

THE FOREBODING:

A SKETCH.

“Loathed Melancholy.”—MILTON.

“If you please, Sir Henry, the curricle is quite ready.”

“Very well,” replied the master to his servant; “bring me my boots, and desire her maid to acquaint your mistress that the carriage is waiting.”

The footman left the library, and Sir Henry Buckingham, going to the window which commanded a view of his noble park, exclaimed to himself, “This will be a glorious day for our drive! the sun will be tempered by those troops of soft clouds which are sailing about so quietly, throwing their grave shadows on the earth—the air is mild—last night’s rain has filled the herbage

with fragrance; and the trees seem to rest, after the refreshing shower, in motionless and satisfied repose. All is as I could wish it to be, for my dear wife's sake, to whose spirits the airing will certainly be beneficial. This open, smiling, gentle scene, upon which I cannot look and despair, must assuredly infuse something of its healthiness into her mind."

Here he paused in his soliloquy; but whether to brood on the comfort of the thought, or to examine its validity, was not at first apparent. It was soon, however, evident, that the feeling was one of misgiving, for his meditations again finding words, he said:

"Yet why do I flatter myself thus? The influence of spring could not save her from the attack of the mind-sickness which weighs her down, neither will the laughing summer drive it away. My unhappiness, I fear, is irremediable! What avail my many worldly advantages,—fortune, youth, health, the possession of her whom I so long have loved? Darkness is thrown over all

by *one* misfortune, which is the more miserable, because, being causeless, I know not what to do to insure a remedy."

Here a female servant entered the library with a request that Sir Henry would step into his lady's room, which, with a sigh laden with wretched anticipation, he obeyed.

Lady Buckingham was a confirmed *ennuyée*. The two first years of her marriage passed happily and even joyously; but the last twelve months had been characterized by great and mysterious depression,—a constant but undefined fear of some impending calamity, which shook her innocent heart to its very centre. Every change alarmed her. The seasons, in their diversity, approached like portents; and the coming-on of dawn, no less than the deepening shadows of evening, filled her with intolerable tremour. During the noon, either of night or day, she seemed to enjoy some little respite from her apprehensions, for then the hours appeared to pause; but she could not divest herself of the dread that every *obvious*

change was only the prologue of an unutterable tragedy. In vain her affectionate husband tried to reason her out of these fears—in vain he expatiated on the simplicity of her character, on the whiteness of her conscience, and on her duty to be thankful to her Creator for the worldly blessings he had been pleased to bestow on her. She acknowledged the reasonableness of all this, and then, after a struggle, sank again into her dejection, as though some invisible demon were practising upon her his numbing spells!

Her very beauty was tainted with this melancholy; but still she was a lovely creature,—pale, indeed, and too thin for the perfection of feminine grace, though from the outline of her figure it was evident that nature had intended to fashion her shape in the full luxury of womanhood. Her voice was sweet beyond expression; and formerly her words were simple, gentle, timid, even girlish; and from the charm of their innocent spell it was not possible to escape. Alas! this part of her character was now fearfully altered by the over-informing tyranny of her distemper, which had, as

it were against her will, lifted her mental faculties out of their simplicity, perplexed them with "thick-coming fancies," and, by a painful process, filled them with premature knowledge and the command of lofty eloquence! Her eyes were ever restless, glancing hither and thither with eager scrutiny; but in other respects she was lethargic.

Sir Henry, on entering her room, found that his wife had not yet risen, and that she had been weeping. "Why, my dear," said he, "I expected you would have been ready to accompany me in the little airing we spoke of last night, and now I find you dejected and in tears. For heaven's sake, arouse yourself in time from this melancholy, or it will gather strength in proportion as you yield to it, until at last you will be its abject slave."

"I am that already," she replied; "I am the victim of a throng of hideous fears, which scare away my wits. I do not dare to leave my bed; and (jeer me as you may) I must tell you that I

am warned, by my evil genius,—nay, smile not, for the fiend of destiny haunts me—that my death, and your's too, will be the consequence of my accompanying you this morning.”

“ Nothing, my dear,” replied Sir Henry, “ can be more unreal (I should say, ridiculous, did I not respect even your weakness) than these fears. They are the offspring of ill health, to which you reduce yourself by persisting in so sedentary a life. You must not be offended, if, for once, I employ the authority of a husband, and require that you forthwith prepare yourself for exercise and fresh air. Come, let me woo thee in the words of the holy oriental song: ‘ Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land.’ ”

The heartfelt kindness of this solicitation was not lost on the lady, who, after a struggle with her apprehensions, arose, and dressed herself for

the morning ride, and joined her husband in the library.

That the exercise might be more efficacious, Sir Henry extended the drive farther than he had at first contemplated, and, when about ten miles from home, called at the house of a friend, with whom he and his lady were prevailed on to partake of an early dinner. The jaunt and the cheerful society seemed to have a beneficial influence on the spirits of the hypochondriac.

They returned in the evening. Twilight was coming on, and, as it deepened, gigantic clouds were observed lifting themselves uncouthly above the horizon, and congregating in sullen masses. This was succeeded by weak flashes of lightning, accompanied by heavy sultriness, and an unnatural quiet. The leaves of the trees, which had rustled pleasantly during the day, were now still; the shallow brooks, which had made music with their fresh rippling, seemed now like stagnant pools; the cattle crouched together and became mute. Meanwhile the lightning grew stronger, though

still not blue or forked, or attended by thunder. Darkness at length ensued; and, of a sudden, there came a blast of air like a mighty whirlwind, which tore the branches from the heavier trees, and bent the light ones till their tops swept the ground, even as though they were bowing in worship of the Angel of the Storm! The whole earth appeared to stagger; when a terrific dart of lightning ran, like a huge serpent, down the sky, making rifts in the dense clouds, and affording awful revelations of the interior heaven. This was instantly succeeded by a stunning and continued peal of thunder, and a descent of rain, like the beginning of another deluge. The lightning now was incessant; sometimes appearing to dash broad floods of light with force upon the ground, and at others to throw a blue and ghastly illumination against the severed masses of the clouds, which had assumed the grand forms of mountains and pyramids and colossal temples!

What a frightful hour must this have been for our poor afflicted lady! It shook even the strong nerves of her husband; whose agitation was in-

creased, when, on looking round at his wife, he perceived she had fainted. O! how he blamed his pertinacity in urging her to take the excursion. There was, however, no time for reflection; his presence of mind and skill were required in the management of his horses; for death seemed inevitable, should they, by becoming wild, get beyond his control. He, therefore, merely drew his lady's cloak nearer about her, and concentrated his attention on the reins, which he held with a strong and wary hand, and thus driving through the terrors of the night, he at length reached his own gates in safety.

The lady was restored sooner than the fears of Sir Henry had allowed him to expect. She passed a calm night of refreshing sleep, and in the morning, which was fine and bright, talked over, with cheerfulness, the danger of the preceding evening. This unlooked-for amendment of her spirits continued for some time, and gave her husband reason to indulge in confident hopes of her settled recovery. Her former distemper furnished a theme even for raillery, during which she not only mani-

fested no signs of impatience, but even joined in the pleasantry, and wondered at her own delusion.

Alas! this was not of long duration. A relapse came on; and one morning at breakfast, after a long silence, she suddenly burst out as follows:

“O! my husband, I have had a ghastly dream, which weighs upon me like the announcement of fate, and will not be shaken off. That fearful ride! The memory of it has haunted me all night. Some of its terrors, indeed, were diminished; but then, others more fatal, more tremendous, more maddening, were substituted. Methought we were, as then, in that open carriage—it was broad day, clear, cloudless, and with a deep blue sky. Every thing seemed happy, and you and I enjoyed to the full the blessed tranquillity. As I looked about me, however, I became gradually aware of a minute stain in the lower atmosphere, like a blot, which moved near and around us, now here, now there, in a strange manner. I endeavoured once or twice to push it aside; but at this, it only seemed to hang closer to my eyes. I was

about to call your attention to it, when, of a sudden, it swelled into size and shape, and I beheld, flying at my side, a bony spectre,—the king of terrors—Death! The horses had an instinctive recognition of the phantom, for they moaned dismally, their nostrils were dilated, the whole of their frame was seized with convulsive shudderings, and they struggled as though to escape from the trammels of the harness. I was distracted with terror, when the gaunt and execrable monster, touching me, whispered in my ear, ‘Thou art mine—this night shalt thou sleep in my everlasting cave!’ As it said this, the hateful thing shifted its position, and when I turned round I saw it had crouched under one of the wheels, which it lifted up, and threw the carriage over the brink of a deep precipice. I shrieked aloud, and, as I fell, the demon, with a laugh of exultation, caught me in his arms, and bore me into the darkness of the chasm.”

“Do not distress yourself so, my dear,” said Sir Henry; “forget this vain dream—forget it, I beseech you. Your spirits shall no more be put to a trial so severe as that which you had to encounter the other night; for I plainly see, in spite

of the apparent cheerfulness which subsequently elevated you, that the recollection of the tempest has been engendering these hideous phantasms. You shall not again trust yourself in that vehicle."

"And yet," she replied, "my spirits were relieved by the former excursion, notwithstanding my reluctance to engage in it; and, it may be, that the storm which seemed so full of danger, but, in the event, was so harmless, served to convince me of the vanity of my alarms. I shall always be under the dominion of this dream, if I do not *prove* its fallacy. For this purpose, I will make a strong effort, and beg you to take me again with you in that very carriage and along that very road, and I shall doubtless return home liberated from the haunting terror."

"I congratulate you, from my heart, on your resolution," said Sir Henry, embracing his wife. "We will go, and, as you say, you shall have abundant demonstration of the groundlessness of your dread."

To put her determination in practice was, how-

ever, as she had premised, a painful effort on the part of the lady. She trembled as she stepped into the carriage, and dropped into her seat, with the desparate air of one obliged to submit to some extreme calamity. With such a white face and forced composure, did Tell level the arrow against the apple on his dear boy's head; and so looked Brutus as he assumed the judgment-seat to pronounce sentence of death on his son!

It was a lovely day, with fresh airs breathing about, and a sky deeply blue like that of the South. In the course of the journey, they turned, they scarcely knew how it happened, into a lane in which they did not recollect to have ever been before. It was a solitary spot; the road was exceedingly uneven, and the swaying of the carriage to and fro was occasionally not without danger. They had penetrated the avenue so far that it was not advisable to return; yet, although the way was so uncouth, they could hardly fear an accident, as the horses were known to be steady, and the mid-day light was so strong and clear. Presently they came to a break in the hedge on one side, and this shewed them that they were on the brink of a sudden

descent into a deep dell. The lady shuddered violently as she saw this; but Sir Henry, in an attempt to re-assure her, said:

“There is nothing here to fear, although it must be confessed this pit looks ugly enough. You know I am an approved good charioteer, and, see, yonder we shall have the fence again. Cheer up, my love.”

He had no sooner said these words than a large bird darted out from the opposite hedge with a rushing noise across the eyes of the horses, who, taking fright thereat, pulled different ways, and grew utterly unmanageable. The lady had only time to shriek out, “See the horses! the dream, the dream!”—when the carriage rolled on one side, and then was precipitated over the edge of the steep.

Some peasants, who accidentally strayed into that unfrequented place the same evening, found the carriage among briars and underwood, at the bottom of the dell, the horses mangled and dying, and the husband and wife folded in each others' arms, dead and cold!

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