

LUNACY OF FANNY PARR.

BY MRS. SEBA SMITH.

READER mine, hath it ever been thy good or thy ill fortune to find either one man or one woman with an entirely sound mind; free from every little by-kink; with no cosey whim-wham, no ambling hobby, no snug little corner of lunacy, into which either he or she was wont to retire, and, throwing off the strait jacket imposed by society, give free scope to some favourite predilection—sit down the true unguarded heir of humanity, "Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw?" If thou hast, I warrant me thou didst find a most dull and undesirable commodity; a true mediocre specimen; a living mummy, swathed and embalmed, but of no earthly use; a vital Mahomet's coffin, suspended between earth and heaven, to share in the glories of neither; a perpetual hibernator; a—but why multiply metaphors to describe a nonentity, a monster of a man? A mind perfectly balanced! we hear a world of twaddle about it, oceans of nonsense—such a thing never did and never will exist; it isn't in the nature of things. There would be no impulse, no motive to action. Men would walk our streets with a sepulchral tread; with great dull eyes, devoid of "speculation." Machines are put in motion to go on without change till the parts become clogged or worn out. Why, 'tis the perpetual change, the ebb and flow, the preponderance of this over that, which gives life, action; seizes upon time and circumstance, and makes society an acting, breathing, mass; a discipline; a congregation of discordant and pestilent vapours, it may be, yet holding the conservative principle within, that shall hereafter work out the good and the true.

I honour either man or woman capable of healthy, vigorous impulse—who can feel towering passion, dignified indignation, and the thousand promptings incident to a full, noble, and godlike nature. Such may and often do err, but their return to the right is full of majesty. I am writing an essay when I designed but a tale.

Did you ever see a pretty lunatic? I have, many a one. True they do not pass for such, but they are, nevertheless. Love-sick girls, with their pretty abstractions, and melancholy sighs, are of this class, till marriage brings them to their senses or drives them mad; or disappointment, "like a worm in the bud, preys on their damask cheek," and they go down to the grave, consumptives, as they are called, but in truth victims to the one emotion that decides the fate of woman for ever. Whosoever becomes the victim of one absorbing thought or emotion, is, for the time being, a "deranged" man. The disease is more or less confirmed, pro-

portionate to the length of time and virulence of the symptoms. It may be simply a love fit, which in your sex, Mr. Editor, is of short duration; it may be speculation, to result in theories, whimsies, hobbies, or, if still more intense, be the working in passion, vice, crime; and a total prostration of the will, consigns the patient to our halls of justice, or the walls of an insane hospital; or, where the case is pronounced inveterate, a cure is effected by means of strangulation.

I digress, but it is the very vice of my subject. Half the world, like Hamlet, will say,

"bring me to the test,
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from—"

yet apply the test when off their guard, and you find them "gambol" from the subject in hand like very madmen. One train of association strikes another, and they are off every moment upon a tangent; their hearers call it a digression, a beautiful episode, because they find therein an apology for the like in themselves; but it is a dash of lunacy—just enough to make them delightful, but the thing, nevertheless.

A pretty lunatic. Ophelia must have been one. We never weep for Ophelia—Shakspeare never designed we should do so—we feel a sweet refreshing sadness come over us, but nothing like suffering at her fate; she is too airy, too sweet and earnest, for common life, and we are prepared for what follows. We take her own "rosemary for remembrance," and her posies for thought, and even take up with a sad pleasure her pretty burden of,

"And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?"

for we feel it to be the sweet language of a young girl's heart, not embittered—that could not be—but deluded by gentle fantasies.

Fanny Parr was just such a one. A pretty blue-eyed girl, with long fair hair, and a figure like a sylph. Her eyes had the prettiest look of appeal in the world, and she had a way, unconscious to herself, of drawing up beside the one she was addressing, as if she were alive with tenderness and sought protection. She was confiding like a child, and her thoughts as pure. Every one loved Fanny, nor thought of asking why, for the very atmosphere about her was that of love. She had many lovers, but, herself simple and true-hearted, loved only one. I doubt if she ever dreamed that a woman's heart could change. She read of such

things, indeed, but then she always regarded them as the fancies of the poets, and she had a thousand of her own, so she could never believe them real. She had a world of illusions, beautiful, trustful and pure; and that became the real to her.

When her lover first went away, Fanny amused herself in feeding the birds he had given her, and tending the flowers that grew most beautifully under her care. Quiet and secluded, she had little to occupy her attention, and the songs she sang, the books she read, the walks she took, all indicated the presence of her lover to her mind's eye. He would be home in six months, and then he would make her his wife.

Time is always a laggard to divided lovers. A thousand methods are devised to kill him, yet he stays by with his leaden face as if his journey would never cease. Six months passed away, and Fanny was buoyant with the hope of the return of her lover. Day after day she sat in expectation, and yet he came not. She had ceased to hear from him, but she did not heed that, for surely he will soon be here, she thought, and all will be explained. A month more passed, and yet he came not. No tidings reached her, and the hope that had hitherto consoled her began to fade from her heart. Her cheek grew pale, and a listlessness crept upon her, making exertion of any kind painful. Her friends resorted to many expedients to rouse her, but in vain. They tried to excite her woman's pride by tales of his desertion and falsehood; but she shook her head mournfully, and the large tears gathered in her eyes. "He is ill, he is dying," she would articulate, "or the ocean has become his grave."

A year passed in this way, and Fanny was wasted to a shadow. One day she was seated in the verandah with her hands folded in her lap, when a mendicant came to ask alms. The woman regarded her for a moment in silence, and then respectfully took her hand and read the lines upon the palm. Fanny was instantly all attention. But the woman was silent, and turned away.

"Tell me if he is alive," cried Fanny, earnestly.

"You will never be his wife," replied the woman.

"He is dead! he is dead!" shrieked the poor girl, and fell to the earth.

When Fanny recovered she found the beggar looking sorrowfully into her face, while her friends were bathing her temples. She beckoned her forward.

"Is there no way, good woman, by which you can tell me his fate?"

The woman shook her head, only saying, "Lovers are often false."

"No! no! not false! Henry could never be false, he was all truth and nobleness; besides, who could be false to love like mine?"

The woman took a pack of cards from her pocket, and sat down at the feet of the poor girl, and began to shuffle them over.

"Now wish," she said, "and cut the cards three times, all the time with the same wish."

Fanny did as she was directed, repeating her wish aloud, "I wish Henry will soon be here," three times over, and laying the cards on the seat beside her.

The woman then looked them over and put them by.

"Tell me what it is. Shall I have my wish?" cried the half bewildered girl.

"Leave the future with the Almighty, lady. No good can come of this."

"Tell me all. I can bear anything now;" and she burst into tears.

Thus adjured, the woman said, in a low voice, "There is sickness and death to your lover."

"I knew he wasn't false," cried Fanny, bursting into an hysterical laugh. "I knew he wasn't false," as if even death were preferable to falsehood.

The woman arose to go, but Fanny recovered herself and grasped her arm.

"I am dying; do you not see I am? Teach me your art, that I may know the worst that is to befall me."

The woman looked pityingly in her face, and kissed her thin hand, while a tear fell upon it. That tear revealed the depths of womanhood; the strong, never to be effaced characters upon the heart, to be read, it may be, only by the eye of the All-seeing. Have love and sorrow become one? Both are superstitious, and both are asking of the future. The village girl has a thousand methods by which she seeks to test the sincerity of her lover, and her anxiety is just in proportion to the earnestness of her own attachment.

The beggar was respectable in her appearance, and had an air of mysticism, entirely foreign to anything like imposture; she was evidently deluded by her own imagination. She had unqualified faith herself in all she taught.

"These pieces of paper," she began, "look simple and unmeaning enough; yet it was the operation of a marvellous mind that conceived their number and devices. They have a character affixed to each, and the position which they occupy is fixed by fate. Where the wish is strong in the soul it decides the place of each, and they become oracular. But it will take you long, very long, to learn their true meaning; indeed you must have the experience, and the suffering that I have known, it may be, before you will rightly understand them."

The eyes of the two met, and there was that strange look of affinity, an expression akin each to the other—the faint overshadowing of reason in each, that had at once established a sympathy between them.

She went on to explain. "This ace of hearts is your house. You are fair, and you must be the queen of diamonds; your lover must be the king to the same suit. Now shuffle the cards and see what is next you."

She did so, and the woman went on. "There you see is your house, you are beside it; and the ten of spades, and the ace of spades are between you and your lover. Good angels shield you, poor child, for that means sickness and death."

Fanny shuddered, still repeating, "I knew he couldn't be false," as if that were yet a comfort. She took the picture of her lover from her bosom, and the two looked upon it and wept, with a strange sympathy.

At length the woman looked up. "You are young and beautiful. Forget the past and learn to love another. I have known much of the world; and thousands, tens of thousands, forget their first love, and are happy in another."

Fanny looked at her with amazement. "I! what I be false to Henry! false to myself! and you counsel it!

Alas! poor girl, so thorough had become the sympathy between the two bewildered minds, that each had forgotten that their intercourse had been that only of a few hours.

The woman took her leave, first putting the cards in Fanny's hands, that she might read her own fate.

And now weeks, months passed away, and every day Fanny might be seen with the cards between her fingers, her lids drooping, and eyes fixed upon their characters. Her face was calm and serious, a faint smile only stealing to her lips, as at each operation she observed the deuce of spades was never beside her lover. "I knew he wasn't false," she would murmur, and then cut and shuffle the cards again. If at any time the obnoxious card bore a juxtaposition, her brow would contract, and she would whisper, "No, no, Henry isn't false, but he fears for me; he fears I may forget him in his long absence. No, Henry, never! never!" and she would burst into tears.

The village maidens learned to sympathize with the poor girl, and brought her fruits and flowers, and tried to wile her from her melancholy. They would in part succeed, for Fanny was exceedingly gentle, and won by the voice of tenderness. Then they would ask to have their own fortunes told, and, strange to say, a belief in her predictions gained ground, and the maidens learned to rely upon what she told them. Fanny would say they must be sincere and earnest in what they wished or she could predict nothing by the cards. All would be confused and only mislead both.

The lunacy of the poor girl had its uses. Her companions began to assimilate to her own earnestness; to dread falsehood, and to forbear trifling in affairs of the heart. Often when two or three were gathered about her Fanny would tell the

fortunes of one, and then bid them wait while she cut for herself. As piece after piece came before her eye, she would read the details in a low voice: "Yes; a long removal by water; tears and kisses obstructed; yet love, a great deal of love, and disappointment with it. Fanny and Henry close to the house, and sickness and death between; always the same; no hope, alas! only in our faith;" and the tears would trickle over her pale cheeks while her companions stood weeping around her.

At length, one bright morning in June, when the rose was filling the air with gladness, a carriage stopped at the door, and Henry, pale and emaciated, tottered to the house. He had been shipwrecked, had been ill in a foreign port, and now he had come home to die with Fanny. She felt it must be so, and she nestled in his bosom, more than content, for she felt she too must be a victim. It was pitiful to see the lovers, each with the hand of death upon them, yet so cheerful in the belief. Henry, indeed, wept bitter tears over the wreck of thought in the poor girl, but then he learned to feel it more merciful thus to have been, for these fantasies had wrought their own relief. Fanny brought her cards, and taught her lover how to read their fate; and it may be that a harmless credulity crept even upon his own mind, for illness is sure to bring down the arrogance of mere reason, while the affections and sentiments, the true soul, remain unimpaired.

"Here is a marriage ring beside us, Fanny; be my wife, dearest," said her lover, as they reclined beside the window, Fanny with her head upon the shoulder of her lover, who held the cards in his thin fingers.

Fanny pressed her lips to his head, and murmured, "Dear, dear Henry."

The priest was summoned, and they were made one, not in vows merely, but in soul. They sat and looked into each other's eyes.

"Put by the cards, dearest," said Fanny; "I have had a long, sad, and yet sweet dream. But now I am thine, Henry, thine!" She had knelt at his feet, subdued by the sweet reverence and tenderness of her woman's heart, and as she ceased to speak her head fell upon his lap. Henry raised her to his bosom. Fanny had ceased to dream.

It is many years since the lovers were laid side by side in the little churchyard of N—, but the maidens of the village yet scatter their graves with flowers, and the story of their truth and constancy has wrought as a leaven upon the community, making the vows of love a holiness among them.

NOTE. The story of Fanny is in every essential a true one, an incident similar having come under the writer's own observation.