

swordsman, and swimmer; the fleetest of foot, and strongest of arm of all his youthful competitors. With infinite good-humour did the vanquished retire from the contest, and with one voice confess his superiority. A young nobleman having chanced to see him wrestling on one of these occasions, was so struck with his figure of gigantic height, and extraordinary muscular power, combined with exquisite grace and agility, that he informed himself of his story and character, and offered to secure to him such an income as would, with his bride's dower, render him independent of all future caprices of fortune.

"You are well born," said the Marquis de Marialva; "there can be no doubt of it: allow me the merit of restoring you to your proper station in society."

"My lord, you must not think me the less grateful for your intention because I reject your favours. I am very proud in my own particular manner. I would not condescend to be one of a body who might hold themselves disgraced by my admission into their circle; I should hurl back on them, all, and more than all, the contempt they would lavish upon me. But I have energies within me that shall not perish by feeding on themselves—thoughts and feelings that shall nerve me to exertion. The time may come that my country will need an undaunted soul, when one fearless and determined spirit may change the fortune of a day;—then will I make a name for the nameless, and I shall ask no prouder title, than the Peasant of Portugal. You may smile, my lord; but I would rather be the one who should have saved or died for his country—rather dignify the general denomination of half a people—than be lord of the largest territory and most ancient name in the civilized world."

When with flushed cheek and burning brow Juan thus gave expression to an inward sense of power not yet modified into distinct form and nature, he little imagined that the danger was already at hand which, in the spirit of sad prophecy, he thus anticipated; but the suddenness of the demand for his exertions only gave them added force and vigour. Although so lately a happy bridegroom, he prepared to leave his lovely wife without a murmur; and Marguerita, heedless of the danger that threatened from without, tenderly reproached her husband for quitting her on their bridal day. He was already on the threshold, but he returned to kiss the tear from the cheek of his beloved, and to assure her that the desire of fame, and the wish to distinguish himself, originated in his anxiety to prove himself worthy of her; and he said truly. One great passion in its mighty flow had aroused every dormant faculty of his being, and that with such rapidity as to seem

to give birth to the powers it merely called into action. With perfect presence of mind, and an air of calm decision, did he give orders for the defence of the village; and they were the most skilful and judicious that could have been conceived and executed upon the spur of the moment. Then unsheathing his father's sword,—the rude pillow of his infancy,—he conjured the assembled villagers, all vigorous and robust men, to fight to the death for their homes, their wives, and their children.

"We shall live—we will live, my friends, to press once more to our bosoms those dear ones, who will be all the dearer for the danger they will have incurred. But should we fall, we will make an impassable barrier with our bodies, which the most hardened profligate shall tremble to violate;—we will purchase, by our deaths, the right of honourable treatment for our wives and daughters."

All hailed the enthusiasm of the young speaker as the herald of success; and never was a French regiment, instinctively brave as they are, met with more determined hostility, or a stronger spirit of resistance. Provoked that a handful of Portuguese peasants should dispute the event with a regiment high in favour with Napoleon, and decked with numerous marks of distinction,—hard-earned pre-eminence,—the commanding officer gave his men permission to put the village to fire and sword, and pillage and massacre, at their own unlicensed will, its unfortunate inhabitants. But the peasantry were fighting at their own thresholds for the olives and vineyards that formed their little store of wealth; they were no hirelings, paid so much a day for shedding their blood in a cause they neither felt nor understood. They were a simple people and knew little of the pitiful ambition of rulers, born of weakness, yet powerful in its consequences; like a lighted brand in the forest, which, borne on the wings of the wind, compels the loftiest trees to yield their green honours to swell the flame,—the fool and fuel to its pride and glory. They were men urged to desperation; and what had their enemies to oppose to its influence? They had numbers—increasing numbers; and good discipline, and able commanders; and more than all this, they had revenge; which urged them to wreak upon the helpless and unresisting, when the strong had fallen, the deaths of their companions in arms. It would have been mercy,—a mercy little understood by a ferocious soldiery,—had they only stabbed their victims to the heart; but brutal lust and burning vengeance were not to be so satiated; they dishonoured, ere they destroyed, to deprive death of all consolation—of every mitigation in its bitterness.