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Constance.

A Fay of the Olden Time.

BY MAPLE LEAF.

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Constance.







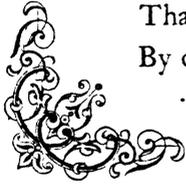
Constance.

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A LAY OF THE OLDEN TIME.

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CONSTANCE and ROSALINE, twin sisters were,
Daughters of Earl de Macey, a proud peer,
Claiming descent from a high Norman lord,
Who came with the Duke William o'er the sea,
That monarch who, to his reluctant sway,
Reduced fair England by the Hastings' fight;
When but mere babes the maidens' mother died,
Scarce 'ere her budding flowers had op'd to bloom,
Scarce 'ere the little feet could run alone,
Without the guidance of her gentle hand
And 'ere the infant lips could frame that word,
MOTHER, the sweetest of all names 'mong men.
Thus left in earliest childhood motherless,
Seem'd they to cling with more than common love
Each to the other, tho' 'twas strange, I ween,
That natures so diverse should be entwin'd
By closest of all ties, twin-sisterhood.



Rosaline was one of fairy form and face ;
Back from her forehead stream'd her waving hair
Clustering in golden ringlets o'er her neck,
Whilst her soft eyes, like two celestial stars,
Blue as the vault of Heaven, seemed often filled
With the glad sunshine of a glorious youth.
And she was like some blushing moss-rose fair,
But Constance was a flower more rarely seen.
Tall and commanding was her slender form,
Lofty her mien, and on her countenance
The majesty of virtue ever sate.
And from her marble brow, pure as the snow,
Rippl'd the tresses of rich, auburn hair ;
Whilst often in the flashing of her eye
One traced the fire of a high, dauntless soul ;
Yet when in contemplation she was wrapt,
Her spirit seem'd to dwell in those dark depths,
Their hue a liquid brown—pure, deep, and clear,
Ev'n like the waters of that far-famed lake
From whence the maiden had derived her name—
And tho' she seldom smiled, a smile it seemed
To all more sweet because so rarely seen.
The Castle stood within a vale beneath,
And on the north side rose a mountain high,
Whence the adventurous climber could behold,

Far down below, a waving forest grand ;
And in the distance lay the glist'ning sea,
Shining beneath the starlit firmament,
And there the Castle stood, a stately pile,
As tho' the frowning battlements could touch
The sky above ; and the grey, massive walls
Possessed a certain weird and barren air,
As tho' the spirit of a by-gone age
Dwelt in the old and hoary edifice.
Aye ! there it lay, wrapt in night's sombre shade ;
All dark and grim, save where a steady light
Burned from the highest turret ; marking thus
The nightly bower of the fair sister-twins.
For on the morrow Constance would ride forth,
Ride by her father's side with train select,
Unto the Court of England. For 'twas said
A host was then preparing to depart
To join Crusaders in the Holy Land.
And ne'er was brave De. Macey known to lag
When wise and prudent counsel was besought,
Still less when gallant leaders were required
To head a fiery band of warriors. First
His presence at the court was in request,
And thus his absence for a score of days.
And the two sisters (who in all their lives

Scarce for one day had separated been)
Bade each the other a long, sad farewell,
For thus the time, tho' brief, love magnified.
Only upon that morn he bade them choose,
Which should remain behind and which proceed :
For he had said his daughters were too fair
To hide their charms in their wild Castle home,
And Rosaline had pleaded, " I will stay,
" Constance must go, she is so like a queen,
" That all the court will marvel when they see
" Her wondrous loveliness and gracious ways."
Then suddenly rememb'ring they must part,
Swiftly she glided to her father's side,
And whisper'd, " Why, my father, cannot both
" Go with thee on this journey to the court ?"
Then leaned her golden head upon his breast,
And patiently awaited his reply.
Then spake De Macey, smoothing her bright hair,
" Nay, daughter, these are warlike times, I trow,
" There's often danger when we dream it not ;
" Therefore 'tis better one should here remain,
" Yet grieve I much to part my two White Doves."
For such the name he, in his loving pride,
Had given to Constance and his Rosaline.

Then spake the stately beauty, who till now
Silence had kept, "Yea, father, thou art right,
"And as thou sayest, these are warlike times,
"Too warlike for our gentle Rosaline,
"She will be safer here. Dearest, adieu,
"And doubt not that we two shall meet again."
Then asked her sire, "Hast thou no fear, my Constance?"
"Fear!" and as she spake the ill-omened word,
Flashed her dark eyes; she raised her stately head,
To its full height she drew her slender form,
And looked around her with a queenly air
Of dauntless courage, and then questioned thus,
"What should I fear? Fear seldom visits me.
"Perchance 'tis fear that makes our Rosaline
"Tremble to see thee clothed in burnished steel,
"Tremble to see thee mount thy barbéd steed?
"Sometimes methinks that I have judged her wrong,
"And that she shares with me a proud delight.
"Tell me, my father, what have I to fear?"
The maiden ceased, "Now bravo!" cried the Earl,
"Like a De Macey hast thou said, my child;
"One scarce would deem that in thy woman's soul,
"The courage of our Norman fathers dwelt.
"Yet art thou braver far than many a knight

“ Who in the tournament has laurels won ;
“ So mayst thou ever be, my noble girl,
“ Be brave and pure, thy father asks no more.
“ And thou, my Rosaline, my darling child !
“ Thou art my gentle, timid, little bird,
“ Yet both are dear, so dear, I cannot tell
“ Which hath the noblest soul, the fairest face.
“ And now adieu, my daughters. Constance, thou
“ Upon the morrow wilt depart with me.”

Thus spake the Earl ; well pleased 'twas thus agreed,
Then left the maidens' bower ; and as the clank
Of his spurred heel fell on the pavement stone,
Rosaline shudder'd, and forboding ill,
Clung to her sister, but fair Constance smiled ;
Then turning, cheered her with low, tender words,
As one would sooth a gentle child's alarm.

II.

Calm thyself then ; tho' now with aching heart
You bid farewell!
Ever to meet again, in grief or joy ?
Ah, who can tell !

Weep not, sad heart, so wildly ! tho' on earth
These partings are so sore ;
Know ! that in Heaven, where no sorrow comes,
We part no more !

Now dawned the smiling morn. The sun arose,
And draped in sunlight the grey castle walls,
And the soft sky above, a wide expanse
Like one vast *thought* of the all-mighty God
So spiritual, pure, unfathomable,
No clouds, as frowns, furrowed its countenance ;
And in the golden light the feathery trees
Waved their green boughs, and kissed the summer wind,
Which flitted, softly sighing, o'er the ground.
Meanwhile the lark, that sunny bird of joy,
Greet'd with gladsome song the op'ning day.
Within the castle courtyard, all was life,
And men-at-arms oft hurried to and fro,
Whilst neighing steeds, impatient, pawed the ground.

To one alone, give we a passing glance ;
A milk-white mare, of rare Arabian breed,
Meet bearer of the lovely Lady Constance.
And scarce could Evrette, the dark-eyed page,
Restrain the movements of the fiery steed,
Yet, at the word of Constance, who came forth,
And with the Earl, prepared to mount, then stood
Snow (such its name) meek as the gentle lamb,
When the fair maid caressed her snowy mane.
But now, "To horse! To horse!" De Macey cried,
Then on his coal-black charger lightly sprung,
And with a blast of trumpets loud, his train
Swept from the courtyard of the castle, and
Quickly, in martial order, passed away.
Slowly the portcullis the warders dropped,
But on the battlements stood Rosaline
Her kerchief waving, and with tearful eye,
At the fast disappearing train, then gave
One long, last look, then to her bower retired.
Now slowly dragged along the wings of time,
Day followed day, in dreary nothingness.
Her 'broid'ry work lay all unheeded by,
For old pursuits now cared not Rosaline.
In such employ their wonted pleasure was,

Yet when unshared by Constance, it had fled.
Full twice twelve days had passed, and Rosaline
Within her bower, on the couch reclined.
It was the hour of noon, the sultry air
Lay as a heavy cloud on all around.
Her maidens spake together 'neath their breath,
Thinking that their fair mistress slumberèd.
When suddenly upon their startled ears,
And thrice repeated, rang a bugle blast ;
A moment's solemn pause, and then the sound
Of trampling horse's hoofs, the silence brake.
Then swiftly Rosaline rose from her couch,
And crying, "'Tis my sire!" was hastening forth,
But paused, as Effingham, the castle steward,
Just entering, "Besought his Lady's grace,
"For thus intruding on her solitude."
"How now! Good Effingham, doth not that blast
"Foretell the Earl's approach? What sayest thou?"
"Not so, my Lady, 'tis a goodly train,
"Commanded by the young Knight De Lestrangle,
"Who prays admittance at the castle gate,
"And craves an audience of thee, for he brings
"Dispatches from my Lord, I but await
"Thine own commands. Shall I him entrance grant,

“ And shall his retinue remain without ?”
“ Dispatches from my father, doth he bring ?
“ Without delay admit him, Effingham.
“ Touching his train ; canst thou not quarter them ?
“ Our castle gives full, ample space for all.”
With low obeisance, Effingham retired.
Then to her maidens turned fair Rosaline,
“ Now haste ! attire me as my rank demands.”
Then, at her words, the tire-women obeyed.
One, her bright ringlets bound with azure band,
Another, clothed her in a sheeny robe,
Fasten'd with skill the jeweled girdle bright,
Claspt massy bracelets on her arms of snow.
Then forth she stood, in fitting dress attired,
Robed, best of all, in youthful loveliness.
Her maidens following her, she led the way,
Unto the audience chamber, to receive
The messenger, and letters of her sire.
With a light grace, she thro' the entry stept,
Pass'd up the grand old hall, and paused a space.
All waiting her approach, was De Lestrance,
Attended solely by a squire who bore
The buckler, and the sword, of the young knight.
Then, with chivalrous courtesy, Lestrance
Swiftly advanced, saluting Rosaline ;

And winningly she bowed her beauteous head.
When,—as her eye fell on the squire—she frown'd,
And on the maiden's brow displeasure sate,
And thus to Effingham, the steward, she spake,
“ Why didst thou not my strict commands obey ?
“ Said I not that thou shouldst the suite admit,
“ Of this young knight ; and wherefore this neglect ? ”
“ Nay, lovely Lady ! he deserves not blame,
“ For faithfully thy mandate he fulfilled.
“ By *my* commands proceeds my train. Methinks
“ Our presence might be irksome ; thou wouldst love
“ Our absence better than our company ;
“ And when these letters have been render'd safe
“ Into thine own fair hands, then I depart.”
Then answered Rosaline, all graciously,
“ Methinks, Sir Knight, 'tis an ill compliment.
“ Is Rosaline so churlish that thou fear'st
“ Poor cheer she'd render to her father's friends ?
“ Send then a message to recall thy train ;
“ At least this even must thou here abide.”
“ Thou churlish, beauteous Lady ! ” cried Lestrangle ;
“ 'Tis thou who, speaking thus, dost wrong thyself.
“ With lance and sword, oh fairest Rosaline !
“ Would I defy the world for such reproach.
“ Add to thy bounteousness forgiveness sweet,

“ And take it for an unintended fault !”
“ Thou hast it,” said the maiden, “ but meanwhile
“ We trust, this eve, thou wilt our banquet grace.
“ But what news of my father dost thou bring ?
“ Aught of the Lady Constance, hast thou seen ?”
Then placed Lestrange within her dainty hands
A packet tied with silk, graved on the seal,
A lion rampant, the DeMacey arms.
In vain the knot to loose, strove Rosaline.
“ And by thy favor ?” saith the gallant knight.
Upon one knee, knelt he, with courtly grace,
E’en with his dagger, cut the silk in twain.
“ A thousand thanks, fair Sir,” she said, and smil’d,
A sunny smile, that he could ne’er forget,
And as the scroll she read, he musing watched,
Thinking there was no other face so fair.
Then after a brief space spake Rosaline,
“ Now hie thee, Effingham, to those without,
“ And say that ere shall set another sun
“ The Earl, with Lady Constance, will return.
“ And thou, Knight of Lestrange,” the maiden said,
“ My father prays thou wilt remain, for he
“ Would wish to hold with thee a conference.”
Then bent his head, and answered De Lestrange,
“ Honored am I, indeed, to be *thy* guest—”

Ere he proceeded, there a shout arose,
A long, loud shout, which echoed wide and far.
“Nay, fear not, Lady!” quoth the trusty steward.
“They have received the gladsome tidings, and
“They joy to know the Earl will soon return.”
That night the castle rang with festive song,
And mirth and feast flourished without reserve.
And with her maidens, in the banquet hall,
Sate Rosaline, her guest the stranger knight,
Of noble form and face, was De Lestrangle;
Thickly the brown curls cluster’d o’er his brow;
Keen as a falcon’s was his chestnut eye,
And tho’ scarce twenty summers he had seen,
His mien commanding, his athletic form
Was moulded in a matchless symmetry.
Courtied as friend, dreaded alike as foe,
Skilled in all manly exercises,
And graced withal with knightly courtesy.
Thus of the knight; then questioned Rosaline,
“How fares the court? aught of that peerless maid,
“Constance De Macey, hast thou seen, fair Sir?
“Methought that all, that Lady’s praise would sing.”
“Nay, such good fortune had I not,” he said,
“Her beauty is the theme of every tongue;
“She, the chief subject of the minstrel’s lay.



“ All render homage to the queenly maid,
“ And, if report speaks true, soon will she wed
“ One of the noblest of England’s sons.
“ ’Twas ever said the daughters of the Earl
“ Were fairest among women ; yet, I trow,
“ Rumor hath scarce done justice to their charms,
“ If Constance can compare with Rosaline.”

The blushing maiden smiled and lightly said,
“ Sir Knight, we thank thee much for thy fair speech ;
“ Yet well thy words prove thou hast not beheld
“ The Lady Constance. Those who *have* beheld,
“ Would deem her sister worthy scarce a glance.”
“ Nay, Lady, nay,” the youthful knight replied,
“ Treason to beauty to believe such words.”
And in such converse passed the eve away.



III.

*Oh let my troubled heart have rest,
I want no more ;
I want the calm and quiet breast
I had before.
Oh let my troubled heart have peace ;
Be far away
Desires of every kind—and cease
On me to prey.
Oh let my troubled heart be still ;
Come Holy Dove,
Come all my altered soul to fill
With God's pure love.
Oh soul restored again, ne'er roam
The sinful road ;
Thrice blessed is he who goes not from
The ways of God.

Three hours had scarcely fled, since De LeStrange
The deer pursued, amid the forest glades.
Deftly he drew his bow, an arrow sped,
Fulfilled its mission, for a graceful stag,
With quick'ning bound, fell lifeless to the earth.
Then, bidding his attendants bear the game,

*These lines were kindly contributed by a friend.

Back to the castle quickly rode Lestrangle.
For in the distance, saw the youthful knight,
The castle courtyard, crowd'd with men in arms,
And heard the shouts that told the Earl's return.
Then spurred he on his horse, then reached the gate,
And leaping down, threw to his squire the reins.
Then wending thro' the crowd, gained he the hall,
But at the entrance paused one minute's space,
On Constance's far-famed charms intent to gaze.
Around the Earl was grouped a lordly throng,
And some were there of England's proudest sons.
Ofttimes admiringly their glances fell
On Rosaline, who claspt her sister's hand,
On whose bright face sat rapturous delight.
For to De Macey's right, there Constance stood,
Clad in a robe of velvet, silver grey,
Her long, bright hair in silken ringlets flow'd,
A diamond star shone on her lofty brow,
'Neath which her eyes gleam'd with a purer light.
Then as Lestrangle gazed on her, thus he thought,
"Aye! she is fairer far than they have said!
Formed is she, that face shows; for noble things,
Not for a life in trifles occupied.
What courage in her flashing eye, there dwells,
Courage, perchance, for highest deeds required.

A noble soul, methinks, doth there abide,
A soul far nobler than the face is fair !”
Then, in a lower tone, softly he spake,
“ Too grandly beautiful is she for me !
’Tis Rosaline whom I would seek to wed.”
Then entered he the hall. Thus cried the Earl,
“ Ho ! De Lestrangle ! come hither, gallant knight,
“ Of my most old and valued friend, the son,
“ Meetly we welcome thee, how dost thou fare ?
“ Thou hast before seen Lady Rosaline,
“ But, Constance, know thou now this valiant youth.”
Then lowly bowed Lestrangle and greeted her ;
And statelily she bent her head, whilst o’er
Her face there dawned her rare and winning smile.
Then Earl De Macey, taking up his speech,
Thus broken by the coming of Lestrangle,
Resumed, “ And so my lords ye have resolved
“ To add your numbers this great host unto,
“ Which in a month proceeds to Palestine.”
“ Such our intention is,” the nobles said ;
And the young De Lestrangle made like reply.
“ Such is mine also,” then the proud Earl saith.
“ Rollo De Macey *never* lags behind.
“ But ample time doth there remain, I trow,
“ For preparations, ere we join the host,

“ Therefore ’tis meet that ye our guests should be.”
And with these words up brake the conference.
’Twas but a short space since the Earl’s return,
One morn, there sallied from the Castle gate,
To hunt the wild boar in the forest depths,
A gallant band, his guests, and daughters fair,
For thus had prayed, the daughters of the Earl,
“ Yea, let us go, for in some place where naught
Of danger is, there will we watch and wait,”
Knowing not that the secret hope of each
Was that the victor De Lestrange should be,
And their fond sire had granted their request.
Now at the destined goal had all arrived,
A cool retreat with ancient oak trees girt,
Then to the ladies bade adieu in haste
The hunters, eager then to join the chase,
Attendants leaving them, to shield from harm,
Rode ’mongst the trees, and soon were lost to view.
Apart the sisters sate, in converse low,
Naught brake the silence, save the distant shout,
The baying of a hound, or winded horn,
At length, in slight alarm, spake Rosaline,
“ They tarry long, what danger hath befall’n ? ”
“ Nay, dearest, fear not,” calmly Constance saith,
“ See’st thou that path, that to the woodland strays ? ”

“Perchance if we proceed a little way
“We then our truant hunters may behold.”
Guiding with skilful hand her milk-white steed,
Led she the way, followed by Rosaline ;
But at the forest entrance halted they,
On all around a wand’ring gaze then threw,
When suddenly a piercing cry there brake
From Rosaline, who sate transfixed with fear.
Rudely was trampled down the brushwood nigh ;
And with a roar like thunder, forth there sprung,
A fierce wild boar, and rushed at Rosaline.
The lily cheek of Constance paler grew,
Swiftly she drew her rein ; with sudden bound,
Athwart the pathway sprang ; and Rosaline
Beheld her only shield, the slender form
Of Constance, and again with mighty cry,
The boar rushed on ; when from the brushwood ran
Guy De Lestrance, and before Constance stood
One moment’s space, then brightly gleamed his spear,
And the wild monster of the forest fell
To the green earth, and gasping lay in death.
Then to the side of Constance sped Lestrance,
To learn if injury she had received.
And in low, thrilling tones the knight she thanked ;
And Rosaline in joyful tears, with sobs

Pray'd him *her* share of gratitude accept.
Then answered De Lestrangle in accents low,
" Know'st thou not, loveliest, I am well repaid:
" In saving one whom thou dost hold so dear?"
Save that her cheek was paler than its wont
Slight token, Constance gave, the speech she heard.
Small need doth there remain to dwell, I trow,
Upon De Macey's joy and thankfulness.
Nor of the envy of his noble guests
In that a deed, with such good fortune fraught,
Fell to the lot of the more favored knight.
All sunshine was the life of De Lestrangle,
When smiled upon by fairy Rosaline.

Upon the mount which near the castle lay,
In purple grandeur rising to the sky,
Often would stray the daughters of the Earl,
For near the summit was a rustic bower,
Fashioned of verdant moss and trailing vine,
And seated there, fair Constance oft would say,
The soft wind sighing mid the forest trees
Like spirit voices ever seem'd to her,
And the low moaning of the distant sea
Was as the sad wail of a dying soul.
One eve in this loved spot the sisters sate,
And there had passed their time since sultry noon ;

And Rosaline had softly said, "Methinks
"The sun is well nigh set, let us depart.
"Bid Evrette attend, thy harp to bear.
"T'is better thus, dear sister, let us haste."
But as they rose, a shadow fell athwart
The entrance, and then entered De Lestrange.
"Forgiveness, fairest ladies," oft he pled,
"I knew not that this spot was graced by you.
"Methought sweet strains of music I had heard ;
"That I was not deceived yon harp doth prove.
"Oh, that one little favor I might pray !
"Fair Rosaline to hear thy voice I yearn.
"Sweet Lady Constance, ask I now too much ?"
"Great must the one be which we would not grant
"To the preserver of our lives," she said.
Thus Constance spake and Rosaline with smiles,
Passing her fairy fingers o'er the strings,
Broke forth into a sweet and joyous strain,
A clear and bird-like trill. Sweet as the sound
Of water rippling over mossy stones ;
Or as the tinkling of a silver bell ;
A joyous voice, singing of sunny youth.
And many were the thanks the young knight gave
When ceasing. Constance lightly touched the strings.
But with diviner melody she sang.
Stilled by the magic power of her voice,
Sometimes they all in perfect silence stood ;
Then homeward thro' the twilight went their way.

IV.

Some flowers droop beneath the burning sun
And pine away ;
They cannot bear the heat and weariness,
The burden of the day.

But others, tho' the storm may bruise and bend
Them to the ground,
The storm being o'er they raise their stately heads
And smile around.

Are there not some bright souls
Who mourning lie,
Too frail the sorrows of this earth to bear,
So droop and die ?

Yet stronger, loftier spirits, are there not,
Who sorrow long,
Yet 'mid affliction conquer by suffering
And being strong ?

Soon would the host depart to Palestine.
Yet ere De Macey's guests the castle left,
The noble Earl pray'd that they would remain
To witness the betrothal of his child,
The lovely Rosaline, to De Lestrangle.

And in the grand old hall, all deck'd with flowers,
And graced by brilliant lords and ladies fair,
There did the lovers make the solemn vows.
Some marvelled that the face of Constance was
Paler than needed for her sister's joy.
When midnight came all had to rest retired,
Yet slumber strayed far from the sisters twain.
Rosaline smiling e'en thro' happy tears,
Besought her sister's praises of her knight ;
And Constance with a smile sweet, spiritual,
In accents low spake all her heart desired.
Length gentle sleep came to fair Rosaline,
Weaving the airy fancies of the day
Into the brighter fairy dreams of night.
Yet *Constance* slept not. From her couch she rose
And strove in vain her heart's wild throbs to still.
Having no mortal eye to see her grief,
Her haughty head bow'd in mute agony,
Still strove in that tempestuous hour to pray,
And when the storm itself had well-nigh spent,
To her unselfish self spake falteringly :
" Ah me, my soul is full of weary pains ;
Fain would I die, and then forever rest !
And yet, not thus must Constance weakly yield.
Ah ! full of utter selfishness and sin

Am I; yet could it e'en be otherwise
I would not have it so; it is my lot
To care, alas! for one who loves me not.
Better a thousand times that I should weep
Than that my Rosaline should even sigh;
For thou wouldst die for me, my little bird,
My love of thee shall ne'er be less than thine.
I would not have my Rosaline's young life
Clouded by grief; I would not have it thus;
Earth's shadows are for me; earth's joys for her;
And could I, in addition to my own,
Have all the thorns that in *her* pathway lie,
Then would I be content, I would not shrink,
Knowing her happy I should be resign'd.
Do with me, Father, even as thou wilt,
In my great weakness do thou help thy child."
The night was calm and silent; and the moon
Like some fair guardian spirit, reigned above,
Sole queen, seemed she, of the vast firmament,
Shedding her mellow light on all around,
To Constance's sad, stricken soul it came,
As a still, wondrous, heavenly influence.
And then athwart the glorious midnight sky
The silvery clouds sailed ever slowly on,
Like snowy flakelets, pure and celestial,

Then wreath'd themselves in shining coronets
Around the pale face of the smiling moon.
The crystal stars looked down from their high thrones,
With sweet, sad gaze, like pitying angel eyes.
Softly the flowers slumbered o'er the breast
Of their grand, universal mother, earth.
And that fair child of song, the nightingale,
Pour'd forth a lay of wild, sweet melody.
And a great calm o'er her sad spirit fell.
Again sleep visited her weary eyes,
For to her came a grand and holy peace.
Now dawned the morn with smiles, yet fraught with tears
Was that bright day unto the sisters twain.
Last eve a courier had come in haste
Unto the castle gates, and of the Earl
Craved hearing, and then thus his message gave,
" That on the morrow he would join the host,
" For 'ere two suns had set they would depart
" Across the seas to the far Holy Land."
And now the sisters in the castle hall,
Bade to their sire and De Lestrangle God-speed.
Straightway the Earl then Constance led aside,
And in low tones thus to his daughter spake:
" And I must leave thee now. Ah! these home ties,
" Methinks, unman us for that stern, fierce strife,

“ Which pass we thro’ who spend in war our life.
“ Perchance, my Constance, I shall not return
“ From that far country whither I am bound,
“ Thy sister then, less fearless than thyself,
“ Unto thy tender care do I confide.
“ To Reginald of Evrey give I charge
“ Of this, my castle, and more dear to me
“ Than aught else on the earth, my daughters fair.
“ He is thy mother’s uncle, a true knight,
“ Who from all harm, the best to shield thee well.
“ Never in other days have I gone forth
“ With heart foreboding and of doubtful mind
“ As now ; for cometh to me the sad thought
“ That I no more my Rosaline shall see ;
“ Tho’ with it comes perchance the fancy wild,
“ That I again may Constance thee behold.
“ But I go hence, sweet daughter, fare thee well.”
And on her forehead laid a father’s kiss,
Saying again, “ Sweet Constance, fare thee well.”
A little space from them the lovers stood,
And thus to Rosaline spake De Lestrangle :
“ We part for but a little time, I trow,
“ And then with haste to claim my bride I come ;
“ Pray that thy knight to thee, sweet, may return.
“ Nay, weep not, for I would not mine own love,

“ That words of mine should cloud thy fair young brow,
“ Or cause a single tear of thine to fall.
“ I *shall* return, richly with laurels crown'd,
“ To lay at thy fair feet, my Rosaline.
“ My own, my beautiful! alas, farewell!
“ My sun has set when *thou* art far from me.”
Then to her came the Earl, and stooping low,
Close claspt her to his breast, thus murmuring :
“ Perchance forever, sweet one, fare thee well.
“ My two white doves, once more I bid adieu.”
Then to the courtyard from the hall they went,
And wildly sobbed fair Rosaline, whilst o'er
Her brow fell as a veil of shining gold
Her waving hair, 'neath which her lovely face
Gleam'd like a morning glory wet with dew,
And marvelled that her Constance was so calm.
She could not tell that in that noble heart,
Sorrow there lay too deep for utterance,
Nor knew not that beneath that still, sweet smile
Was there a grief tears could not weep away.

v.

Oh! let us guard our treasures! we know not
How long they may be ours;
For death, dark death, alas! too soon may come,
And snatch away our flowers.

We wildly cry, "Pass by this tender bud,
It is too young for thee!"
Death answereth "Nay, but to a fairer clime
It shall transplanted be."

Two years had well nigh pass'd away, methinks;
Small change they wrought unto the sisters twain,
In dull monotony passed by their lives.
Oft vainly longing for their sire's return,
These two fair maids, seeming in very truth
Like prison'd birds, in their lone castle home.
One even a wild panic spread throughout
The castle; oft-times paced men to and fro,
And with sweet, wond'ring eyes, fair Rosaline
Looked from the window of her bower down
Into the courtyard, and then softly called,
"Constance, hath aught of evil us befall'n?
"Or," with a somewhat startled, gladdening cry,

“ Are tidings from far Palestine received ?”
Then Constance entering, low answered, “ Nay,
“ That which thou sayest first alas is truth !
“ An evil hath befallen us indeed.
“ The fever that all dread hath here arisen,
“ And stricken Effingham, our trusty steward :
“ And who the hapless victim next may be
“ We wot not ; therefore thou, dear Rosaline,
“ This bower must not leave, but here abide.
“ Our father gave thee to my care thou knowst,
“ Nor must I faithless prove unto my trust.
“ Then leave this bower not, nor venture forth
“ Where the dire fever doth so fiercely rage ;
“ Else how in happier future hours can I
“ Meet those we love in that far distant land,
“ If aught of harm should come, dear one, to thee ?”
Then plead’d Rosaline, “ Thou wilt remain
“ With me, my dearest, and I will obey.”
“ Nay,” Constance answered, “ others too have fallen
“ A prey to this fierce fever ; there are those
“ Who fear to minister their wants unto.
“ E’en tho’ they fail their duty to fulfil,
“ I must not shrink, but rather be more strong,
“ Granting my aid unto the suffering.”
So ceased. Yet Rosaline could not be stay’d,

But passionately cried, "I too will go
"And share thy danger also, sister mine."
"Nay," firmly, e'en tho' gently, Constance saith.
Still pleaded Rosaline, "Must I remain
"These perils leaving thee alone to brave?
"Is not thy life, love, dearer far than mine?
"And wherefore this?" Then with a sadden'd smile
Spake Constance, "Ah! my dearest, is there not
"One who would far more miss and mourn, methinks,
"Thyself e'en than a thousand Constances!
"Therefore entreat no more, my Rosaline,"
Then she went forth in sweet self-sacrifice;
Watched o'er the sick, thought only of their wants,
And of the safety of her sister fair.
In utter self-forgetfulness she went,
And many lying on their couch of pain
E'en held their breath her light footfall to hear,
And 'mid the darkest hour, when fever raged,
Fancied the cooling touch of her small hand
Was a pure dew drop, fall'n from the skies;
And thought the soothing sound of her sweet voice,
The murmur of the wavelets of the lake.
And often the last gaze of dying eyes
Rested on her; half deeming that they saw
An angel in that slender, shadowy form,

And yearning look of love unutterable.
And strained their failing ears the last, last words
Of holy triumph and steadfast faith to hear.
For the grim messenger came day by day,
Those taking who to this life still would cling.
Nor spared the young, but with his iron grip
The fairest flowers oft pluck'd in passing by.
Yet amongst those who fearèd death were some
Who meekly yielded up to God their souls ;
Yea, such who with a Christian's lofty faith,
Long'd only their dear Master Christ to meet.
'Length had the fever well nigh past away,
One eve there spread the evil news abroad,
Bringing deep gloom unto the hearts of all :
Spite of all care, alas ! 'twas even so,
The Lady Rosaline had not escaped.
And likewise Reginald, of Evrey, who
Scarce three days past, in health and life had been,
Now a cold corpse within the castle lay ;
But few were from that sickness sore restored.
And in their bower, o'er her sister's couch
Hung Constance, and the words she ofttimes heard,
Which all unconsciously spake Rosaline.
In vain to stay her wild delirium
Strove Constance ; and she knew in those dark hours,

How oft her gentle sister longèd to see
Her De Lestrangle ; how often she had dwelt
Upon that name belov'd with mournfulness,
And ever wailed, " Come back to me, ah, come !
" I would not lose one brief day's intercourse
" With thee, tho' years of life might thus be gain'd ;
" For when apart from thee all life is naught.
" And wherefore list not to my pleading voice ?
" Oh, Guy ! unto thy Rosaline return.
" Oh ! tarry not, for death may take me hence,
" Then, Oh ! beloved, we shall meet no more."
'Length after many days of pain and weariness,
When hope had fled, and Constance knelt beside
Her couch, in utter dreariness and woe ;
Those watching saw the white lids softly droop,
And then to Rosaline sleep gently came.
And Constance, in great thankfulness to God,
In prayer, breathed all her praise and gratitude.
Then health once more to Rosalinè return'd,
Unto her cheek the pale, pink roses came,
And in her azure eyes there shone again
The sunny light and life of glorious youth.
One even, when upon a couch she lay,
Well-nigh restored, there to the castle came
A palmer from the far off Holy Land,

And Constance bade them bring the wand'ring man,
For with him would they hold some conference.
“ If aught of Earl De Macey he had heard,
“ And likewise of the young knight De Lestrance.”
“ Yea,” answereth the palmer, “ sooth to tell,
“ That brave De Macey, wounded nigh to death,
“ Lieth within the camp ; and 'tis e'en said
“ Those 'neath the burning sun of Palestine
“ Can ne'er survive, when wounded as the Earl ;
“ Although in some, perchance, more genial clime,
“ Might health regain. Touching that gallant Knight,
“ Guy of Lestrance, of him, know I but this,
“ That, at his mighty deeds upon the field
“ All marvel, for in truth 'tis seldom seen
“ *Such* deeds, and wrought by one scarce grown a man,
“ But ye are pale, fair ladies, and, methinks,
“ Savor too much the things whereof I speak
“ Of war.” Then thus the Lady Constance said,
“ We thank thee, palmer, now this gold accept ;
“ Thou mayst withdraw, for we alone would be.”
So he departed. The twin-sisters fair
Long silently and with blanch'd faces sate.
Then Constance spake, her voice so strangely clear,
Now on the ear in quavering accents fell :
“ And so our father lieth wounded now

“ Nigh unto death, and yet might live, perchance,
“ Could he unto his castle home return.
“ Ah, who, alas! would home our father bring?
“ For Reginald of Evrey now is dead,
“ And of our faithful followers the few
“ Who went not with him unto Palestine,
“ Have likewise 'neath that fever fall'n, save
“ Good Effingham, who here must still remain,
“ And Evrette, the page. Too young is he
“ Alone, to pass across the ocean wide.
“ Neither, alas! could honest Markham go;
“ Therefore, my dearest, hearken unto me.
“ Upon the morrow's dawn there setteth sail
“ A vessel, bound for the far Holy Land;
“ With Evrette, to-night, must I depart,
“ And honest Markham, full of strength and truth;
“ Thou must not stay me, Rosaline, with these
“ I needs must go hence to that distant land.”

VI.

The din of battle and the clash of arms
Have passed away,
Naught doth remain save those that bravely fought
And fell that day.

Some in the pride of beauty and of youth
Are lying there,
Smiling as tho' in life's last closing hour
They conquerors were.

And some in manhood's prime and strength, alas!
All lifeless lie ;
Who bravely fought upon that battle field,
And scorn'd to fly.

“ De Macey to the rescue !” Wide and far
Rang thus the war cry ; and the noble Earl,
Scarce healed him of his wounds, rushed forth again,
Into the thickest fight, oft rallying
His valiant followers, aid render'd they
Unto their lord, and straightway charged the foe.
Till louder and more fierce the combat grew,
And as a sickle down the wheat doth mow
So men by death upon the plain were strewn

And fiery war-steeds and their riders bold,
Together on the field of strife were laid.
But e'en the bravest of the brave, I trow,
Was one, a youthful knight of high degree,
Who in his helmet an azure kerchief wore.
And on the gallant warrior now down-poured
The foe, in numbers vast, innumerable.
Thrice bore him to the earth, yet thrice he rose,
And fell the fourth time senseless 'mongst the slain.
Likewise it chanced with Earl De Macey brave,
For vainly 'gainst his enemies he strove ;
And whilst they fought their master's side to gain,
All trodden down his faithful followers were.
Ah ! fatal to the Christians was that day,
By the fierce Saracens so hard beset,
They with weak numbers suffer'd sore defeat.
'Length night came on, and the clear stars shone forth,
As jewels in an azure mantle set,
And the pale moonbeams fell all quaveringly
Upon the pallid features of the slain ;
And far around a vast deep stillness lay,
All undisturbed e'en by a falling leaf.
When now athwart the awful plain of death,
Onward two figures glided silently.
A maid serenely fair, a dark-eyed page,

Sole living, seemingly, amongst the dead.
And suddenly the maiden, stooping low,
Her arms around a fall'n warrior threw.
And *CONSTANCE* knelt beside her dying sire.
Oh! that her loving soul e'en yet could call
That spirit, fast departing, back again.
Her prayer was granted, nor did her sweet words fall
Unheard, unheeded by the dying Earl,
And o'er his countenance there stray'd a smile,
And after mutterings low, came utterance.
"Can it be *Constance* whom again I hear?
"How camst thou hither? Yes, 'tis my fair child!
"What of thy sister? is it well with her?
"Yea, sayest thou? alas! almost, methinks,
"It better were had it been otherwise.
"For know lies dead our noble Guy Lestrangle,
"And 'ere unto his rescue I could flee,
"O'er powered by many, fall'n had our knight.
"Nay! start not, shrink not, with white countenance
"Thy part is now to comfort *Rosaline*."
And *Constance*, in sublime self-sacrifice,
Unheeding now her heart's mute agony,
Answereth, "Yea, that part, alas, is mine!"
Then in a voice now chang'd, thus spake the Earl,
Not dreaming she the youthful knight had lov'd,

“ Ay, he is gone ; his message bear thee back,
“ My last fond love, unto our Rosaline.
“ Thou art my own true Constance thus to brave
“ All dangers to thy dying sire to come.
“ And now, draw nigh, thy sweet lips press to mine,
“ For the shadowy vale of death I’m entering,
“ And yet once more would hold thee ere I go
“ Unto my heart, my best beloved child.
“ ’Tis hard to leave thee thus, and yet e’en now
“ We must not ’gainst our Father’s will rebel.
“ Kiss me once more, sweet Constance ;” and again :
“ Surely the sky hath clouded, for methinks
“ I cannot see ; it groweth dark around.”
Then on her bosom leaned he as to rest
His head, and in his hand her hand he held,
And whispered low, “ Constance, my *comforter*,
“ Until again we meet, sweet child, farewell.”
Then with a long-drawn, restful sigh, he passed
Far from a life of strife to one of peace.
And she wept not, e’en tho’ the sobbing page
Knelt with low wailings at his master’s feet ;
But softly murmured, “ Father, in that land
“ I soon shall meet thee, when—” but here she stay’d
Her speech, and swiftly then the color came
Unto her face, before as driven snow,

For lightly swayed there in summer wind
An azure kerchief from an helmet bright,
And Constance then at one slight glance bethought
It was the favor of her Rosaline.
None but one knight could that blue token wear ;
And went she then unto his side in haste,
And saw the pallid face of Guy Lestrangle,
Of deathly hue, but life there lingered still.
Then with the page's aid drew she the knight
From 'mongst the heaps of slain which compass'd him,
And shuddered when all bleeding there he lay,
And with her flowing hair the red tide stayed,
And bound her girdle o'er the gaping wound.
Love giveth strength e'en to the feeblest.
And with the page's aid then Constance bore
The mailed form far from that slaughterous scene.
At length the Christian's camp in safety gained,
And in his own pavillion laid him down.
When those few followers, who from the fight
With life had 'scaped, deeming their master dead,
All joyously again their lord beheld,
E'en tho' with wounds nigh unto death he lay,
And looked with awe and reverence on the maid
Who thus her life had perilled his to save ;
Deeming it passing strange that he should choose

For his betrothed, not her, but Rosaline.
And Constance ever watched and tended him,
And oft the weary, restless hours of pain
Fled swiftly when beside his couch she sate,
And sang in her strange spiritual voice,
Or talked of Rosaline, theme best he loved.
Then slowly back to life came he again,
And oft-times gazing on her face so pure
With gratitude and reverence, e'en would say :
"Constance, so holy and so fair art thou,
"More angel than a child of earth thou seemst."
At length to health was De Lestrangle restor'd,
With all that of his retinue remained,
Then set he sail unto his native land,
And passed all dangers to the castle came
And was with glad rejoicings welcomed oft.
He heard, that with her maidens, Rosaline,
Upon the mount had strayed ; their bower unto
Then forthwith De Lestrangle and Constance went,
Together, trod the upward pathway till
The vine-clad bower reached, then slowly paused,
For on the threshold stood there Rosaline,
And at the setting sun so sadly gazed.
Then sighing turn'd she, and the twain beheld,
And with a gladden'd, joyous cry she sprang

Unto Lestrange ; thus met the lovers true. ✓
'Length after Rosaline, with tender words,
Her knight had greeted, unto Constance went,
But started when she saw her sister thus.
For in the golden sunlight Constance stood,
Not radiant as a spirit glorified,
But pale, and gazing on the distant sea,
Gazing with far-off look, 'twas e'en as tho'
Something unseen to her was visible,
And o'er her face there dawned a moonlight smile,
And softly to herself she murmured low,
" My work is done, and now I fain would rest."

VII.

And the glad earth' mourn'd that her fairest flower
Was hidden away from sight,
And the birds no more sang their songs of joy—
E'en the flowerets seem'd less bright.

And nature wore her mourning robe,
Full many a tear she shed,
And the wind wailed low 'mid the forest trees,
And sigh'd for the gentle dead.

So were they wed, yet not with pomp and state,
For ev'n in all their joy the sorrow came ;
In that no more was now the noble Earl.
And other cares encountered Rosaline,
For to her watchful eyes oft Constance seemed
Each day more shadowy and spirit-like,
And day by day she faded as a flower.
And Rosaline then feared, with sorrow wild,
(Perchance the burning sun of Palestine
Well-nigh had snapt the silver cord of life)
That soon from Constance she must separate.
And Constance lay e'en like a tired child
Knowing that she on earth should rise no more

Until within the Paradise of God
She'd walk, where there is naught of weariness ;
And oftentimes when sleeping softly smiled,
As tho' to her there wondrous visions came.
One even of her sister she besought
That they would bear her to that vine-clad bower,
Once more the sunset on the mount to see.
Then hasted Rosaline and De Lestrangle
Her wishes to fulfil ; then was she borne
Upon a couch, far up the rugged path,
Until the bowret reached, then paused awhile,
And long gazed she around, then softly said :
“ Come hither Rosaline, Guÿ also thou,
“ For the last time do I that sunset see,
“ And ere I go, fain would I speak with thee.
“ Oh ! that thou mayst each to the other long
“ Be granted : such has *ever* been my prayer.
“ Yet pray I not as in those other days,
“ That naught but happiness may fall to thee,
“ For sorrow purifieth, and methinks
“ We may grow holy 'neath God's chastening rod ;
“ And often 'mongst the thorns are fairest flowers,
“ And if we suffer here that other world
“ The brighter seemeth to our longing souls.
“ So mayst thou be, that then when death shall come

“ Such it is not to thee, but rather life.”
Then ceased a little while, then spake again,
“ Methought last night, in a fair dream, perchance,
“ An angel form came softly unto me,
“ And bending held my hand, low murmuring,
“ ‘ Constance, thy work is o’er, come to thy home.’
“ And in that face, while gazing, I beheld
“ Our mother, as in life, divinely fair,
“ Then with a flood of light, she onward passed,
“ And I in silence lay, oft wondering.
“ Yet spirit voices ever seem to say,
“ ‘ Come hither, sister, we but wait for thee!’
“ And in the watches of the night, I hear
“ The footsteps of the Master drawing nigh.
“ And I go hence, sweet sister, not in fear,
“ For on my soul no shadow there hath fall’n,
“ But full of calm, deep peace, do I depart.
“ The road hath been *so* rough and wearisome,
“ But now at last my spirit rest hath found.
“ Ye must not mourn and weep for me as one
“ Having no hope, for I am satisfied.”
And a still, saintly smile came o’er her face,
Robing her marble features as a veil
Of shadowy light, whilst o’er her brow there strayed
The auburn tresses, and ’neath the red light

Of sunset, shone like waves of burning gold.
And o'er her eyes, so spiritually clear,
The lids droop'd, as the water lily folds
Its snowy petals o'er its golden breast.
Tranquil she lay, nor spake. All breathlessly
They watched, but deeming that their Constance slept.
'Length when the shades of night had gathered o'er,
Unto her sister there, came Rosaline,
Saying, with tender words, "Shall we depart."
She answered not, and when again they spake,
Stirred not, for in that silent hour had fled
Her spirit pure, unto its longed for home.
And with a wailing cry, fell Rosaline
All swooning there her sister's couch beside.
Then raised her, e'en with sorrow deep as hers,
Guy De Lestrage, and then in quav'ring tones
Bade those attending home to follow him,
And silently they bore the sacred dead,
And in her virgin bower laid her down.
'Length Rosaline to consciousness restored
Then wildly sobbed, until Lestrage advanced
And pleaded thus : "Come Rosaline, with me ;
" For when thou gazest on that angel face,
" Methinks thou couldst not call her back again."
Then she arose and to that bower went,

But wept more bitterly, till to his heart
Fondly he held her, and then softly said :
“ Look up, sweet one, our Constance is not dead,
“ But in a fairer clime our flower lives,
“ And in a few brief years we meet again ;
“ Therefore, my Rosaline, be comforted.”
And she obeyed, lifting her weeping eyes
To where, like a pure lily gently culled,
The form of Constance in sweet sleep reclined.
But at that sight she stay'd her gasping sobs,
Clinging to Guy her wild tears ceased to flow.
For as she gazed upon that marble brow,
Full of still, deep repose, it seemed as tho'
The spirit passing by had smiled and left
Upon that brow unutterable peace.
The fight was over now, the toil, the strife
Were gone, and like a conqueror there she lay,
Her countenance with angel brightness clad,
And o'er her lips a shadowy smile there play'd,
Unearthly in its sweetness, thus she slept.
Ah ! now, no more her mourning spirit sighed.
All earthly sorrows from her fled for aye,
And her sad soul at last was *satisfied*,
For she had passed to a diviner land,
To where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the poor weary hearted ever *rest*.

THE END.

