

Written for the Lady's Book.

THE OPAL RING.—A GERMAN LEGEND.

BY MRS. SEBA SMITH.

"Stately stept he east the wa',
And stately stept he west,
Full seventy years he now had seen,
With scarce seven years of rest."

Ballad of Hardyknute.

THE old Lord Rudolf was a hardy champion of the olden time, living in his strong hold upon the verge of the Rhine. His zeal in every thing pertaining to feats of arms was acknowledged and unequivocal; but as to matters of the church, the brethren of St. Gothard regarded him with ill-dissembled suspicion, and tolerated him only in view of his great power, large estates, and the not-to-be questioned zeal and liberality of his young wife, the Lady Eleanor. He treated with a contempt, altogether remarkable, considering his country and the age in which he lived, the marvellous stories of sorcery and witchcraft, in which his people so much delighted, and a belief in which, the priesthood, from motives of their own, did not fail to encourage. Indeed it would almost seem that a belief in the wild and incredible was made a test for the measure of faith in the dogmas of the church.

The stern, lofty brow of the Baron, was now white with the frosts of eighty winters, yet his eye had lost none of its fierceness, and his form had that erect and stately bearing supposed to besem a warrior of the olden time. While the companions of his youth had, one after another, fallen in the many forays of those unsettled times, had gone out to the wars of the Holy Land, and returned no more; or, sunk in the dotage and decrepitude of age, still mumbled their prayers and counted their beads, at the will of their ghostly advisers, and gave immense sums to the church by way of expiation for their sanguinary lives, the Baron Rudolf walked the ramparts of his castle, and beheld, far as the eye could sweep, stately forests nodding to the wind, and filled with the wild boar and deer, fields ripe for the harvest, and domains rich and extensive, all of which owned him for their possessor; and with stout heart and flashing eye, he vowed none of these should go to enrich an overgrown and pampered church.

A resolution like this argued no ordinary spirit in an age when the priesthood swayed the consciences of men with an iron rule, and bent the firmest to their will by the threatened anathemas of the church. Nor was this all—he had married, in his old age, a young, aspiring bride, with a spirit indomitable as his own, and all the vigilance of the Baron became requisite to foil the machinations of his wife and her confessor.

Had Lady Eleanor lavished upon her lord those attentions and indulgencies, which his age might seem to demand, it is more than probable he would have sunk into the helpless dotage of his contemporaries, and have left her to a younger spouse, and his estates to the church. But fortunately for him, some rather ungentle attempts at power, on the part of the Lady, roused the lion-like spirit within, and he arose, like the strong man of old, and shook off the fetters that bound him, and walked forth with a firm step and vigilant eye, bidding defiance to every aggressor

whether in the shape of foreign foe, priest, wife, or even time itself.

It was a period of profound peace; and yet the wary Baron forgot none of the securities of war. Turret and battlement frowned their defiance, with all the "pomp and circumstance" of war. The sentry of the watch-tower gave instant notice of the approach of either friend or foe, and one blast of the warder's horn would have filled the courts with a gallant array of men-at-arms and retainers. The drawbridge would have resounded to the tramp of horse and the clash of armour, battlement and barbacan would have bristled with pike and battle-axe, while gay pennon and flaunting standard would have waved from the turrets. The long halls and stately apartments, decked with gorgeous tapestry, and waked only by the light foot-step of beauty, or the soft melody of the harp, would have echoed to the din of war and the stirring notes of the trumpet, transforming the peaceful habitation into a military fortress, capable of repelling no inconsiderable army, at a period when the deadly instruments of modern warfare were unknown.

An occurrence like this would have given Lady Eleanor infinite delight, weary as she was of the monotony of the castle. But none presented itself. The military prowess of the Baron had years before subjected all the petty states about him to his power, and such was the dread with which he was now regarded, that none thought of rebellion.

The last disastrous crusade had closed, and in scattered groups, thinned and disheartened, but a handful as it were of the proud and gallant army that had embarked for Syria, returned, the chivalry of Europe. The sword, the pestilence, and famine, had each claimed its myriads ere men awoke from the delusion into which they had been plunged.

Group after group arrived to claim the hospitality of the warlike Baron, and yet the heir of the castle came not. Many were the tales of wild adventure, of knightly daring, or Paynin generosity, in which Oswald figured the bravest of the brave, to which the Lady Eleanor and her damsels listened, from the lips of gallant knight, or wandering minstrel. The pilgrim, decked with his scallop-shell, told of those disastrous wars, of individual prowess or suffering, till bright eyes were suffused with tears, and fair cheeks grew pale at the recital.

The wars had ceased, and while the disheartened survivors, spent and weary, sought the father-land, Oswald lingered behind. Various and dark were the surmises to which this circumstance gave rise. At one time it was hinted, that enamoured of an eastern maid of surpassing beauty, he had abjured country and religion for her sake; and spell-bound by a sorceress, beautiful as Armida, remained a willing captive to her charms. Again, it was said, that he devoted himself to the forbidden love of powerful

magicians, acquiring knowledge, forbidden to the believers in the faith of the cross, knowledge and power dangerous to the soul, and unworthy the character of a Christian knight.

At length, a returning party of his companions announced that he would return. Every thing was put in readiness for a reception worthy the heir to such fair estates.

Runners were sent to every out-post, that the earliest notice might be given of his approach; and a troop of noble retainers were ready to escort him home, with gay pennon and spirit stirring music. Daily did the Baron, with a statelier step, and a lordlier bearing, walk the old terrace, impatient at his delay.

Lady Eleanor busied herself in all those arrangements that woman's taste alone suggests; for she had never seen her step-son, and fame had proclaimed him no less handsome than brave and courteous. The old armour of the great hall was newly burnished, rich tapestry was suspended from the walls, choice embroidery,

"Wrought by nne hand as ye may guess,
Save that of Fairly fair,"

was taken from sumptuous wardrobes of carved oak, to decorate the couches. Great was the taste and skill lavished upon the room designed to be the sanctum of the young knight.

The large Gothic windows, with their delicate tracery, and springing arches, through which the light, penetrating the stained glass, quivered upon the tassellated floor with hues like a riven rainbow, were again softened by heavily embroidered silk, that fell in gorgeous folds to the very floor. Silver lamps, of rich and grotesque construction, were suspended, by chains of the same metal, from the ceiling, and fed with aromatic oils. The heavily ornamented alcoves contained rare cabinets, in which were preserved those illuminated manuscripts, of such great value, that principalities were exchanged for their possession. High backed, oaken chairs, curiously wrought with uncouth devices, stood upon mats of the finest oriental carpeting; images of saints occupied every niche, and the scene of the crucifixion, executed with no mean skill by the fair hands of Lady Eleanor and her maidens, was suspended over the huge fire-place. Upon the cumbrous table were placed relics of rare value, in cases of ivory, and venerated vases of exceeding beauty.

All was completed, and yet the Knight returned not. Lady Eleanor grew weary of adorning her handsome person, all to no purpose, and pettishly chid her maidens as they loitered in their embroidery, as the only feasible method of allaying her own irritation.

CHAPTER II.

Longe, longe hath toll'd the midnight bell,
And the stars grow dim in the skye,
Yet the taper burns in the old grey tower,
Like a beacon placed on highe.

Old Ballad.

THE shadows of evening were veiling the landscape in the grey hue of twilight, when a solitary Pilgrim, with rusty cowl, and the scallop-shell, was seen to approach the castle. He moved slowly, leaning upon his staff, apparently too much absorbed in

his own thoughts to take much note of objects about him. The portal was thrown open with ready zeal, the hospitable board spread, and the calls of hunger allayed, ere the courtesy of the old Baron would permit him to press inquiries even upon the subject nearest his heart, the protracted absence of his son.

Little use was there to question. The Pilgrim seemed moody and silent, and his short, abrupt replies repelled all advances. At length the damsel Agatha hinted, with many blushes, that the Lady's Page, Henri, had been practising a new song; and then, for the first time, did the stranger appear at all interested in the group about him. While the youth swept the strings of the harp, with a slight blush, indeed, yet with the air of a handsome stripling accustomed to the smiles of ladies, the stranger raised his head, and the cowl falling back, revealed an eye and countenance little according with the subdued tone and manners he had assumed. The eye was black, penetrating, and almost fierce in its expression, and yet a dash of sadness seemed to linger about it, and to rest upon the lofty forehead that gleamed from the midst of dark curly hair, which clustered thickly about it, and shaded the swarthy cheek and haughty lip. The Page shrunk abashed before the keen eye, but a smile and glance from the maiden reassured him, and he sang as follows.

SONG OF THE PAGE.

Oh! many an eye is clear and bright,
Like stars that deck the brow of night,
And full of glee;
But there is one, whose faintest ray
Can chase all thoughts of care away,
When fixed on me.

There 's many a cheek, whose changeful hue,
Is like the rose when bathed in dew,
And fair to see;
But one alone, whose timid blush
Will cause the blood to mine to rush,
Is dear to me.

There 's many a voice, whose dulcet swell
Is like the chime of silvery bell
From dewy lea;
But only one, that from my heart
The pangs of grief can bid depart,
Is dear to me.

It is uncertain how long the youth might have continued his amorous ditty, had not a gesture of impatience from the stranger arrested him. He took the harp from the abashed Page, and swept his hand across the strings, with a boldness and freedom that called forth the full power of the instrument; then, in a clear manly voice he sang the following words, while the ladies listened with all but suspended breath.

The Rhine, the Rhine, majestic Rhine,
The bright, the beautiful too,
That rusheth down from the mountain side,
And glidest the vallys through.
Thou rollest on in thy glorious pomp,
Thou pride of my father land,
And I hear thy voice with my boyhood's joy,
Once more on my native strand.

"My son, my own son," cried the old Baron, forgetting all his stateliness in the delight of beholding him again. Oswald returned the embraces and congratulations of his family with little of the enthu-

siasm with which he was greeted, and Henri whispered:

"Agatha, I fear our young Lord is but a churlish Knight, for methinks he hath a plentiful lack of courtesy."

"Nay, nay," said the maiden, "I like his lofty bearing. Commend me to your dark-eyed mysterious knights, that look as if stirred by no ordinary thoughts. I like not to read all at a glance."

"Those that seek concealment, are most likely to have good cause for so doing. I like a frank, open bearing, a valorous heart and ready sword," returned the Page, with a something very like pique in his manner.

Agatha laughed, with a pretty coquetry. "I doubt not my good cousin will be all he so much admires, but not the less shall I affect a mystical appearance, a majestic mien, that awes one to look upon—"

At this moment, she encountered the dark eye of the knight, and the blood mantled to her fair brow, and the small hand trembled as it unconsciously tightened its grasp upon a rose-bud it held, the last gift of the Page.

Henri reddened with something like resentment, but mindful of the gentle training to which he was subjected, he suppressed its expression, and replied with a careless air:

"So then, my gentle cousin would rather tremble at the glance of a proud eye, than behold a true and courteous knight, awed at her own fair self."

"Nay, nay, good coz, that is not a fair inference; kneeling knights are every where to be found—they do homage to a fair cheek and sparkling eye, lightly as they don their helmet; but, but," and the cheek of the gay girl was dyed with blushes, "methinks it were a worthy triumph to subdue yon haughty knight, who seems little heedful of lady's smiles; to behold such an one suing for a maiden's favour, were indeed assurance of no ordinary power."

Henri's brow contracted, and it is uncertain what might have been his response, had not Lady Eleanor at this moment summoned her damsels to attend her, and the Page left them at the door of the Lady's apartment, where they were at liberty to discuss the knight at their leisure.

For many days, the Knight yielded to the endearments of domestic life, visiting his fair domains, and indulging the curiosity of the family in details of the hazards and disasters of those fatal wars, and the deadly sufferings of the Christians in contending with foes ever on the alert, and innumerable as the locusts swept by the hot winds of their own deserts. But these things gradually grew irksome to him, and he secluded himself mostly, either in his own room, or an old tower, rarely used except in times of commotion; and then only as a place of great strength and security, where a foe could be greatly annoyed, while the repellants were secure from every ordinary weapon.

There, hour after hour, even when the midnight stars grew dim in the early dawn, was beheld the solitary light of the watcher, and occasionally his form might be seen to pass between the light, and the low arched portal.

The old Baron walked the long terraces of his strong hold with a feebler step, and the gloomy disaffected air of a man who has nourished some bright anticipation, and wakes to find it but an illusion of the fancy. Disappointment seemed likely to accomplish what age had failed to do, even to bow the

strong spirit to the earth. Lady Eleanor felt all a proud woman's resentment at the indifference with which she was treated, and more than once hinted dark suspicions of necromancy and forbidden arts.

The maiden, Agatha, had, from the first, detected a deep and abiding sadness in the stranger, and her girlish fancy had at once been awakened to an interest in his behalf. She had invested him with sorrows and wrongs, that perhaps never had an existence, except in her own youthful imagination, and then had wept over them, and offered her prayers to the Virgin, that the one might be redressed, and the other alleviated. She even wished it were in her power to do something to relieve his despondency. Her girlish coquetry gave place to a quiet pensiveness, and perhaps her fine eyes might have expressed more of tenderness than she conceived, as they rested upon the knight, for she thought not of herself, but only of his sorrows.

Henri alone seemed to enjoy the state of affairs at the castle. His volatile spirits became even more buoyant than ever, and he sang his songs and madrigals with unprecedented sweetness and skill. He was a gay, handsome youth, with a smooth tongue, and courtly address, and withal frank and brave, and promising hereafter to be right worthy of the sword and spurs of knighthood. He had already installed his fair cousin upon the pedestal of his heart, as his only "Lady Love," partly in consequence of the beauty and many excellencies of the damsel, and partly because the seclusion in which he lived afforded none other so good and lovely.

Agatha, half in sport, and half in the thoughtless inexperience of girlhood, humoured the whim of the young devotee, unconscious of the dangerous passion, that was thus daily strengthening in the heart of her admirer. Now that a new grace had been imparted to her face, in the soft pensiveness that was stealing over it, she sat with abstracted air, while he poured forth the most dulcet melody, her own looks more dangerous to the youth, and herself unaware that her thoughts were away with the solitary watcher of the tower, and more intent upon divining his secret cause of grief, than in doing justice to the skill or taste of the handsome Page.

CHAPTER III.

"There came, and look'd him in the face,
An angel, beautiful and bright;
And then he knew it was a fiend,
This miserable Knight."—Coleridge.

WE have before said, that the stern hardihood of the Baron had hitherto enabled him to bid defiance to the ghostly warnings of the Fathers of St. Gothard, who urged him to prepare for the rest of his soul, by contributions to the church. It may hence be inferred they regarded him with no friendly eye; and now that his son had returned, leading a dark, solitary life, their malicious scrutiny was at once excited. Nor was this all; Lady Eleanor, in the sanctity of confession, had relieved her burden of spleen, by hinting mysterious fears and doubts, as to the motives of his retirement.

The moon in its first quarter hung like a silver barque upon the verge of the horizon, its faint rays playing upon the waters of the Rhine, as they heaved darkly in the uncertain light, when Agatha, who was looking from the terrace, was roused from a long

reverie by the voice of the Page. He pointed to the dim light of the old tower, and said in a low voice:

"The eagle, companionless and alone, becomes a surer mark for the archer."

"What mean you, Henri? Is danger really threatening the noble Oswald? And have you not warned him of the peril?"

"How should I, sweet Coz, when he treats me with the contempt of a menial? Methinks, were I to mount to yonder tower with a message of warning, it were poor reward for such service to be pitched from the battlement."

"Shame on thee, Henri; I thought thine had been a nobler nature;" and the maiden turned away with a look of scorn.

The eye of the Page flashed, and his brow crimsoned, yet he did not fail to address her with his habitual deference, but still with an infusion of pride that well became him.

"Agatha, you wrong me. I care little for the scorn of yon proud Knight; should he attempt discourteous service, he would scarcely find me the craver to submit either to his violence or dictation. It may be that my devotion to the Baron hath magnified to me the danger of his son." Then, in a lower voice, while his eyes rested sadly upon the face of the excited girl, he said, "It may be too, Agatha, that I feared for him for *thy* sake."

A deep blush spread over her face and neck at this allusion to herself, which the youth marked with a deeper shade of melancholy. He then went on to express his fears that the fathers were about to cite the young Lord to appear before a council of their order, to answer to the crimes of witchcraft and sorcery. He had expressed his reasons for so thinking to the Baron, who had treated the subject with utter contempt, and thus, he doubted not, would the son.

Agatha retired to her room but not to sleep. The danger that threatened the Knight grew every moment upon her imagination, and suggested many methods by which he might be warned of the peril; but with the timidity of maidenly reserve she shrunk from putting them in execution. She looked out from the casement; the stars beamed placidly from the deep sky, and the old woods reposed in dim shadow, while the heavy outline of the towers of St. Gothard lay like a dense mass against the horizon. As she continued looking in the direction of the monastery, she observed a file of monks with cowl and cassock, each bearing a small lantern, slowly emerge from its walls, and take the direction of the casele.

Instantly was her resolve taken. Throwing a mantle over her shoulders, she paced with a trembling step the long dark corridors, and took the direction of the old tower.

The structure was intricate, and of immense size, and a deadly fear seized the lone girl, as she threaded the dark passages at such an hour. Occasionally too, as she approached the outer walls, nocturnal birds, disturbed in their retreats, spread their broad heavy wings and sailed forth with loud screams into the open air. At length she reached the base of the tower, and began to ascend. Laying her hand upon the damp walls she groped up the narrow winding steps. She felt something glide from beneath her touch; but whether snake or lizard she knew not, for a cold shivering passed all over her, and she scarcely suppressed a scream of horror. Then the wild super-

stitutions of the age came upon her with a deadly power, and to her excited fancy the dark passage seemed full of unearthly sounds; horrid eyes glared upon her from every side, and her flesh crept beneath the touch of hideous and malignant demons. She pressed the crucifix close to her bosom, closed her eyes to all about her, and breathing inarticulate prayers to the Holy Virgin, reached the landing, where the light streamed from the retreat of the Knight.

Here, while pausing for breath, her ear was arrested by the soft notes of a lute, accompanied by the low, exquisite tones of a female voice. In the astonishment of the moment she listened to the following words, sang with great sweetness and effect.

SONG.

'Mid scorching sands the desert bulb
Lies hid beneath the plain,*
With all its beauty folded up,
To wait the coming rain.

It comes—the welcome rain-drops come,
And, like a magic life,
The joyous flow'ret upward springs,
With every beauty rife.

Awhile it blossoms in the sun,
A creature of delight;
Till fed no more with genial dews
It withers in the light.

And thus the heart, when waked by love,
A thousand joys may know,
But coldness, like the desert air,
Shall wither all its glow.

A noise from below started her from her attitude, and she rushed to the portal, exclaiming in hurried accents:

"Fly, Sir Knight, it is for your life."

Oswald rose fiercely to repel the intruder; but not till Agatha had beheld a female of singular beauty reclined upon a low ottoman at his feet. She was arrayed in the most sumptuous mode of oriental magnificence: a turban of golden tissue was wreathed about her redundant hair, in which glittered the costliest gems; and an opal, of large size, reflecting a thousand prismatic hues, shone upon her clear dark brow. Her round rich lips were slightly parted, revealing teeth of resplendent whiteness; and her full liquid eyes, that looked like a sea of tenderness, shaded, as they were, by long curved lashes, were raised to the face of the Knight, who gazed into their passionate depths with intense devotion. Her robe was open from the throat nearly to the girdle, revealing a swan-like neck, that swelled from the graceful chest like polished ivory. Her arms were encircled by bracelets of pearl, which gave a startling brilliancy to their rich colour and elegant contour.

Agatha obtained but a momentary view of this

* Travellers tell of immense plains in certain parts of Africa, where, during the hot months not a spear of vegetation appears; the earth is dry and hard, and seamed with cracks to a great depth, by the action of the sun's rays upon the barren surface. But no sooner does the rainy season commence, than their whole appearance is changed. Innumerable bulbous plants, whose roots were hid beneath the surface, spring from the earth, and in a few weeks the plain, so lately a barren desert, assumes the appearance of an immense flower garden, with blossoms of the rarest and most beautiful description. These continue till the setting in of the dry season, when they rapidly disappear.

radiant creature; and she stood alone with the mysterious dweller of the tower. His face darkened with suppressed passion, and he fixed his fierce eye sternly upon the maiden. But her pale, child-like face, and timid air, restored all the chivalry of his profession. He led her to the ottoman the mysterious lady had but lately occupied, and heard her recital with compressed lips. The sounds approached nearer. Agatha sprang to her feet, wild with terror as the thought of detection in such a place, and at such an hour, flashed upon her mind.

"Thou hast done me kindly service, Agatha, and I would not that suspicion should fall upon thy maiden fame as thy guerdon. Wilt thou not rest concealed beneath the battlements, till these intruders have retired?"

Agatha took the proffered arm, and he led her out where the walls overlooked the mass of waters, that swept the very base of the tower.

He had scarcely seated himself at the rude table, with a manuscript spread before him, when the inquisitors entered the room.

They glanced at each other, astonished at the simple employment of the student, and the naked poverty of the apartment. The Knight slowly rose to receive them, and demanded, with a placid brow, to what he owed the privilege of a visit at such an hour.

"In sooth, fair sir," said the principal, "we owe

thee an apology for this intrusion. Knowing the power and arts of the spirit of darkness, how he goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, the church, ever mindful of the welfare of the faithful, and desirous, if but a lamb should go astray, to win it back to the fold, hath sought thee in all love and faithfulness, lest thou shouldst have been deluded by the wicked devices of the arch adversary of souls."

"I owe thee many thanks, good father," said the Knight, a slight sneer betrayed upon his noble features, "were I so unfortunate as to prove recreant to the faith of a true Knight and a Christian, I doubt not the holy brethren of St. Gothard would use all ghostly admonition to restore me within the pale of the church. In the meanwhile I will see to it, that suitable provision be made to ensure the pious exertions, and prayers of the brethren, lest peradventure I might swerve from the faith."

This was uttered half in reverence and half in mockery, but the promise involved in the concluding clause, was enough to blind all eyes to aught inconsistent with the manners of a faithful son of the church; and though the principal still eyed him with a lingering look of suspicion, he raised his thin, pale hands, and pronouncing a benedictio, slowly retired.

[To be concluded.]



Written for the Lady's Book.

A WILDWOOD SCENE.

BY MISS JULIET H. LEWIS.

THERE is a spot that is wondrous fair,
Where the zephyr on sighing wings doth bear
The perfumed kiss of his loved wild flower,
Through nodding tree top, and leafy bower;
Where the brook bounds on like a joyous child,
And the fawn roams free through its native wild—
Where the grateful birds through the wildwood lurk,
Singing praise to the Lord for his handiwork—
Where laughing vines with their tendrils grasp;
The tree as it bends to the loving clasp—
Where blushing roses their leaves unfold,
As the nightingale's tender tale is told--

Where the giant oak waves its boughs in pride,
Beckoning the sunbeams to fly to its side--
Where the leaves of the aspen are dancing in glee,
And the mosses are pendant from branchlet and tree--
Where the violet dwells unsought and unseen,
In its humble home so leafy and green,
With nothing to tell of its lonely bloom.
Save its clustering leaves and its wild perfume.
And would ye know why the scene is fair?
Why beauty is stamp'd upon all that is there?
'Tis the work of God! that heavenly spot,
And the hand of man hath defaced it not.



Written for the Lady's Book.

S U M M E R F A N C I E S.

Inscribed to a much loved trio.

BY MISS A. D. WOODBRIDGE.

EARTH drinks the cheering rain,
And blushing, turns to meet the sun's embrace;
While Summer flings o'er every hill and plain,
Her ample robe of grace.

The golden harvest waves,
As if to woo the joyous reaper-band;
While meadows broad, which yonder streamlet laves,
Await the mower's hand.

Peace rests within the vale,
And Plenty's voice re-echoes far and wide;
While songs of joy ascend from ev'ry dale,
And from the green hill side.

And like those genial showers,
Sweet words of love distill'd upon this heart,
And glances bright as sunlight to the flowers,
Caused plants of hope to start.

There, Love, that flower divine,
That harvest of the heart, springs fresh and fair;
Its fragrance floats, belov'd ones, to your shrine,
O! make it still your care!

Gleaners, in life's broad field!
May joy's rich fruits around you ever fall,
And earth for you her richest treasures yield!
God bless you, dear ones, all!

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THE OPAL RING.—A GERMAN LEGEND.

BY MRS. SERA SMITH.

[Concluded from page 16.]

CHAPTER IV.

"Great love they bare to Fairy fair,
Their sister soft and dear,
Her girdle showed her middle gimp,
And gowden glist her hair."

Hardyknote.

If Agatha had been astonished at the ready self-possession of the Knight at this critical period, she was no less charmed at the grace and elegance with which, seating her upon the ottoman, he gave utterance to his many expressions of gratitude, for the service she had rendered him.

"It may be that I have failed in knightly courtesy, maiden, but impute it only to my strange destiny. Pardon me, lady, I have not been blind to thy many excellencies, but I am bound by inexorable fate. Think of me as one who would do all knightly service for thy sake, but who, alas! is unworthy even to kneel at thy feet:" and his proud lip quivered with emotion.

Agatha had risen to depart, but the language of the Knight, alluding to his strange fate, emboldened her to speak upon the fearful subject of the beautiful apparition she had seen. With a blending of feminine tenderness, and maidenly dignity, she turned toward him; the blush that a moment before had mantled upon her cheek, had died away, and left it of a marble paleness.

"I came not here, Sir Knight, to scrutinize what thou wouldst fain conceal, but to warn thee of danger. But there are fearful spells, and forbidden powers, of which I shudder to speak—demons may assume the appearance of angels of light, and thereby lure the soul to destruction. Let me implore thee to fly the snare."

The Knight's brow contracted, a deadly paleness gathered upon his face, and his lips were compressed with a strong pressure. Agatha thought she saw a dim shape flit by her.

"Then thou didst behold her, Agatha. I am in deadly peril," and he gasped for utterance.

"Thou hast nothing to fear from me, Sir Knight; I am no idle maiden to babble upon the secrets of others. I would only lure thee from the snare, not betray thee to danger."

The Knight smote upon his brow. "Noble, noble girl—wo is me, that I have thrown a great gulf between me and such as thou, and for the love of —."

A low hiss sounded through the apartment, and Agatha, raising her eyes, beheld upon the opposite wall, a small spot flashing and sparkling in the shadow around, and she knew it for the opal she had seen upon the brow of the strange lady. The Knight followed the direction of her eyes, and he dropped the hand he had raised to his lips, and retired from her side.

Slowly and in silence he conducted her through the long passages, and then sought again the lonely tower.

Sleep came late and troubled to the lids of the fair girl, and the occurrences of the night were strangely commingled with dark and hideous visions. At one time the beautiful lady, with the opal-crowned brow,

stood before her, singing to her lute such strains of dulcet melody as ravished her senses to hear. While she looked upon her surpassing beauty, slowly did her figure expand, towering and darkening, and the air became filled with shrieks and lamentations. Then she beheld a funeral pyre, and Oswald chained to the stake, and the strange lady wringing her hands; and then, hideous with laughter, she stood beside him. Glad was she when the pure light of the morning, with the sound of singing birds, dispelled the phantoms of the night.

The old Baron was exasperated, when told of the secret visit of the fathers of St. Gothard;

"Red, red, then grew his dark-brown cheeks,
See did his dark-brown brow:"

and in the heat of his resentment, he ordered the private passage, by which they had entered, to be closed up for ever, that prying priest might never again intrude upon the sanctity of his dwelling, unannounced, and unbidden.

For many days the Knight seemed more than ordinarily severe and gloomy, but Agatha saw with delight he went not to the old tower. His manner, when he approached her, was even more deferential than ever, and his eye rested upon her with unwonted tenderness. Agatha saw this, and it sent a thrill of delight to her heart. And, yet, wherefore should she desire the love of one so strange, so guilty even, according to his own confession? She would strive to forget him; and then came the memory of his sorrows and his loneliness, with none to counsel, none to lead him back to faith and holiness, and she knelt and prayed fervently to the Virgin in his behalf. Alas! she could not dream how dear those very prayers were making their subject to her own heart. So earnest was she in her devotions, that she began to believe the blessed saints had interposed specially in behalf of the Knight, and by their holy influences kept him from the old tower, and the dangerous lady who lured him thither. Impressed with this conviction, she redoubled her devotions; her cheek grew pale with fast and vigil, and her beauty every day more spiritual. She felt as if the salvation of the Knight depended upon the fervency of her prayers, and sleep departed from her pillow, and her pale cheeks were wet with the tears of supplication. The terrible secret no longer weighed upon her spirits, she needed no relief in confession, for the enthusiasm of a lofty piety brought its own strength, support, and consolation. She had more than once seen that opal light gleam from the battlements, and heard the low, sad tones of the lute, and she turned to her devotions with but the more zeal.

At this juncture a strange Knight and Lady arrived to claim the hospitality of the castle. Nothing could be more commanding than the appearance of the stranger. He was of lofty stature, yet so justly proportioned, that his height gave the same pleasure felt upon beholding the perfection of statuary. His brow was high, and his hair of a raven blackness. His eyes, sunk beneath deeply arched brows, were painfully intense in their jetty hue and searching expression. His accoutrements were sumptuous in the ex-

trene, and all in chivalric perfection. The lady clung to his arm with timid gentleness, her head bowed beneath a silvery veil, that nearly concealed her person. At a few whispered words of the Knight she threw back her veil, and revealed the lady of the tower, with the opal upon her brow. Her liquid eyes beamed with tenderness, and the rich blood trembled upon her cheek as she received the few words of welcome that fell from the ashy lips of Oswald.

The stranger's stay was short. He craved the matronly hospitality of Lady Eleanor in behalf of his sister, while he should be absent a few weeks to redeem a knightly pledge. He had no sooner departed than the lady, taking a small lute, commenced that low strange melody now familiar to the ear of Agatha.

SONG OF THE LADY.

Dearest brother, fare thee well,
Though in sorrow forced to part,
Thou wilt bear a sister's love,
Cherished ever in thy heart.
Danger's path may lure thee on,
Stern the soldier's heart may be,
But the brother's ever will
Soft and gentle be for me.

The words were simple, but it was the soft magic of the voice and lute, as the lady sat with the silver veil floating like a halo about her, that gave them a strange power over her hearers.

Very gentle and winning were the manners of the strange maiden; yet Agatha remarked, that she never said *Pater Noster*, nor *Ave Marie*; and the symbol of the holy cross was never made upon her brow, where the brilliant opal gleamed for ever in its changing beauty. She delighted to roam the sequestered grounds of the old domain, and her lute breathed every where its dulcet numbers. Her manners were always those of maidenly reserve, yet Agatha more than once had marked her lustrous eyes fixed with a peculiar fascination upon the face of Oswald. Did he seat himself to listen to the lady's lute, she unconsciously glided to his feet, and Agatha thought a supernatural beauty rested upon her, while she breathed those liquid tones that held all spell-bound at her side.

Agatha felt an undefined dread whenever she approached this creature of fascination, which grew deeper as the regards of the lady were more and more fixed upon herself. She saw that the Knight looked pale and troubled, and fearful surmises crowded upon her brain. Who, and what was the beautiful stranger?

CHAPTER V.

"And first she wet her comely cheeks,
And then her boddice green,
Her silken cords of twirle twist,
Well plait with silver sheen."

THE night was warm and still. Agatha had found it impossible to sleep, and she stepped out upon the terrace, where the huge trees clustered thickly around, almost dispelling the light of the pale, waning moon. As she looked down upon the scene below, she beheld the Knight standing with folded arms, and rigid features, looking sternly upon the mysterious lady, who was kneeling at his feet; her beautiful brow, and imploring eyes turned to his face, and her round arms and clasped hands gleaming like alabaster in the pale light, as they were raised in the attitude of supplication.

"Never, Zaydith, never. I have perilled soul and

body for thy sake. Ask no more. Return, and practise thy spells upon those that know thee not."

Slowly the lady rose from her kneeling posture, her clasped hands drooping before her, her head bowed upon her bosom, and the tears falling in showers from her radiant eyes.

"Zaydith, Zaydith," said the Knight, folding her to his bosom, "why wouldst thou drag me to perdition? Why didst thou seek me, but to plunge me deeper and deeper in guilt and misery?"

Passionately did the maiden fold her fair arms about the neck of the Knight, and her curls were mingled with his, while her soft eyes rested upon his face with a look of inconceivable tenderness.

"Alas! alas, I am in peril, even greater than thine. If I abandon thee, most terrible is the punishment that awaits me. Wo is me, for I have never loved till now. Now only do I feel that I would suffer inexpressible pangs, rather than one particle of suffering should be infused into thy cup. It shall be done. Enough, that thou art safe. Alas, dost thou love me, Oswald?"

The Knight answered by a deep moan of agony, and a shower of kisses upon her lips, brow, and cheek. The lady pressed her small hands to her eyes and wept bitterly. She disengaged herself from his arms, and the tones of the lute broke the silence of the night, as, reclined at the feet of her lover, she sang the following words with singular pathos:

SONG.

Yes, the word of Fate is spoken,
Zaydith quits thee, love, for ever;
Should her heart be wildly broken,
May'at thou know it, never, never.
Never know what fate awaits me,
Outcast from that heart of thine;
Yet, each thought so fixed upon thee,
Love shall make a heaven of mine.
Fare thee well—my heart is broken,
Sadly, sadly let me weep;
I will ask no gift, no token,
For thy memory may not sleep.

"My own Zaydith," cried the Knight, "we may not, cannot part; let us be doomed together, my own true, fond-hearted girl."

An unwonted splendour shot from the mysterious opal, and the lady clasped her hands in agony.

"Oswald, unsay those dreadful words. Return to thy faith. Pray; for prayers may avail thee. Thy fate is not yet sealed—the signet is not upon thy brow. O pray; the deluded Arab girl bids thee pray—pray for—the doomed."

She turned deadly pale—a shivering past over her—she pressed her lips to his, and in a moment had disappeared.

Then Agatha beheld the Knight upon his knees, under the still heavens, and his deep sobs mingled with the wail of the night-wind; and she too knelt, and their prayers ascended upon the same air, to the throne of love and mercy.

The next morning early, the stranger made his appearance to recall his sister. His manners were stern and gloomy, and the maiden trembled when his glance fell upon her. As she turned to depart, she pressed her lips fondly to those of Agatha, and the maiden remembered, long after, that fearful, burning kiss. She took a ring from her finger, and placed it upon that of Agatha, dropped her veil about her, cast one long anxious glance around, and then departed.

Agatha shuddered with undefined horror as the ring pressed her finger. A new mystery was revealed to her. Dim forms flitted around, with pale and troubled countenances, and a shadow seemed for ever flung over all that to her had been bright and beautiful. Strange and troublous thoughts crowded upon her, and her prayers became fearfully vague and incoherent. Days and weeks passed away, and she shrank within herself like a guilty thing, for now was the human heart, with all its fearful secrets, exposed openly to her view. All who approached stood with naked hearts before her. She closed her eyes, but there still gleamed the hidden spirit, in its pale, unearthly light, written upon every side with the dark records of humanity. She recoiled from the view as from the revelations of a charnel house.

Thenceforth, to her there could be no evasion, no concealment—the human heart was exposed to a human eye. Fearful, fearful sight! She beheld the dark ineffaceable records of years—the fearful catalogue of long, long unrepented sins. She bowed her head, and longed and prayed, that a spirit of mercy might descend and wash away those withering stains with the tears of angel pity. None came.

Her confidence in human actions was for ever shaken. She saw the motive and the consequence, even “afar off,” before it had become defined to the actor. She beheld the thoughts, and cared little for the utterance of the tongue. Often did she find herself responding, not to the *words*, but the *thoughts* of others. A human heart revealed to a human eye! It was a fearful picture. She ceased to look within her own heart, for the spectacle of others for ever unfitted her for the task. She ceased even to pray for herself, or others, for her whole being was disquieted by the fearful visions she beheld. The human spirit had become to her a dark, troubled, gloomy chaos, from which love, and trust, and hope were for ever expelled.

She shrank from the duty of confession, for the heart of the sanctimonious priest was open to her eye. She lived in the solitude of her own power, avoiding the companionship of others. She fled from the presence of Henri; for in the pure, generous heart of the noble youth, did she behold her own image, clear and exalted, the creature of his idolatry.

Oswald witnessed her distress, and as often as her eyes met his, they fell with more than maidenly timidity. That heart was open to her view, and she strove, yes, wilfully strove, to blind her vision to the dark traces there recorded. Why was it? Why did she lament to be enshrined in the pure heart of Henri, and delight to behold herself filling daily, more and more, the gloomy heart of the crusader? Why did she rejoice to behold the picture of the Arab girl glow less distinctly there, while her own grew in the hues of life and reality? Why rejoice in a shrine so unhallowed? Was she ruled by a strange power of darkness? or was it but the perversity of the female heart? Scarcely did she sign the cross upon his brow, scarcely did she pray for deliverance from peril.

CHAPTER VI.

“Then backe he came to tell the kinge,
Who sayde, Sir Lukyn, sawe ye ought?
Notings, my liege, sawe that the winde
Nowe with the angry waters fought.”

King Arthur's Death.

AGATHA again stood upon the terrace, and the Knight beside her.

“Agatha,” he said, “thou art in great peril and perplexity. An awful power hath been revealed to thee, and thou art ignorant of the cause.”

He took the ring from the trembling hand of the maid, and pressed it to his lips. Tears, the first she had shed for many a day, gushed to her eyes, and she sank upon her knees, uttering a low prayer of thankfulness.

The Knight looked with admiration upon her beautiful face, and now Agatha could read the language of love only from those full speaking eyes. She arose, covered with blushes.

“Nay, Agatha, thou shouldst not leave me. Our secret is known to each other;” and he held up his finger, on which glittered a ring with the same mysterious seal. Agatha turned pale, and leaned against the battlement. Tenderly did the Knight support her, while he uttered the declarations of love.

“But the Arab girl,” gasped Agatha, as the thought of her flashed upon her memory.

“Think not of her. A deadly power is hers; but I shall see her no more, unless—”

“At the hour of death,” shrieked the maiden, as the conviction of his guilt flashed upon her mind; and she fell senseless upon his bosom. When she awoke to consciousness she thought only of his look of love.

“Agatha, I shall see her no more, if prayers and penitence may avail. You love me—forget the past. I will live only for my God, and thee. The eastern maid shall henceforth be to me as if she were not.”

Agatha's eyes fell upon the opal ring, which he still held. It flashed with startling brilliancy.

“These fatal gifts—where these are, there can be no prayers—no peace—no love even,” she added, blushing, as she took them from his hand. They leaned over the wall:—“I have read thy thoughts, and thou mine—let us do so no more.” The Knight strove to arrest her hand, but she playfully tossed them into the waters beneath.

A loud shriek followed, and the Knight fell at her feet; his fingers moved in sign of the cross, and a low prayer died upon his lips.

Agatha stood mute with horror; when suddenly the Arab girl appeared with dishevelled hair, wringing her hands, and uttering low stifled sobs; but she touched not the sacred body of the repentant believer. Then the sad melody of her exquisite voice broke upon the air:

SONG OF THE ARAB GIRL.

Thou wert mine, my own, my own,
Why did Zaydith from thee part?
Scarce I knew the depth of loving,
Till I tore thee from my heart.

Thou wert mine—would I had borne thee
To some lone, sequestered isle;
There, with none but thee beside me,
Thou hadst lived in Zaydith's smile.

Every breath that lingered round us,
Would a tale of love disclose;
Not a shade should dim the sunshine,
Not a canker blight the rose.

There, for ever gleams the opal,
With its mystic light for thee;
Thou hadst lived a captive willing;
Thou hadst smiled alone for me.

But 'tis past; farewell, for ever,
Never more we meet again;
Thou canst not know the doomed one's anguish,
Canst not feel thy Zaydith's pain.