriek broke from her white lips as, suddenly letting himself down over the ledge, she saw him seize a branch, and so swing down to the water-edge, until he could grasp one of the golden-chaliced lilies, with which prize he was soon standing safe on the green bank again; and Avice, pale enough now, was watching, wondering and perplexed—for she had long ago recognized the figure, as what woman ever does fail to recognise the man that she loves?

The very violence of her motion had driven the blood back to her heart, which beat and thrilled, and ached in a manner perplexing to poor Avice; who, ready as she was to venture her opinion and tell her mind as to love and its exigencies, as in the manner with many young women, was as yet happily ignorant of its caprices, and wondered sorely why she grew so faint, and tenderly melancholy, though all the time conscious that she was perfectly happy.

Avice went to bed at last, but not, you may be sure, until the lily gatherer had long ago disappeared, and the moon, travelling on her way, had left the path in shadow.

Bright dreams were Avice's that night; and through them all came a vague consciousness that there was some presence near; that eyes were watching her, and lips breathing near her; once she thought they touched hers, and starting up with a cry, she saw only the pale dim day-dawn stealing into the room, and turning upon her side the girl fell into a deep dreamless rest, from which she did not awake until the sun was streaming into the room, and coming straight through the middle panes of the bay-window, fell upon her bed, where, upon the crimson quilted coverlet, white and glistening, lay a water-lily.

One might well judge that such an adventure would alarm Avice, and yet it scarcely may be said to do so. In those days there was a much stronger belief in the supernatural; and living as Avice had done in a notoriously haunted and spirit-ridden house, it is scarcely to be wondered at that she suddenly became possessed with the notion that this mysterious wanderer and the haunting spirit were one and the same, and that by some strange freak this spirit loved her. It would be hard to say whether Avice was pleased or frightened when her mind first conceived, and then instantly accepted, this wild notion; it was very awful, of course to have a lover of an ethereal nature, and not mortal flesh and blood as she herself was; she had read, too, of the Evil One taking human shape to deceive young maidens; but this could not be a demon! oh, no, Avice was sure of that. Those blue eyes that stirred her heart even now, and that sad, quiet face—there was no taint of evil there; rather must be some heavenly spirit who, for some cause or other, was doomed to remain a season on earth.

When Avice began to let her mind wander away into such wild regions as these, there was no limit to the visionary world she soon made around her; and it was perhaps fortunate that going down to prepare the morning meal for her brother she found he had been seized with an ague, and obliged to send to the nearest town for a doctor.

A long anxious day followed; Avice had her hands full; Percy was very ill, and by no means an easy patient to deal with; for he had to be kept in bed almost by main force, insisting upon getting up and riding over to Middleham to meet the attorney who was to settle his racing losses. As day waned, the fever left him, and then he became bent upon a new excitement; he and Avice were to attend the mask at their cousin's wedding, which was to come off that night, and being unable to go himself, which sorely against his will he at last admitted, he insisted upon Avice carrying out her part, which was none

other than the Queen of Cœur de Lion, which great monarch Percy himself had been prepared to personate. In vain Avice pleaded against his will; he was inflexible; and at last, dreading the effect of continued altercation in his present state, she consented.

(To be concluded in our next.)

## THE DRAMA.

**B**UT few plays, written after the time of Goldsmith, possess the same charm for either the reader in the quiet study, or the spectator at the theatre, as Sheridan's "School for Scandal," and but few convey to the mind such a vivid idea of the fashionable world's frivolous amusements, of the period at which it was written. To the end of time, we suppose, society will never lack members of the stamp of Sir Benjamin Backbite, Crabtree, delightful Mrs. Candour, Suave, insinuating hypocritical Joseph Surface, and his careless, good-hearted, spendthrift brother, Charles; while Sir Peter Teagle, and his young wife, are victims of a matrimonial mistake to be made the best of examples of which are seen every day. Miss Rushton played Lady Teagle in a vivacious manner, though she rather overdressed the part, but a country young lady, suddenly elevated into the position of a leader of the fashion, would not be unlikely to fall into the error of dressing so as to display, in her opinion, her attractions to the best possible advantage.

As Sir Peter, a part that has given opportunities to great actors like Farren to make an addition to their stock of fame, Mr. T. A. Beckett played very well indeed. His useful description of married life, his surprise when Lady Teagle stood revealed upon the throwing down of the screen, and the immediate assumption of a husband's natural dignity, while Joseph Surface endeavoured to explain matters, were very effective. Sir Peter Teagle is the most difficult part to fill in the comedy, and to do so well is a labour deserving no ordinary amount of approbation. As Mrs. Candour, Mr. Hill retailed all the little bits of scandal with an amount of lively appreciation and a gusto, very suitable to the character; while the lady's excuse for recommitting any fresh attack upon the characters of her friends, "people will talk you know," was given in a self-defensive, deprecatory style, that was very mirth-provoking. Mr. Bowers, as Crabtree, also was very amusing; the relish with which he took snuff after each ill-natured remark, and the coolness with which he calumniated his acquaintances in presence of their relatives, were in characteristic accordance. Mr. Carden, as jovial Charles Surface, was very spirited and successful, though the latter's enjoyment of the situation of affairs in the screen scene would have been more indicative of his good breeding as a gentleman, and equally as effective, had it been toned down to a quieter level. Mr. Halford's Joseph Surface was very good, and the other characters were creditably sustained.

"The Honeymoon" is such a beautifully written comedy, and, with almost every character, noticeable for some effective peculiarity, that to play any of them, in an unsatisfactory manner, would be unworthy an artist of the most moderate pretensions. As the haughty Juliana, Miss Rushton appeared to good advantage; and represented the petulant, gradually yielding manner of the wife, slowly being tamed into a meet, docile, loving helpmate, better than she has depicted the peculiarities of any character she has, as yet, appeared in here. Mr. Jas. Carden played Duke Aranga in a light, pleasant style, and delivered the many vigorous sentiments of the text in a very manly, appreciative manner. His costume as the Duke was very elegant and picturesque. The woman-hating Rolando found a good representative in Mr. Halford, who seemed very happy to have the captain's peculiar prejudices overcome at the last by the power of Zamora (very prettily and gracefully played by Miss Emma Maddern), and submitted to matrimonial bonds with a very good grace. Miss Lizzie Maddern was a suitably