

The Lay of Marie

Matilda Betham

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THE LAY OF MARIE

and

VIGNETTES IN VERSE

MATILDA BETHAM

with an introduction for the Garland edition by Donald H. Reiman

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THE LAY OF MARIE: A POEM

BY

MATILDA BETHAM.

1816

TO

LADY BEDINGFELD.

To whom,--as Fancy, taking longer flight,
With folded arms upon her heart's high swell,
Floating the while in circles of delight,
And whispering to her wings a sweeter spell
Than she has ever aim'd or dar'd before--
Shall I address this theme of minstrel lore?
To whom but her who loves herself to roam
Through tales of earlier times, and is at home
With heroes and fair dames, forgotten long,
But for romance, and lay, and lingering song?
To whom but her, whom, ere my judgment knew,
Save but by intuition, false from true,
Seem'd to me wisdom, goodness, grace combin'd;
The ardent heart; the lively, active mind?
To whom but her whose friendship grows more dear,
And more assur'd, for every lapsing year?
One whom my inmost thought can worthy deem
Of love, and admiration, and esteem!

PREFACE

As there is little, in all I have been able to collect respecting MARIE, which has any thing to do with the Poem, I have chosen to place such information at the end of the book, in form of an Appendix, rather than here; where the only things necessary to state are, that she was an Anglo-Norman Minstrel of the thirteenth century; and as she lived at the time of our losing Normandy, I have connected her history with that event: that the young king who sees her in his progress through his foreign possessions is our Henry III.; and the Earl William who steps forward to speak in her favour is William Longsword, brother to Richard Coeur de Lion. Perhaps there is no record of minstrels being called upon to sing at a feast in celebration of a victory which involves their own greatest possible misfortune; but such an incident is not of improbable occurrence. It is likely, also, that a woman, said to be more learned, accomplished, and pleasing, than was usually the case with those of her profession, might have a father, who, with the ardour, the disobedience, the remorse of his heroic master, had been, like him, a crusader and a captive; and in the after solitude of self-inflicted penitence, full of romantic and mournful recollections, fostered in the mind of his daughter, by nature embued with a portion of his own impassioned feelings, every tendency to that wild and poetical turn of thought which qualified her for a minstrel; and, after his death, induced her to become one.

* * * * *

The union of European and Eastern beauty, in the person of Marie, I have attempted to describe as lovely as possible. The consciousness of noble birth, of injurious depression, and the result of that education which absorbed the whole glowing mind of a highly gifted parent, a mind rich with adventures, with enthusiasm and tenderness, ought to be portrayed in her deportment; while the elegance and delicacy which more particularly distinguish the gentlewoman, would naturally be imbibed from a constant early association with a model of what the chivalrous spirit of the age could form, with all its perfections and its faults; in a situation, too, calculated still more to refine such a character; especially with one who was the centre of his affections and regrets, and whom he was so soon to leave unprotected. That, possessing all these advantages, notwithstanding her low station, she should be beloved by, and, on the discovery of her birth, married to a young nobleman, whose high favour with his sovereign would lead him to hope such an offence against the then royal prerogative of directing choice would be deemed a venial one, is, I should think, an admissible supposition.

* * * * *

That a woman would not be able to sing under such afflicting circumstances might be objected; but history shews us, scarcely any exertion of fortitude or despair is too great to be looked for in that total deprivation of all worldly interest consequent to such misfortunes. Whether that train of melancholy ideas which her own fate suggests is sufficiently removed from narration to be natural, or not near it enough to be clear, the judgment of others must determine. No wish or determination to have it one way or another, in sentiment, style, or story, influenced its composition; though, occasionally, lines previously written are interwoven; and, in one instance, a few that have been published.

* * * * *

Her Twelve Lays are added in a second Appendix, as curious in themselves, and illustrative of the manners and morals of an age when they formed the amusement of the better orders.

THE LAY OF MARIE.

CANTO FIRST.

The guests are met, the feast is near,
But Marie does not yet appear!
And to her vacant seat on high
Is lifted many an anxious eye.
The splendid show, the sumptuous board,
The long details which feuds afford,
And discontent is prone to hold,
Absorb the factious and the cold;--
Absorb dull minds, who, in despair,
The standard grasp of worldly care,
Which none can quit who once adore--
They love, confide, and hope no more;
Seek not for truth, nor e'er aspire
To nurse that immaterial fire,
From whose most healthful warmth proceed
Each real joy and generous deed;
Which, once extinct, no toil or pain
Can kindle into life again,

To light the then unvarying eye,
To melt, in question or reply,
Those tones, so subtil and so sweet,
That none can look for, none repeat;
Which, self-impell'd, defy controul,--
They bear the signet of the soul;
And, as attendants of their flight,
Enforce persuasion and delight.

Words that an instant have reclin'd
Upon the pillow of the mind,
Or caught, upon their rapid way,
The beams of intellectual day,
Pour fresh upon the thirsty ear,
O'erjoy'd, and all awake to hear,
Proof that in other hearts is known
The secret language of our own.
They to the way-worn pilgrim bring
A draught from Rapture's sparkling spring;
And, ever welcome, are, when given,
Like some few scatter'd flowers from heaven;
Could such in earthly garlands twine,
To bloom by others less divine.

Where does this idle Minstrel stay?
Proud are the guests, august the day;
And princes of the realm attend
The triumph of their sovereign's friend;--
Triumph of stratagem and fight
Gain'd o'er a young and gallant knight,
Who, the last fort compell'd to yield,
Perish'd, despairing, in the field.

The Norman Chief, whose sudden blow
Had laid fair England's banner low;
Spite of resistance firm and bold
Secur'd the latest, surest hold
Its sceptre touch'd across the main,
Important, difficult to gain,
Easy against her to retain;--
Baron de Brehan--seem'd to stand
An alien in his native land;
One whom no social ties endear'd
Except his child; and she appear'd
Unconsciously to prompt his toil,--
Unconsciously to take the spoil
Of hate and treason; and, 'twas said,
The pillage of a kinsman dead,
Whom, for his large domain, he slew:
'Twas whisper'd only,--no one knew.
At tale of murderous deed, his ear
No startling summons seem'd to hear;
Yet should some sudden theme intrude
Of friend betray'd--ingratitude;--
Or treacherous counsel--follies nurs'd
In ardent minds, who, dying, curs'd
The guileful author of their woes;
His troubled look would then disclose
Some secret anguish, inward care,
Which mutely, sternly, said, Forbear!

He spake of policy and right,
Of bold exploits in recent fight,--
Of interest, and the common weal,
Of distant empire, slow appeal.

Skill'd to elicit thoughts unknown
In other minds, and hide his own,
His brighter eye, in darting round
Their purposes and wishes found.
Praises, and smiles, and promise play'd
Around his speech; which yet convey'd
No meaning, when, the moment past,
Memory retold her stores at last.

Courtiers were there, the old and young,
Of high and haughty lineage sprung;
And jewell'd matrons: some had been,
Erewhile, spectators of a scene
Like this, with mien and manners gay;
Who now, their hearts consum'd away,
Held all the pageant in disdain,
And seem'd to smile and speak with pain.
Of such were widows, who deplor'd
Husbands long lost, but still ador'd;
To grace their children, fierce and proud,
Like martyrs led into the crowd:
Mothers, their sole remaining stay,
In some dear son, late snatch'd away;
Whose duty made them better brook
Their lords' high tone and careless look;
Whose praises had awaken'd pride
In bosoms dead to all beside.

Warriors, infirm with battles grown,
Were there, in languid grandeur thrown
On the low bench, who seem'd to say,
"Our mortal vigour wanes away;"
And gentle maid, with aspect meek,
While cloud-like blushes cross her cheek,
Restless awaits the Minstrel's power
To dispossess the present hour,
And by a spirit-seizing charm,
Her thoughts employ, her fancy warm,
And snatch her from the mute distress
Of conscious, breathless bashfulness.

Young knights, who never tamely wait,
Crowd in the porch, or near the gate,
By quick return, and sudden throng,
Announcing the expected song.

The Minstrel comes, and, by command,
Before the nobles of the land,
In her poor order's simple dress,
Grac'd only by the native tress,
A flowing mass of yellow'd light,
Whose bold swells gleam with silver bright,
And dove-like shadows sink from sight.
Those long, soft locks, in many a wave
Curv'd with each turn her figure gave;
Thick, or if threatening to divide,
They still by sunny meshes hide;
Eluding, by commingling lines,
Whatever severs or defines.

Amid the crowd of beauties there,
None were so exquisitely fair;
And, with the tender, mellow'd air,
The taper, flexile, polish'd limb,
The form so perfect, yet so slim,

And movement, only thought to grace
The dark and yielding Eastern race;
As if on pure and brilliant day
Repose, as soft as moonlight, lay.

Reluctant still she seem'd,--her feet
Sought slowly the appointed seat:
Her hand, oft lifting to her head,
She lightly o'er her forehead spread;
Then the unconscious motion check'd,
And, struggling with her own neglect,
Seem'd as she but by effort found
The presence of an audience round.

Meanwhile the murmurings died away
Which spake impatience of delay:
A pitying wonder, new and kind,
Arose in each beholder's mind:
They saw no scorn to meet reproof,
No arrogance to keep aloof;
Her air absorb'd, her sadden'd mien,
Combin'd the mourning, captive queen,
With her who at the altar stands
To raise aloft her spotless hands,
In meek and persevering prayer,
For such as falter in despair.
All that was smiling, bright, and gay,
Youth's show of triumph during May,
Its roseate crown, was snatch'd away!
Yet sorrows, which had come so soon,
Like tender morning dew repos'd,
O'er hope and joy as softly clos'd
As moist clouds on the light at noon.

Opprest by some heart-withering pang,
Upon her harp she seem'd to hang
Awhile o'erpower'd--then faintly sang:

"Demand no lay of long-past times;
Of foreign loves, or foreign crimes;
Demand no visions which arise
To Rapture's eager, tearless eyes!
Those who can travel far, I ween,
Whose strength can reach a distant scene,
And measure o'er large space of ground,
Have not, like me, a deadly wound!
Near home, perforce, alas, I stray,
Perforce pursue my destin'd way,
Through scenes where all my trouble grows,
And where alone remembrance flows.
Like evening swallows, still my wings
Float round in low, perpetual rings;
But never fold the plume for rest
One moment in the tranquil nest;
And have no strength to reach the skies,
No power, no hope, no wish to rise!

"Blame me not, Fancy, if I now restrain
Thy wandering footsteps, now thy wings confine;
Tis the decree of Fate,--it is not mine!
For I would let thee free and widely stray--
Would follow gladly, tend thee on thy way,
And never of the devious track complain,
Never thy wild and sportive flights disdain!
Though reasonless those graceful moods may be,

They still, alas! were passing sweet to me.

"Unhappy that I am, compell'd to bind
This murmuring captive! one who ever strove
By each endearing art to win my love;
Who, ever unoffending, ever bright,
Danc'd in my view, and pleas'd me to delight!
She scatter'd showers of lilies on my mind;
For, oh! so fair, so fresh, and so refin'd,
Her child-like offerings, without thorns to pain,
Without one canker'd wound, or earthly stain.

"And, _darling!_ as my trembling fingers twine
Those fetters round thee, they are wet with tears!
For the sweet playmate of my early years
I cannot thus afflict, nor thus resign
My equal liberty, and not repine!
For I had made thee, infant as thou art,
Queen of my hopes, my leisure, and my heart;
Given thee its happiest laugh, its sweetest tear,
And all I found or conquer'd every year.

"I blame me now I let thy sports offend
Old Time, and laid thy snare within his path
To make him falter, as it often hath;
For he grew angry soon, and held his breath,
And hurried on, in frightful league with Death,
To make the way through which my footsteps bend,
Late rich in all that social scenes attend,
A desert; and with thee I droop, I die,
Beneath the look of his malignant eye.

"Me do triumphant heroes call
To grace with harp their festal hall?
O! must my voice awake the song?—
My skill the artful tale prolong?
Yes! I am call'd—it is my doom!
Unhappily, ye know not whom,
Nor what, impatient ye demand!
How hostile now the fever'd hand,
Across these chords unwilling thrown,
To echo plainings of my own!
Little indeed can ye divine
What song ye ask who call for mine!

"Till now, before the courtly crowd
I humbly and I gaily bow'd;
The blush was not to shame allied
Which on my glowing cheek I wore;
No lowly seemings pain'd my pride,
My heart was laughing at the core;
And sometimes, as the stream of song
Bore me with eddying haste along,
My father's spirit would arise,
And speak strange meaning from these eyes,
At which a conscious cheek would quail,
A stern and lofty bearing fail:
Then could a chieftain condescend
In me to recognize his friend!
Then could a warrior low incline
His eye, when it encounter'd mine!
A tone can make the guilty start!
A glance can pierce the conscious heart,
Encountering memory in its flight,
Most waywardly! Such wounds are slight;

But I withdraw the painful light!

"Fair lords and princes! many a time
For you I wove my pictur'd rhyme;
Refin'd new thoughts and fancies crude
In deep and careful solitude;
'And, when my task was finish'd, came
To seek the meed of praise or blame;
While, even then, untir'd I strove
To serve beneath the yoke of love.
Whene'er I mark'd a fearful look,
When pride, or when resentment, spoke,
I bent the tenor of my strain,
And trembled lest it were in vain.
By many an undiscover'd wile
I brought the pallid lip to smile,
Clear'd the maz'd thought for ampler scope,
Sustain'd the flagging wings of hope;
And threw a mantle over care
Such as the blooming Graces wear!
I made the friend resist his pride,
Scarce aiming what he felt to hide
From other eyes, his own implor'd
That kindness were again restor'd.
As generous themes engag'd my tongue
In pleadings for the fond and young:
Towards his child the father leant,
In fast-subsiding discontent:
I made that father's claims be felt,
And saw the rash, the stubborn, melt;
Nay, once, subdued, a rebel knelt.

"Thus skill'd, from pity's warm excess,
The aching spirit to caress;
Profuse of her ideal wealth,
And rich in happiness and health,
An alien, class'd among the poor,
Unheeded, from her precious store,
Its best and dearest tribute brought;
The zeal of high, adventurous thought,
The tender awe in yielding aid,
E'en of its own soft hand afraid!
Stealing, through shadows, forth to bless,
Her venturous service knew no bound;
Yet shrank, and trembled, when success
Its earnest, fullest wishes crown'd!
This alien sinks, oppress'd with woe,
And have you nothing to bestow?
No language kind, to sooth or cheer?--
No soften'd voice,--no tender tear?--
No promise which may hope impart?
No fancy to beguile the heart;
To chace those dreary thoughts away,
And waken from this deep dismay!

"Is it that station, power, or pride,
Can human sympathies divide?
Or is she deem'd a thing of art,
Form'd only to enact a part,
Whose nice perceptions all belong
To modulated thought and song,
And, in fictitious feeling thrown,
Lie waste or callous in her own?

"Is it from poverty of soul;

Or does some fear some doubt, controul?
So round the heart strong fibres strain,
That it attempts to beat in vain?
Does palsy on your feelings hang,
Deaden'd by some severer pang?
If so, behold, my eyes o'erflow!
For, O! that anguish well I know!
When once that fatal stroke is given,--
When once that finest nerve is riven,
Our love, our pity, all are o'er;
We even sooth ourselves no more!

"Back, hurrying feelings! to the time
I learnt to clothe my thoughts in rhyme!
When, climbing up my father's knees,
I gaily sang, secure to please!
Rounded his pale and wasted cheek,
And won him, in his turn, to speak:
When, for reward, I closer prest,
And whisper'd much, and much carest;
With timorous eye, and head aside,
Half ask'd, and laugh'd, and then denied;
Ere I again petition made
To hear the often-told crusade.
How, knowing hardship but by name,
Misled by friendship and by fame,
His parents' wishes he disdain'd,
With zeal, nor real quite, nor feign'd;
And fought on many a famous spot;--
The suffering of a captive's lot;
My Georgian mother's daring flight;
The day's concealment, march by night;
Her death, when, touching Christian ground,
They deem'd repose and safety found:
How, on his arm, by night and day,
I, then a happy infant, lay,
And taught him not to mourn, but pray.
How, when, at length, he reach'd his home,
His heart foretold a gentle doom;
With tears of fondness in his eyes,
Hoping to cause a glad surprize;
Full of submission, pondering o'er
What he too lightly priz'd before;
The curse with tenfold vengeance fell.--
Those who had lov'd him once so well,
In whose indulgence perfect trust
Had still been wise, though most unjust,
Were in the grave!--Their hearts were cold!
His penitence might still be told--
Told to the winds! for few would hear,
Or, hearing, deem that tale sincere
His patrimony's lord denied,
Who, hardening in possession's pride,
Affirm'd the rightful owner died.

"A victim from devouring strife,
And slavery, return'd with life;
Possessions, honours, parents gone,
The very hand that urg'd him on,
Now, by its stern repelling, tore
The veil that former falsehood wore!

"When he first bar'd his heart before thy view,
Told all its inmost beatings--told them true;
Nay, e'en the pulse, the secret, trembling thrill,

On which the slightest touch alone would trill [Errata: kill];
While thou, with secret aim, collected art,
Didst wind around that bold, confiding heart,
And, in its warm and healthful breathings fling
A subtle poison, and a deadly sting!

"Where shall we else so fell a traitor find?
The wilful, hard misleader of the blind
And what can be the soul-perverter's meed,
Plotting to lure his friend to such a deed,
As made self-hatred on the conscience lay
That heavy weight she never moves away?
O! where the good man's inner barriers close
'Gainst the world's cruel judgments, and his foes
Enfolding truth, and prayer, and soul's repose,
Thine is a mournful numbness, or a din,
For many strong accusers lurk within!

"And, since this fatal period, in thine eyes
A shrewd and unrelaxing witness lies;
While, on the specious language of the tongue,
Deceit has hateful, warning accents hung;
And outrag'd nature, struggling with a smile,
Announces nought but discontent and guile;
Each trace of fair, auspicious meaning flown,
All that makes man by man belov'd and known.
Silence, indignant thought! forego thy sway!
Silence! and let me measure on my way!

"Soul-struck, and yielding to his fate,
My father left his castle gate.
'Thou,' he would cry, with flowing eyes,
'That moment wert the sacrifice!
Little, alas! avails to thee
Wealth, honours, titles, ancestry;
All lost by me! I dar'd to lift
On high thy welfare, as a gift!
To save thee, dearest, dar'd resign
Thy worldly good! it was not mine!
But, O! I felt around thee twin'd
My very self,--my heart and mind!
All that may chance is dead to me,
Save only as it touches thee!
Could self-infliction but atone
For one who lives in thee alone;
If my repentance and my tears
Could spare thy future smiling years,
The fatal curse should only rest
Upon this firm, though guilty breast?
Yet, tendering from thy vessel's freight
Offerings of such exceeding weight,
And free thee from one earthly chain!
Envy and over-weening hate
Would on thy orphan greatness wait;
Folly that supple nature bend
For parasites to scorn thy friend;
And pamper'd vanity incline
To wilful blindness such as mine!

"Thee to the altar yet I bring!
Hear me, my Saviour and my King!
Again I for my child resign
All worldly good! but make her thine!
Let her soft footsteps gently move,
Nor waken grief, nor injure love;

Carelessly trampling on the ground
That priceless gem, so rarely found;
That treasure, which, should angels guard,
Would all their vigilance reward!

"My mind refuses still to fear
She should be cold or insincere;
That aught like meanness should debase
One of our rash and wayward race,
No! most I dread intemperate pride,
Deaf ardour, reckless, and untried,
With firm controul and skilful rein,
Its hurrying fever to restrain!

"Others might wish their soul's delight
Should be most lovely to the sight;
And beauty vainly I ador'd,
Serv'd with my eye, my tongue, my sword;
Nay, let me not from truth depart!
Enshrin'd and worship'd it at heart.
Oft, when her mother fix'd my gaze,
Enwrapt, on bright perfection's blaze,
Hopes the imperious spell beguil'd,
Transcendant thus to see my child:
But now, for charms of form or face,
Save only purity and grace;
Save sweetness, which all rage disarms,
Would lure an infant to her arms
In instantaneous love; and make
A heart, like mine, with fondness ache;
I little care, so she be free
From such remorse as preys on me!"

"My dearest father!--Yet he grew
Profoundly anxious, as he knew
More of the dangers lurking round;
But I was on enchanted ground!
Delighted with my minstrel art,
I had a thousand lays by heart;
And while my yet unpractis'd tongue
Descanted on the strains I sung,
Still seeking treasure, like a bee,
I laugh'd and caroll'd, wild with glee!

"Delicious moments then I knew,
When the rough winds against me blew:
When, from the top of mountain steep,
I glanc'd my eye along the deep;
Or, proud the keener air to breathe,
Exulting saw the vale beneath.
When, launch'd in some lone boat, I sought
A little kingdom for my thought,
Within a river's winding cove,
Whose forests form a double grove,
And, from the water's silent flow,
Appear more beautiful below;
While their large leaves the lilies lave,
Or plash upon the shadow'd wave;
While birds, with darken'd pinions, fly
Across that still intenser sky;
Fish, with cold plunge, with startling leap,
Or arrow-flight across the deep;
And stilted insects, light-o-limb,
Would dimple o'er the even brim;
If, with my hand, in play, I chose

The cold, smooth current to oppose,
As fine a spell my senses bound
As vacant bosom ever found!

"And when I took my proudest post,
Near him on earth I valued most,
(No after-time could banish thence
A father's dear pre-eminence,)
And felt the kind, protecting charm,
The clasp of a paternal arm;
Felt, as instinctively it prest,
The sacred magnet of his breast,
'Gainst which I lean'd, and seem'd to grow,
With that deep fondness none can know,
Whom Providence does not assign
A parent excellent as mine!
That faith beyond, above mistrust,
That gratitude, so wholly just,
Each several, crowding claim forgot,
Whose source was light, without a blot;
No moment of unkindness shrouding,
No speck of anger overclouding:
An awful and a sweet controul,
A rainbow arching o'er the soul;
A soothing, tender thrill, which clung
Around the heart, while, all unstrung,
The thought was still, and mute the tongue!

"O! in that morn of life is given
To one so tun'd, a sumptuous dower!
Joys, which have flown direct from heaven,
And Graces, captive in her bower.

"Thoughts which can sail along the skies,
Or poise upon the buoyant air;
And make a peasant's soul arise
A monarch's mighty power to share.

"When all that we perceive below,
By land or sea, by night or day,
The past, the future, and the flow
Of present times, their tribute pay.

"Each bird, from cleft, from brake, or bower,
Bears her a blessing on its wings;
And every rich and precious flower
Its fragrance on her spirit flings.

"There's not a star that shines above
But pours on her a partial ray;
Endearments, like maternal love,
Her love to Nature's self repay.

"Faith, Hope, and Joy about her heart,
Close interlace the angel arm;
And with caresses heal the smart
Of every care, and every harm.

"Amid the wealth, amid the blaze
Of luxury and pomp around,
How poor is all the eye surveys
To what we know of fairy ground!"

She ceases, and her tears flow fast--
O! can this fit of softness last,

Which, so unlook'd for, comes to share
The sickly triumph of despair?
Upon the harp her head is thrown,
All round is like a vision flown;
And o'er a billowy surge her mind
Views lost delight left far behind.

THE LAY OF MARIE.

CANTO SECOND.

Some, fearing Marie's tale was o'er,
Lamented that they heard no more;
While Brehan, from her broken lay,
Portended what she yet might say.
As the untarrying minutes flew,
More anxious and alarm'd he grew.
At length he spake:--"We wait too long
The remnant of this wilder'd song!
And too tenaciously we press
Upon the languor of distress!
'Twere better, sure that hence convey'd,
And in some noiseless chamber laid,
Attentive care, and soothing rest,
Appeas'd the anguish of her breast."

Low was his voice, but Marie heard:
He hasten'd on the thing he fear'd.
She rais'd her head, and, with deep sighs,
Shook the large tear-drops from her eyes;
And, ere they dried upon her cheek,
Before she gather'd force to speak,
Convulsively her fingers play'd,
While his proud heart the prelude met,
Aiming at calmness, though dismay'd,
A loud, high measure, like a threat;
Soon sinking to that lower [Errata: slower] swell
Which love and sorrow know so well.

"How solemn is the sick man's room
To friends or kindred lingering near!
Poring on that uncertain gloom
In silent heaviness and fear!

"How sad, his feeble hand in thine,
The start of every pulse to share!
With painful haste each wish divine,
Yet fed the hopelessness of care!

"To turn aside the full-fraught eye,
Lest those faint orbs perceive the tear!
To bear the weight of every sigh,
Lest it should reach that wakeful ear!

"In the dread stillness of the night,
To lose the faint, faint sound of breath!
To listen in restrain'd affright,
To deprecate each thought of death!

"And, when a movement chas'd that fear,

And gave thy heart-blood leave to flow,
In thrilling awe the prayer to hear
Through the clos'd curtain murmur'd low!

"The prayer of him whose holy tongue
Had never yet exceeded truth!
Upon whose guardian care had hung
The whole dependence of thy youth!

"Who, noble, dauntless, frank and mild,
Was, for his very goodness, fear'd;
Belov'd with fondness like a child,
And like a blessed saint rever'd!

"I have known friends--but who can feel
The kindness such a father knew?
I serv'd him still with tender zeal,
But knew not then how much was due!

"And did not Providence ordain
That we should soon be laid as low,
No heart could such a stroke sustain,--
No reason could survive the blow!

"After that fatal trial came,
The world no longer was the same.
I still had pleasures:--who could live
Without the healing aid they give?
But, as a plant surcharg'd with rain,
When radiant sunshine comes again,
Just wakes from a benumbing trance,
I caught a feverish, fitful glance.
The dove, that for a weary time
Had mourn'd the rigour of the clime,
And, with its head beneath its wing,
Awaited a more genial spring,
Went forth again to search around,
And some few leaves of olive found,
But not a bower which could impart
Its interchange of light and shade;
Not that soft down, to warm the heart,
Of which her former nest was made.
Smooth were the waves, the ether clear,
Yet all was desert, cold, and drear!

"Affection, o'er thy clouded sky
In flocks the birds of omen fly;
And oft the wandering harpy, Care,
Must thy delicious viands share:
But all the soul's interior light,
All that is soothing, sweet, and bright,
All fragrance, softness, colour, glow,
To thee, as to the sun, we owe!

"Years past away! swift, varied years!
I learnt the luxury of tears;
And all the orphan's wretched lot,
'Midst those she pleas'd and serv'd, forgot.

"By turns applauded and despis'd,
Till one appear'd who duly priz'd;
Bound round my heart a welcome chain,
And earthward lur'd its hopes again;
When, careless of all worldly weal,
By Fancy only taught to feel,

My raptur'd spirit soar'd on high,
With momentary power to fly;
Or sang its deep, indignant moan,
With swells of anguish, when alone.

"Yet lovely dreams could I evoke
Of future happiness and fame--
I did not bow to kiss the yoke,
But welcom'd every joy that came.

"Often would self-complacence spread
Harmonious halos round my head;
And all my being own'd awhile
The warm diffusion of her smile.

"One morn they call'd me forth to sing
Fore our then liege, the English king.
Thy guest, my Lord de Semonville,
His gracious presence was the seal
Of favour to a servant true,
To boasted faith and fealty due!

"It never suits a royal ear
Prowess of foreign lands to hear;
And, leaving tales of Charlemagne
For British Arthur's earlier reign,
I, preluding with praise, began
The feats of that diviner man;
Let loose my soul in fairy land,
Gave wilder licence to my hand;
And, learn'd in chivalrous renown,
By song and story handed down,
Painted my knights from those around,
But placed them on poetic ground.
The ample brow, too smooth for guile;
The careless, fearless, open smile;
The shaded and yet arching eye,
At once reflective, kind, and shy;
The undesigning, dauntless look,--
Became to me a living book.
I read the character conceal'd,
Flash'd on by chance, or never known
Even to bosoms like its own;
Shrinking before a step intrude;
Touch, look, and whisper, all too rude;
Unsun'd and fairest when reveal'd!
The first in every noble deed,
Most prompt to venture and to bleed!
Such hearts, so veil'd with angel wings,
Such cherish'd, tender, sacred things,
I since discover'd many a time,
O Britain! in thy temper'd clime;
In dew, in shade, in silence nurs'd,
For truth and sentiment athirst.

"As seas, with rough, surrounding wave,
Islands of verdant freshness save
From rash intruder's waste and spoil;--
As mountains rear their heads on high,
Present snow summits to the sky,
And weary patient feet with toil,
To screen some sweet, secluded vale,
And warm the air its flowers inhale;--
Reserve warns off approaching eyes
From where her choicer Eden lies.

"Such are the English knights, I cried,
Who all their better feelings hide;
Who muffle up their hearts with care,
To hide the virtues nestling there,
Who neither praise nor blame can bear.

"My hearers, though completely steel'd
For all the terrors of the field;
Mail'd for the arrow and the lance,
Bore not unharm'd my smiling glance;
At other times collected, brave,
Recoiled when I that picture gave;
As if their inmost heart, laid bare,
Shrank from the bleak, ungenial air.

"Proud of such prescience, on I went;--
The youthful monarch was content.
'Edgar de Langton, take this ring--
No! hither the young Minstrel bring:
Ourself can better still dispense
The honour and the recompence.'
I came, and, trembling, bent my knee.
He wonder'd that my looks were meek,
That blushes burnt upon my cheek!
'We would our little songstress see!
Remove those tresses! raise thy head!
Say, where is former courage fled,
'That all must now thy face infold?
At distance they were backward roll'd.
Whence, then, this most unfounded fear?
Are we so strange, so hateful here?'

"I strove in vain to lift my eyes,
And made some indistinct replies;
When one, more courteous and more kind,
Stepp'd forth to save my fainting mind.
'My liege, have pity! for, in truth,
It is too hard upon her youth.
Though so alert and fleet in song,
The strain was high, the race was long;
And she before has never seen
A monarch, save the fairy queen:
But does the lure of thought obey
As falcons their appointed way;
Train'd to one end, and wild as those
If aught they know not interpose.
Vain then is strength, and skill is vain,
Either to lead them or restrain.
The eye-lid closes, and the heart,
Low-sinking, plays a traitor's part;
While wings, of late so firmly spread,
Hang flagg'd and powerless as the dead!
With courts familiar from our birth,
Is it fit subject for our mirth,
That thus awakening from her theme,
Where she through air and sea pursues,
And all things governs, all subdues,
(Like fetter'd captive in a dream,)
Blindly to tread on unknown land,
Without a guide or helping hand,
No previous usage to befriend,
(As well we might an infant lend
Our eyes' experience, ear, or touch!)
Can we in reason wonder much,

Her steps are tottering and unsure
Where we have learnt to walk secure?
Is it not true, what I have told?
Her paus'd, my features to behold--
Earl William paus'd: across his mien
A strong and sudden change was seen,
The courtier bend, protecting tone.
And smile of sympathy, were gone.
Abrupt his native accents broke,
And his lips trembled as he spoke.

"How thus can Memory, in its flight,
On wings of gossamer alight,
Nor showing aim, nor leaving trace,
From a poor damsel's living face
To features of a brave, dead knight!
In eyes so young, and so benign,
What is it speaks of Palestine?
Of toils in early life I prov'd,
And of a comrade dearly lov'd!
'Tis true, he, like this maid, was young,
And gifted with a tuneful tongue!
His looks [Errata: locks], like her's, were bright and fair,
But light and laughing was his eye;
The prophecy of future care
In those thin, helmet lids we spy,
Veiling mild orbs, of changeful hue,
Where auburn half subsides in blue!
Lord Fauconberg, canst thou divine
What is the curve, or what the line,
That makes this girl, like lightning, send
Looks of our long lamented friend?
If Richard liv'd, that sorcery spell
Quickly his lion-heart would quell:
He never could her glance descry,
And any wish'd-for boon deny!
She's weeping too!--most strangely wrought
By workings of another's thought!
She knows no English; yet I speak
That language, and her paling cheek
With watery floods is overcast.--
Fair maid, we talk of times long past;
A friend we often mourn in vain--
A knight in distant battle slain,
Whose bones had moulder'd in the earth
Full many a year before thy birth.
He fed our ears with songs of old,
And one was of a heart of gold,--
A native ditty I would fain,
But never yet could hear again.
It spoke of friendship like his own,
Once only in existence known.
My prime of life the blessing crost,
And with it life's first charm I lost!"

"Chieftain, allow me, on my knee
To sing that English song to thee!
For then I never dare to stand,
Nor take the harp within my hand;
Sacred it also is to me!
And it should please thy fancy well,
Since dear the lips from whence it fell;
'And dear the language which conveys
The only theme of real praise!
O! if in very truth thou art

A mourner for that loyal heart,
A lowly minstrel maid forgive,
Who strives to make remembrance live!

SONG.

"Betimes my heritage was sold
To buy this heart of solid gold.
Ye all, perchance, have jewels fine,
But what are such compar'd to mine?
O! they are formal, poor, and cold,
And out of fashion when they're old;--
But this is of unchanging ore,
And every day is valued more.
Not all the eye could e'er behold
Should purchase back this heart of gold.

"How oft its temper has been tried!
Its noble nature purified!
And still it from the furnace came
Uninjur'd by the subtil flame.
Like truth itself, pale, simple, pure,
Yielding, yet fitted to endure,--
No rust, no tarnish can arise,
To hide its lustre from our eyes;
And this world's choicest gift I hold,
While I can keep my heart of gold.

"Whatever treasure may be lost,
Whatever project may be crost,
Whatever other boon denied,
The amulet I long have tried
Has still a sweet, attractive power
To draw the confidential hour,--
That hour for weakness and for grief,
For true condolment, full belief!
O! I can never feel bereft,
While one possession shall be left;
That which I now in triumph hold,
This dear, this cherish'd heart of gold!

"Come, all who wish to be enroll'd!
Our order is, the heart of gold.
The vain, the artful, and the nice,
Can never pay the weighty price;
For they must selfishness abjure,
Have tongue, and hand, and conscience pure;
Suffering for friendship, never grieve,
But, with a god-like strength, believe
In the oft absent power of truth,
As they have seen it in their youth.
Ye who have grown in such a mould
Are worthy of the heart of gold!"

"Ceasing, and in the act to rise,
A voice exclaim'd, 'Receive the prize!
Earl William, let me pardon crave,
Thus yielding what thy kindness gave!
But with such strange, intense delight,
This maiden fills my ear, my sight;
I long so ardently to twine
In her renown one gift of mine;
That having but a die to cast,

Lest our first meeting prove our last,
I would ensure myself the lot
Not to be utterly forgot!
And this, my offering, here consign,
Worthy, because it once was thine!
Then, maiden, from a warrior deign
To take this golden heart and chain!
Thy order's emblem! and afar
Its light shall lead me, like a star!
If thou, its mistress, didst requite
With guerdon meet each chosen knight;
If from that gifted hand there came
A badge of such excelling fame,
The broider'd scarf might wave in vain,
Unenvied might a rival gain,
Amid assembled peers, the crown
Of tourney triumph and renown;
For me its charm would all be gone,
E'en though a princess set it on!

"I bow'd my thanks, and quick withdrew,
Glad to escape from public view;
Laden with presents, and with praise,
Beyond the meed of former days.
But that on which I gaz'd with pride,
Which I could scarcely lay aside,
Even to close my eyes for rest;
(I wear it now upon my breast,
And there till death it shall remain!)
Was this same golden heart and chain!
The peacock crown, with all its eyes,
Its emerald, jacinth, sapphire dyes,
When first, irradiate o'er my brow,
Wav'd its rich plumes in gleaming flow,
Did not so deep a thrill impart,
So soften, so dilate my heart!
No praise had touch'd me, as it fell,
Like his, because I saw full well,
Honour and sweetness orb'd did lie
Within the circlet of his eye!
Integrity which could not swerve,
A judgment of that purer nerve,
Fearing itself, and only bound
By truth and love to all around:
Which dared not feign, and scorn'd to vaunt,
Nor interest led, nor power could daunt;
Acting as if it mov'd alone
In sight of the Almighty's throne.

"His graceful form my Fancy caught,--
It was the same she always brought,
When legends mentioned knights of old,
The courteous, eloquent, and bold.
The same dark locks his forehead grac'd,
A crown by partial Nature plac'd,
With the large hollows, and the swells,
And short, close, tendril twine of shells.
Though grave in aspect, when he smil'd,
'Twas gay and artless as a child,
With him expression seem'd a law,--
You only Nature's dictates saw;
But they in full perfection wrought
Of generous feeling, varied thought,--
All that can elevate or move,
That we admire, esteem, and love!

"Thus, when it pleas'd the youthful king,
Who wish'd yet more to hear me sing,
That I should follow o'er the main,
In good Earl William's sober train,
As slow we linger'd on the seas,
I inly blest each wayward breeze;
For still the graceful knight was near,
Prompt to discourse, relate, and hear:
The spirit had that exercise,
The fine perceptions' play,
That perish with the worldly wise,
The torpid, and the gay.

"In the strings of their lyres as the poets of old
Fresh blossoms were used to entwine;
As the shrines of their gods were enamell'd with gold,
And sparkling with gems from the mine:

"So, grac'd with delights that arise in the mind,
As through flowers, the language should flow!
While the eye, where we fancy all soul is enshrin'd,
With divine emanations should glow!

"The voice, or the look, gifted thus, has a charm
Remembrance springs onward to greet;
And thought, like an angel, flies, living and warm,
When announcing the moment to meet!

"And it was thus when Eustace spoke,
Thus brightly his ideas glanc'd,
Met mine, and smil'd as they advanc'd,
For all his fervour I partook,--
Pour'd out my spirit in each theme,
And follow'd every waking dream!
Now in Fancy's airy play,
Near at hand, and far away,
All that was sportive, wild, and gay!
Now led by Pity to deplore
Hearts that can ache and bleed no more,
We roam'd long tales of sadness o'er!
Now, prompted by achievements higher,
We caught the hero's, martyr's fire!
Who, listening to an angel choir,
Rapt and devoted, following still
Where duty or religion led,
The mind prepar'd, subdued the will,
Bent their grand purpose to fulfil:
Conquer'd, endur'd, or meekly bled!
Nor wonder'd we, for we were given,
Like them, to zeal, to truth, and heaven.

"Receding silently from view,
Freedom, unthought of, then withdrew;
We neither mark'd her as she flew,
Nor ever had her absence known
From care or question of our own.
At court, emotion or surprise
Reveal'd the truth to other eyes.
The pride of England's nobles staid
Too often near the minstrel maid;
And many in derision smil'd,
To see him pay a peasant's child,
For such they deem'd me, deep respect,
While birth and grandeur met neglect.

Soon, sway'd by duty more than wealth,
He listen'd and he look'd by stealth;
And I grew careless in my lays;
Languish'd for that exclusive praise.
Yet, conscious of an equal claim,
Above each base or sordid aim,
From wounded feeling and from pride,
My pain I coldly strove to hide:
And when, encounter'd by surprize,
Rapture rose flashing in his eyes,
My formal speech and careless air
Would call a sudden anger there.

"Reserv'd and sullen we became,
Tenacious both, and both to blame.
Yet often an upbraiding look
Controul'd the sentence as I spoke;
Prompt and direct its flight arose,
But sunk or waver'd at the close.
Often, beneath his softening eye,
I felt my resolution die;
And, half-reluctingly, forgot
His splendid and my humble lot.

"Sometimes a sudden fancy came,
That he who bore my father's name,
Broken in spirit and in health,
Was weary of ill-gotten wealth.
I to the cloister saw him led,
Saw the wide cowl upon his head;
Heard him, in his last dying hour,
Warn others from the thirst of power;
Adjure the orphan of his friend
Pardon and needful aid to lend,
If heaven vouchsaf'd her yet to live;
For, could she pity and forgive,
'Twould wing his penitential prayer
With better hope of mercy there!
Then did he rank and lands resign,
With all that was in justice mine;
And I, pretending to be vain,
Return'd the world its poor disdain,
But smil'd on Eustace once again!

"Thus vision after vision flew,
Leaving again before my view
That [Errata: The] hollow scene, the scornful crowd,
To which that heart had never bow'd,
Whose tenderness I hourly fed;
While thus I to its nursling said;--

"Be silent, _Love!_ nor from my lip
In faint or hurried language speak!
Be motionless within my eye,
And never wander to my cheek!
Retir'd and passive thou must be,
Or truly I shall banish thee!

"Thou art a restless, wayward sprite,
So young, so tender, and so fair,
I dare not trust thee from my sight,
Nor let thee breathe the common air!
Home to my heart, then, quickly flee,
It is the only place for thee!

"And hush thee, sweet one! in that cell,
For I will whisper in thine ear
Those tales that Hope and Fancy tell,
Which it may please thee best to hear!
I will not, may not, set thee free—
I die if aught discover thee!"

Where are the plaudits, warm and long,
That erst have follow'd Marie's song?
The full assenting, sudden, loud,
The buz of pleasure in the crowd!
The harp was still, but silence reign'd,
Listening as if she still complain'd:
For Pity threw her gentle yoke
Across Impatience, ere he spoke;
And Thought, in pondering o'er her strains,
Had that cold state he oft maintains.
But soon the silence seem'd to say,
"Fair mourner, reassume thy lay!"
And in the chords her fingers stray'd;
For aching Memory found relief
In mounting to the source of grief;
A tender symphony she play'd,
Then bow'd, and thus, unask'd, obey'd.

The Lay of Marie

CANTO THIRD.

"Careless alike who went or came,
I seldom ask'd the stranger's name,
When such a being came in view
As eagerly the question drew.
'The Lady Osvalde,' some one cried,
'Sir Eustace' late appointed bride,
His richest ward the king's behest
Gives to the bravest and the best.'

"Enchantments, wrought by pride and fear,
Made me, though mute, unmov'd appear.
My eye was quiet, and the while
My lip maintain'd a steady smile.
It cost me much, alas! to feign;
But while I struggled with the pain,
With beauty stole upon my sight
An inward feeling of delight.

"Long did the silken lashes lie
Upon a dark and brilliant eye;
Bright the wild rose's finest hue
O'er a pure cheek of ivory flew.
Her smile, all plaintive and resign'd,
Bespoke a gentle, suffering mind;
And e'en her voice, so clear and faint,
Had something in it of complaint.
Her delicate and slender form,
Like a vale-lily from the storm,
Seem'd pensively to shrink away,
More timid in a crowd so gay.
Large jewels glitter'd in her hair;
And, on her neck, as marble fair,

Lay precious pearls, in countless strings;
Her small, white hands, emboss'd with rings,
Announc'd high rank and amplest wealth,
But neither freedom, power, nor health.

"Near her Sir Eustace took his stand,
With manner sad, yet soft and bland;
Spoke oft, but her replies were tame;
And soon less frequent both became.
Their converse seem'd by labour wrought,
Without one sweet, free-springing thought;
Without those flashes of delight
Which make it tender, deep, or bright!
It was not thus upon the sea
He us'd to look and talk with me!
Not thus, when, lost to all around,
His haughty kinsmen saw and frown'd!
Then all unfelt the world's controul,--
Its rein lay lightly o'er his soul;
Far were its prides and cautions hurl'd,
And Thought's wide banner flew unfurl'd.

"Yet we should do fair Osvalde wrong
To class her with the circling throng:
Her mind was like a gentle sprite,
Whose wings, though aptly form'd for flight,
From cowardice are seldom spread;
Who folds the arms, and droops the head;
Stealing, in pilgrim guise along,
With needless staff, and vestment grey,
It scarcely trills a vesper song
Monotonous at close of day.
Cross but its path, demanding aught,
E'en what its pensive mistress sought,
Though forward welcoming she hied,
And its quick footstep glanc'd aside.

"Restraint, alarms, and solitude,
Her early courage had subdu'd;
Fetter'd her movements, looks, and tongue,
While on her heart more weighty hung
Each griev'd resentment, doubt, and pain,
Each dread of anger or disdain.
A deeper sorrow also lent
The sharpen'd pang of discontent;
For unconceal'd attachment prov'd
Destructive to the man she lov'd.

"Owning, like her, an orphan's doom,
He had not that prescriptive home
Which wealth and royal sanction buys;
No powerful friends, nor tender ties;--
No claims, save former promise given,
Whose only witness was in heaven;
And promise takes a slender hold,
Where all is selfish, dull, and cold.

"Slowly that bloomless favour grew,
Before his stern protectors knew
The secret which arous'd disdain.
Declaring that he did but feign,
They, in unpitying vengeance, hurl'd
A sister's offspring on the world.
Thus outrag'd, pride's corroding smart,
The fever of a throbbing heart,

Impell'd him first to wander round,
And soon to leap that barrier ground,
And seek the arch'd, embowering way,
In which her steps were wont to stray.

"No sleep his heavy eyes could close,
Nor restless memory find repose,
Nor hope a plan on which to rest,
In the wild tumult of a breast
With warring passions deeply fraught.
To see her was his only thought;
Feel once again the tones that sprung
So oft to that endearing tongue,
Flow on his heart; desponding, faint,
But too indignant for complaint;
Say how completely he resign'd
All former influence o'er her mind,
Where it was better to destroy
Each vestige of their days of joy.
To breathe her name he would not dare,
Except in solitude and prayer!
'Beyond belief I love, adore,
But never will behold thee more!
Thus thinking o'er each purpose high,
Tears gather'd blinding in his eye;
And bitter, uncontroul'd regret
Exclaim'd, 'Why have we ever met?'

"These conflicts and these hopes were fled;
Alas! poor youth! his blood, was shed,
Before the feet of Osvalde trod
Again on the empurpled sod.
No voice had dar'd to tell the tale;
But she had many a boding thrill,
For dumb observance watch'd her still;
For laughter ceas'd whene'er she came,
And none pronounc'd her lover's name!
When wilfully she sought this spot,
Shudderings prophetic mark'd his lot;
She look'd! her maiden's cheek was pale!
And from the hour did ne'er depart
That deadly tremor from her heart.
Pleasure and blandishment were vain;
Deaf to persuasion's dulcet strain,
It never reach'd her mind again.

"Arise, lovely mourner! thy sorrows give o'er,
Nor droop so forlornly that beautiful head!
Thy sighs art unheard by the youth they deplore,
And those warm-flowing tears all unfelt by the dead.

"Then quit this despondence, sweet Osvalde! be gay!
See open before thee the gates of delight!
Where the Hours are now lingering on tiptoe, away!
They view thee with smiles, and are loth to take flight.

"See the damsels around thee, how joyous they are!
How their eyes sparkle pleasure whenever they meet!
What sweet flowers are entwin'd in their long, floating hair!
How airy their movements, how nimble their feet!

"O! bear her from hence! when she sees them rejoice,
Still keener the pain of her agony burns;
And when Joy carols by, with a rapturous voice,
To hopeless Remembrance more poignantly turns.

"Thus often has her bosom bled;
Thus have I seen her fainting led
From feasts intended to dispel
The woeful thoughts she nurs'd so well.
And must she, by the king's command,
To Eustace plight that fever'd hand?
Proud, loyal as he is, can he,
A victim to the same decree,
Receive it, while regretting me?
For that poor, withering heart, resign
The warm, devoted faith of mine!

"Have I, too, an allotted task?
What from the Minstrel do they ask?
A nimble finger o'er the chords,
A tongue replete with gracious words!
Alas! the tribute they require,
Truth, sudden impulse, should inspire;
And from the senseless, subject lyre,
Such fine and mellow music flow,
The skill that forms it should not know
Whence the delicious tones proceed;
But, lost in rapture's grateful glow,
Doubt its own power, and cry, 'Indeed,
Some passing angel sweeps the strings,
Wafting from his balsamic wings
The sweetest breath of Eden bowers,
Tones nurs'd and hovering there in flowers,
Have left their haunts to wander free,
Linger, alight, and dwell on thee!'

"In Osvalde's porch, where, full in bloom,
The jasmine spread its rich perfume;
And, in thick clustering masses, strove
To hide the arch of stone above;
While many a long and drooping spray
Wav'd up, and lash'd the air in play;
Was I ordain'd my harp to place,
The pair with bridal strains to grace.

"The royal will,--and what beside?
O! what I since have lost,--my pride,
Forbade the wonted song to fail:
I met him with a cheerful hail.
I taught my looks, my lips, to feign
I bade my hand its task sustain;
And when he came to seek the bride,
Her rival thus, unfaltering, cried:--

"Approach! approach, thou gallant knight!
England's first champion in the fight,
Of grace and courtesy the flower,
Approach the high-born Osvalde's bower!
And forth let manly valour bring
Youth's timid meekness, beauty's spring!

"Thou darling of a vassal host,
Thy parents' stay, thy kinsman's boast;
Thou favourite in a monarch's eyes,
Whose gracious hand awards the prize;
Thee does the brightest lot betide,
The best domain, the fairest bride!"

"Mine sunk beneath the mournful look

Which glanc'd disdainful as I spoke;
And, when his step past hurrying by,
And when I heard his struggling sigh,
A moment on my quailing tongue
The speech constrain'd of welcome hung;
But in the harp's continuous sound
My wandering thoughts I quickly found.

"Haste on! and here thy duteous train
In rapt expectance shall remain;
Till, with thee, brilliant as a gem
Set in a kingdom's diadem,
Thy lovely mistress shall appear!
O! hasten! we await thee here!"

"Again did that upbraiding eye
Check my false strain in passing by;
And its concentrated meaning fell
Into my soul:--It was not well
To triumph thus, though but in show;
To chant the lay that joyance spoke,
To wear the gay and careless look.--
The ardent and the tender know
What pain those self-reproaches brought,
When conscience took the reins of thought
Into her hand, avenging more
All that she seem'd to prompt before.
O tyrant! from whose stern command
No act of mine was ever free,
How oft wouldst thou a censor stand
For what I did to pleasure thee!
The well-propp'd courage of my look,
The sportive language, airy tone,
To wounded love and pride bespoke
A selfish hardness not my own!
And only lulling secret pain,
I seem'd to fling around disdain.

"To him, with warm affections crost,
Who, owning happiness was lost,
Had said, 'Dear maiden, were I free,
They would not let me think of thee;
The only one who on my sight
Breaks lovely as the morning light;
Whom my heart bounding springs to greet,
Seeks not, but always hopes to meet;
With eager joy unlocks its store,
Yet ever pines to tell thee more!'
To him, should feign'd indifference bring
A killing scorn, a taunting sting?
To Osvalde, drooping and forlorn,
A flower fast fading on the stem,
All exultation seem'd like scorn,
For what was hope and joy to them?
As with awakening judgment came
These feelings of remorse and shame,
With the throng'd crowd, the bustling scene,
Did deep abstractions intervene,
O'er yielding effort holding sway,
As, humbled, I pursued my way.

"The festive flowers, the incens'd air,
The altar taper's reddening glare;
The pausing, slow-advancing pair,
Her fainter, his most watchful air;

The vaulted pile, the solemn rite,
Impress'd, then languish'd on my sight;
And all my being was resign'd
To that strong ordeal, where the mind,
Summon'd before a heavenly throne,
Howe'er surrounded, feels alone.
When, bow'd in dust all earthly pride,
All earthly power and threats defied,
Mortal opinion stands as nought
In the clear'd atmosphere of thought;
And selfish care, and worldly thrall,
And mean repining, vanish all.
When prayers are pour'd to God above,
His eyes send forth their beams of love;
Darkness forsakes our mental sky,
And, demon-like, our passions fly.
The holy presence, by its stay
Drives failings, fears, and woes away;
Refines, exalts, our nature draws
To share its own eternal laws
Of pure benevolence and rest,
The future portion of the blest--
Their constant portion! Soon this flow
Of life I lost--recall'd below:
From prayers for them recall'd. Around,
A sudden rush, of fearful sound,
Smote on my ear; of voices crying,
'The bride, the Lady Osvalde dying!
Give place! make room!' the hurrying press
Eustace alarm'd; and, in distress,
Calling for air, and through the crowd
Which an impeded way allow'd,
Forcing slow progress; bearing on
Her pallid form; when, wholly gone
You might have deem'd her mortal breath,
Cold, languid, motionless as death,
I saw before my eyes advance,
And 'woke, astounded, from my trance.

"The air reviv'd her--but again
She left not, for the social train,
The stillness of her chamber;--ne'er
Its threshold pass'd, but on her bier:
Spoke but to one who seem'd to stand
A near, and took his viewless hand,
To promise, let whate'er betide,
She would not be another's bride.
Then, pleading as for past offence,
Cried out aloud, 'They bore me hence!
My feet, my lips, refus'd to move,
To violate the vows of love!
My sense recoil'd, my vision flew,
Almost before I met thy view!
Almost before I heard thee cry
Perfidious Osvalde! look and die!

"Oppose them? No! I did not dare!
I am not as a many are,
Ruling themselves: my spirits fly,
My force expires before reply.
Instinctively a coward, free
In speech, in act, I could not be
With any in my life, but thee!
Nor strength, nor power do I possess,
Except, indeed, to bear distress!

Except to pour the aching sigh,
Which only can my pain relieve;
Inhuman ye who ask me why,
And pause, to wonder that I grieve:
Mine are the wounds which never close,
Mine is a deep, untiring care;
A horror flying from repose,
A weight the sickening soul must bear.
The tears that from these eyelids flow,
The sad confusion of my brain,
All waking phantoms of its woe,
Your anger, and the world's disdain,--
Seek not to sooth me!--they are sent
This feeble frame and heart to try!
It is establish'd, be content!
They never leave me till I die!

"So little here is understood,
So little known the great and good,
The deep regret that Eustace prov'd,
Brought home conviction that he lov'd
To many: others thought, her dower,
The loss of lordships, wealth, and power,
Full cause for sorrow; and the king
Hop'd he might consolation bring,
And bind a wavering servant o'er,
(Not found too loyal heretofore,)
By linking his sole daughter's fate
In wedlock with an English mate--
His favourite too! whose own domain
Spread over valley, hill, and plain;
Whose far-trac'd lineage did evince
A birth-right worthy of a prince;
Whose feats of arms, whose honour, worth,
Were even nobler than his birth;
Who, in his own bright self, did bring
A presence worthy of a king--
A form to catch and charm the eye,
Make proud men gracious, ladies sigh;
The boldest, wisest, and the best,
Greater than each presuming guest;--
I speak from judgment, not from love,--
In all endowments far above
Who tastes this day of festal cheer,
And whom his death assembles here!

"That he is known those look avow,
The mantling cheek, the knitting brow:
I could not hope it did he live,
But now, O! now, ye must forgive!
Most recreant they who dare offend
One who has lost her only friend!
De Stafford's widow here appears--
For him, my Eustace, flow these tears!
Ye may not blame me! ye have wives,
Who yet may sorrow for your lives!
Who, in the outset of their grief,
Upon a father's neck may spring;
Or find in innocence relief,
And to a cherish'd infant cling;
Or thus, like me, forlornly shed
Their lonely wailing o'er the dead!

"Can eyes that briny torrents steep,
Others in strong subjection keep?

Yes! here are some that mine obey,
And, self-indignant at the sway
I hold upon them, turn away!
Some, too, who have no cause for shame,
Whom even the injur'd cannot blame,
Now here, now there, above, below,
Their looks of wild avoidance throw!
Nay, gentle cousin, blush not so!
And do not, pray thee, rise to go!
I am bewilderd with my woe;
But hear me fairly to the end,
I will not pain thee, nor offend.
O no! I would thy favour win;
For, when I die, as next of kin,
So 'reft am I of human ties,
It is thy place to close my eyes!

"With state and wealth to thee I part,
But could not with De Stafford's heart!
Nor could I mute and prudent be
When all at once I found 'twas thee,
Doom'd ever, in thy own despite,
To take my rank, usurp my right!
I told, alas! my father's name,
The noble stock from which I came:--
'Marie de Brehan, sounds as well,
Perhaps,' I cried, 'as Isabel!
And were the elder branch restor'd,
(My grandsire was the rightful lord,)
I, in my injur'd father's place,
Those large domains, that name would grace.'

"I never saw a joy so bright,
So full, so fledg'd with sparkling light,
As that which on the instant flew
To his quick eye, when Eustace knew
He had not yielded to a yoke
Which prudence blam'd, or reason broke.
'O! trebly blest this hour,' he cried;
'I take not now another bride!
I bow'd to duty and to pride;
But, here I pledge my solemn vow,
To wealth alone I will not bow!
The only offspring of a race
No misalliance did disgrace;
Nurtur'd, school'd, fashion'd by their laws,
Not wishing an exceptive clause,
Till thee, my only choice, I met;
And then, with useless, deep regret,
I found in birth, and that alone,
Thou wert unworthy of a throne!
My ancestors appear'd too nice;
Their grandeur bore too high a price,
If, with it, on the altar laid,
Freedom and happiness were paid!
Yet, could I give my father pain,
Or treat those lessons with disdain,
I heard a child upon his knee;
And, at the present, knew to be
Entwin'd with every vital part?
To scorn them were to break his heart!
My mother too, though meek and kind,
Possessing such a stately mind,
That once perceiving what was fit,
If 'twere to die, must still submit;

Knowing no question in the right,
Would not have borne me in her sight;
Though quick her sands of life would run,
Deserting, angry with her son!
Yet noble both, by honour bound,
To take no other vantage ground,
They will not use a meaner plea,
Nor sordid reasons urge to me!
Good and high-minded, they will yield:
I shall be victor in that field;
And for my sovereign, we shall find
Some inlet to his eager mind;
At once not rashly all disclose,
His plans or bidding to oppose,--
That his quick temper would not brook;
But I will watch a gracious look,
And foster an auspicious hour,
To try both love and reason's power.
Zealous I cannot fail to be,
Thou canst not guess to what degree,
Dear Marie, when I plead for thee!

"That the result was plain, I knew,
For I had often heard him sue,
And never known a boon denied.
In secret I became his bride:
But heaven the union disapprov'd--
The father he so truly lov'd,
Before this first offence was told,
Though neither sick, infirm, or old,
Without a moment's warning, died!

"This seal'd his silence for awhile;
For, till he saw his mother smile,
Till time the cloud of woe should chase
From her pale, venerable face,
He felt the tale he dar'd not break,--
He could not on the subject speak!
And oh! the gentle mourn so long,
The faint lament outlasts the strong!

"Her waning health was fair pretence
To keep his voyage in suspense;
But still the king, averse or mute,
Heard coldly his dejected suit,
To give the lingering treaty o'er;
And once exclaim'd, 'Persuade no more!
This measure 'tis resolv'd to try!
We must that veering subject buy;
Else, let the enemy advance,
De Brehan surely sides with France!'"

The harp again was silent; still
No fiat of the general will
Bade her to cease or to proceed:
Oft an inquiring eye, indeed,
The strangers rais'd; but instant check'd,
Lest the new vassals should suspect
They thought the monarch's reasons just,
And faith so varying brought mistrust.
De Brehan, with a bitter smile,
Eyes closing, lips compress'd the while,
Although Remorse, with keenest dart,
And disappointment wrung his heart;
Although he long'd to thunder--"Cease!"

Restrain'd his fury, kept his peace.

The Lay of Marie.

CANTO FOURTH.

Marie, as if upon the brink
Of some abyss, had paus'd to think;
And seem'd from her sad task to shrink.
One hand was on her forehead prest,
The other clasping tight her vest;
As if she fear'd the throbbing heart
Would let its very life depart.
Yet, in that sad, bewilder'd mien,
Traces of glory still were seen;
Traces of greatness from above,
Of noble scorn, devoted love;
Of pity such as angels feel,
Of clinging faith and martyr'd zeal!

Can one, who by experience knows
So much of trial and of woes,
Late prone to kindle and to melt,
To feel whatever could be felt,
To suffer, and without complaint,
All anxious hopes, depressing fears;
Her heart with untold sorrows faint,
Eyes heavy with unshedden tears,
Through every keen affliction past,
Can that high spirit sink at last?
Or shall it yet victorious rise,
Beneath the most inclement skies,
See all it loves to ruin hurl'd,
Smile on the gay, the careless world;
And, finely temper'd, turn aside
Its sorrow and despair to hide?
Or burst at once the useless chain,
To seem and be itself again?

Will Memory evermore controul,
And Thought still lord it o'er her soul?
Queen of all wonders and delight,
Say, canst not thou possess her quite,
Sweet Poesy! and balm distil
For every ache, and every ill?
Like as in infancy, thy art
Could lull to rest that throbbing heart!
Could say to each emotion, Cease!
And render it a realm of peace,
Where beckoning Hope led on Surprise
To see thy magic forms arise!

Oh! come! all awful and sublime,
Arm'd close in stately, nervous rhyme,
With wheeling chariot, towering crest
And Amazonian splendors drest!
Or a fair nymph, with airy grace,
And playful dimples in thy face,

Light let the spiral ringlets flow,
And chaplet wreath along thy brow--
Thou art her sovereign! Hear her now
Again renew her early vow!
The fondest votary in thy train,
If all past service be not vain,
Might surely be receiv'd again!

Behold those hands in anguish wrung
One instant!--and but that alone!
When, waving grief, again she sang,
Though in a low, imploring tone.

"Awake, my lyre! thy echoes bring!
Now, while yon phoenix spreads her wing!
From her ashes, when she dies,
Another brighter self shall rise!
'Tis Hope! the charmer! fickle, wild;
But I lov'd her from a child;
And, could we catch the distant strain,
Sure to be sweet, though false and vain,
Most dear and welcome would it be!--
Thy silence says 'tis not for me!

"With Pity's softer-flowing strain,
Awake thy sleeping wires again!
For she must somewhere wander near,
In following danger, death, and fear!
From her regard no shade conceals;
Her ear e'en sorrow's whisper steals:
She leads us on all griefs to find;
To raise the fall'n, their wounds to bind--
Oh! not in that reproachful tone,
Advise me first to heal my own!

"Alas! I cannot blame the lyre!
What strain, what theme can she inspire,
Whose tongue a hopeless mandate brings!
Whose tears are frozen on the strings!
And whose recoiling, languid prayer,
Denies itself, in mere despair?
So tamely, faintly, forth it springs;
Just felt upon the pliant strings,
It flits in sickly languor by,
Nerv'd only with a feeble sigh!

"I yield submissive, and again
Resume my half-abandon'd strain!
Leading enchain'd sad thoughts along,
Remembrance prompting all the song!
But, in the journey, drawing near
To what I mourn, and what I fear,
The sad realities impress
Too deeply; hues of happiness,
And gleams of splendors past, decay;
The storm despoiling such a day,
Gives to the eye no clear, full scope,
But scatters wide the wrecks of Hope!
Yet the dire task I may not quit--
'Twas self impos'd; and I submit,
To paint, ah me! the heavy close,
The full completion of my woes!
And, as a man that once was free,
Whose fate impels him o'er the sea,
Now spreads the sail, now plies the oar,

Yet looks and leans towards the shore,
I feel I may not longer stay,
Yet even in launching court delay.

"Before De Stafford should unfold
That secret which must soon be told;
My terrors urg'd him to comply;
For oh! I dar'd not then be nigh;
And let the wide, tumultuous sea,
Arise between the king and me!
'O! tell him, my belov'd, I pine away,
So long an exile from my native home;
Tell him I feel my vital powers decay,
And seem to tread the confines of the tomb;
But tell him not, it is extremest dread
Of royal vengeance falling on my head!

"Say, if that favour'd land but bless my eyes,
That land of sun and smiles which gave me birth,
Like the renew'd Antaeus I shall rise,
On touching once again the parent earth!
Say this, but whisper not that all delight,
All health, is only absence from his sight!"

"My Eustace smil'd--' It shall be so;
From me and love shall Marie go!
But on the land, and o'er the sea,
Attended still by love and me!
The eagle's eye, to brave the light,
The swallow's quick, adventurous flight,
That faithfulness shall place in view,
That service, daring, prompt, and true,
Yet insufficient emblems be
Of zeal for her who flies from me!

"Deserter? hope not thus to scape!
Thy guardian still, in every shape,
Shall covertly those steps pursue,
And keep thy welfare still in view!
More fondly hovering than the dove
Shall be my ever watchful love!
Than the harp's tones more highly wrought,
Shall linger each tenacious thought!
Apt, active shall my spirit be
In care for her who flies from me!"

"And, it had been indeed a crime
To leave him, had I known the time,
The fearful length of such delay,
Protracting but from day to day,
Which reach'd at length two tedious years
Of dark surmises and of fears!

"How often, on a rocky steep,
Would I upon his summons keep
An anxious watch: there patient stay
Till light's thin lines have died away
In the smooth circle of the main,
And render'd all expectance vain.

"At the blue, earliest glimpse of morn,
Pleas'd with the lapse of time, return;
For now, perchance, I might not fail,
To see the long expected sail!
Then, as it blankly wore away,

Courted the fleeting eye to stay!
As they regardless mov'd along,
Wooed the slow moments in a song.
The time approaches! but the Hours
With languid steps advance,
And loiter o'er the summer flowers,
Or in the sun-beams dance!
Oh! haste along! for, lingering, ye
Detain my Eustace on the sea!

"Hope, all on tiptoe, does not fail
To catch a cheering ray!
And Fancy lifts her airy veil,
In wild and frolic play!
Kind are they both, but cruel ye,
Detaining Eustace on the sea!

"Sometimes within my cot I staid,
And with my precious infant play'd.
'Those eyes,' I cried, 'whose gaze endears,
And makes thy mother's flow in tears!
Those tender lips, whose dimpled stray
Can even chase suspense away!
Those artless movements, full of charms,
Those graceful, rounded, rosy arms,
Shall soon another neck entwine,
And waken transports fond as mine!
That magic laugh bespeaks thee prest
As surely to another breast!
That name a father's voice shall melt,
Those looks within his heart be felt!
Drinking thy smiles, thy carols, he
Shall weep, for very love, like me!

"Those who in children see their heirs,
Have numberless, diverging cares!
Less pure for them affection glows,—
Less of intrinsic joy bestows,
Less mellowing, less enlivening, flows!
Oh! such not even could divine
A moment's tenderness like mine!
Had he been destin'd to a throne,
His little darling self alone,
Bereft of station, grandeur, aught
But life and virtue, love and thought,
Could wake one anxious thrill, or share
One hallow'd pause's silent prayer!

"Ye scenes, that flit my memory o'er,
Deck'd in the smiles which then ye wore,
In the same gay and varied dress,
I cannot but admire and bless!
What though some anxious throbs would beat,
Some fears within my breast retreat,
Yet then I found sincere delight,
Whenever beauty met my sight,
Whether of nature, chance, or art;
Each sight, each sound, impress'd my heart,
Gladness undrooping to revive,
All warm, and grateful, and alive!
But ere my spirit sinks, so strong
Remembrance weighs upon the song,
Pass we to other themes along!

"Say, is there any present here,

Whom I can have a cause to fear?--
Whom it were wrongful to perplex,
Or faulty policy to vex?
In what affrights the quiet mind
My bitter thoughts employment find!
In what torments a common grief
Do I alone expect relief!
Our aching sorrows to disclose,
Our discontents, our wrongs repeat,
To hurl defiance at our foes,
And let the soul respire, is sweet!
All that my conscience wills I speak
At once, and then my heart may break!

"Too sure King Henry's presage rose;--
De Brehan link'd him with our foes:
Yes! ours! the Brehans us'd to be
Patterns of faith and loyalty:
And many a knightly badge they wore,
And many a trace their 'scutcheons bore,
Of noble deeds in days of yore,--
Of royal bounty, and such trust
As suits the generous and the just.

"From every record it appears,
That Normandy three hundred years
Has seen in swift succession run
With English kings, from sire to son:
But which of all those records saith,
That we may change and barter faith:
That if our favour is not sure,
Or our inheritance secure;
If envy of a rival's fame,
Or hatred at a foeman's name,
Or other reason unconfest,
Now feigning sleep in every breast;
Upon our minds, our interest weigh,
While any fiercer passion sway;
We may invite a foreign yoke,
All truth disown'd, allegiance broke?
Plot, and lay guileful snares to bring,
At cost of blood, a stranger king?
And of what blood, if it succeed,
Do ye atchieve the glorious deed?
Not of the base! when ye surprize
A lurking mischief in the eyes,
Dark hatred, cunning prompt to rise,
And leap and catch at any prey,
Such are your choice! your comrades they!
But if a character should stand
Not merely built by human hand;
Common observances; the ill
Surrounding all; a wayward will;
Envy; resentment; falsehood's ease
To win its way, evade, and please:
If, turning from this worldly lore,
As soul-debasing, servile, poor,
The growing mind becomes, at length,
Healthy and firm in moral strength;
Allows no parley and no plea,
The sources of its actions free,
They spring strait forward, to a goal
Which bounds, surmounts, and crowns the whole!
Ye seek not to allay such force,
To interrupt so bold a course!

What were the use of minds like these,
That will not on occasion seize,
Nor stoop to aid the dark design,
Nor follow in the devious line?
As soon, in the close twisted brake,
Could lions track the smooth, still snake,
As they the sinuous path pursue
Which policy may point to you!
Nay, menace not with eyes, my lords!
Ye could not fright me with your swords.

"E'en threats to punish, and to kill
With tortures difficult to bear,
Seem as they would not higher fill
The measure of my own despair!

"Such terrors could not veil the hand
Now pointing to my husband's bier;
Nor could such pangs a groan command
The childless mother should not hear!

"All now is chang'd! all contest o'er,
Here sea-girt England reigns no more;
And if your oaths are bound as fast,
And kept more strictly than the last,
Ye may, perchance, behold the time
Service to her becomes a crime!

"The troubles calling Eustace o'er,
Refresh'd my eyes, my heart, once more;
And when I gave, with pleasure wild,
Into his circling arms our child,
I seem'd to hold, all evil past,
My happiness secure at last;
But found, too soon, in every look,
In every pondering word he spoke,
Receding thought, mysterious aim:
As I did all his pity claim.
A watchfulness almost to fear
Did in each cautious glance appear.
And still I sought to fix his eye,

"And read the fate impending there,--
In vain; for it refus'd reply.

"Canst thou not for a moment bear
Even thy Marie's look,' I cried,
'More dear than all the world beside?'
He answer'd, 'Do not thou upbraid!
And blame me not, if thus afraid
A needful, dear request to make.
One painful only for thy sake,
I hesitate, and dread to speak,
Seeing that flush upon thy cheek,
That shrinking, apprehensive air.--
Oh! born with me some ills to share,
But many years of future bliss,
Of real, tranquil happiness;
I may not think that thou wouldst choose
This prospect pettishly to lose
For self-indulgence! Understood,
Love is the seeking others' good.
If we can ne'er resign delight,
Nor lose its object from our sight;
And only present dangers brave,

That which we dearest hold to save;--
If, when remov'd beyond our eye,
All faith in heaven's protection die,
Can all our tenderness atone
For ills which spring from that alone?'
My fancy rush'd the pause between--
'What can this fearful prelude mean?
Art thou but seeking some pretence,
So lately met! to send me hence?
Believ'st thou terrors will not shake,
Nor doubts distract, nor fears awake,
In absence? when no power, no charm,
Can grant a respite from alarm!
Unreal evils manifold,
Often and differently told,
Scaring repose, each instant rise,
False, but the cause of tears and sighs.
How often I should see thee bleed!
New terrors would the past succeed,
With not a smile to intervene
Of fair security between!'

"No, Marie, no! my wife shall share
With me the trials soldiers bear:
No longer and no more we part.---
Thy presence needful to my heart
I now more evidently know;
Making the careful moments flow
To happy music! on my brow
The iron casque shall lighter prove,--
The corslet softer on my breast,
The shield upon my arm shall rest
More easy, when the hand of love
There places them. Our succours soon
Arrive; and then, whatever boon
I shall think fitting to demand,
My gracious monarch's bounteous hand
Awards as guerdon for my charge,
And bids my wishes roam at large.
Then if we from these rebels tear
The traitor honours which they wear,
Thy father's tides and domain
Shall flourish in his line again!
And Marie's child, in time to come,
Shall call his grandsire's castle, home!
Alas! poor babe! the scenes of war
For him too harsh and frightful are!
Would that he might in safety rest
Upon my gentle mother's breast!
That in the vessel now at bay,
In Hugh de Lacy's care he lay!
My heart and reason would be free,
If he were safe beyond the sea.

"Nay, let me not my love displease!
But is it fit, that walls like these
The blooming cherub should inclose!
And when our close approaching foes
Are skirmishing the country o'er,
We must adventure forth no more.'

"At length I gave a half consent,
Resign'd, submissive, not content:
For, only in intensest prayer,
For, only kneeling did I dare,

Sustaining thus my sinking heart,
Suffer my infant to depart.
Oh! yet I see his sparkling tears;
His parting cries are in my ears,
As, strongly bending back the head,
The little hands imploring spread,
Him from my blinding sight they bore,
Down from the fort along the shore.

"From the watch-tower I saw them sail,
And pour'd forth prayers--of no avail!
Yet, when a tempest howl'd around,
Hurling huge branches on the ground
From stately trees; when torrents swept
The fields of air, I tranquil kept.--

"Hope near a fading blossom
Will often take her stand;
Revive it on her bosom,
Or screen it with her wand:
But to the leaves no sunbeams press,
Her fair, thick locks pervading;
Through that bright wand no dew-drops bless,
Still cherish'd, and still fading:--
Beneath her eye's bright beam it pines,
Fed by her angel smile, declines.

"Eustace, meanwhile, with feverish care,
Seem'd worse the dire suspense to bear.
Bewilder'd, starting at the name
Of messenger, when any came,
With body shrinking back, he sought,
While his eye seem'd on fire with thought,
Defying, yet subdued by fear,
To ask that truth he dar'd not hear.

"He went his rounds.--The duty done,
His mind still tending toward his son;
With spirit and with heart deprest,
A judgment unsustain'd by rest:--
Fainting in effort, and at strife
With feelings woven into life;
And with the chains of being twin'd
By links so strong, though undefin'd,
They curb or enervate the brain,
Weigh down by languor, rack by pain,
And spread a thousand subtil ties
Across the tongue, and through the eyes;
Till the whole frame is fancy vex'd,
And all the powers of mind perplex'd.

"What wonder, then, it sunk and fail'd!
What wonder that your plans prevail'd!
In vain by stratagem you toil'd;--
His skill and prudence all had foil'd;
For one day's vigilance surpast
Seeming perfection in the last.
Each hour more active, more intent,
Unarm'd and unassail'd he went;
While every weapon glanc'd aside,
His armour every lance defied.
The blow that could that soul subdue
At length was struck--but not by you!
It fell upon a mortal part--
A poison'd arrow smote his heart;

The winds impelling, when they bore
Wrecks of the vessel to our shore!

"Oh! ever dear! and ever kind!
What madness could possess thy mind,
From me, in our distress, to fly?
True, much delight had left my eye;
And, in the circle of my bliss,
One holy, rapturous joy to miss
Was mine!--Yet I had more than this,
Before my wounds were clos'd, to bear!
See thee, an image of despair,
Just rush upon my woe, then shun
Her who alike deplor'd a son;
And, ere alarm had taken breath,
Be told, my husband, of thy death!
And feel upon this blighted sphere
No tie remain to bind me here!
Still in my life's young summer see
A far and weary path to thee!
Along whose wild and desert way
No sportive tribes of fancy play;
No smiles that to the lips arise,
No joys to sparkle in the eyes;--
No thrills of tenderness to feel,
No spring of hope, no touch of zeal.
All sources of heart-feeling stopt,
All impulse, all sustainment dropt.
With aching memory, sinking mind,
Through this drear wilderness to find
The path to death;--and pining, roam
Myriads of steps to reach the tomb!
Of which to catch a distant view,
The softest line, the faintest hue,
As symbol when I should be free,
Were happiness too great for me!"

Here clos'd at once, abrupt, the lay!
The Minstrel's fingers ceas'd to play!
And, all her soul to anguish given,
Doubted the pitying care of Heaven.
But evil, in its worst extreme,
In its most dire, impending hour,
Shall vanish, like a hideous dream,
And leave no traces of its power!

The vessel plunging on a rock,
Wreck threatening in its fellest shape,
No moment's respite from the shock,
No human means or power to 'scape,
Some higher-swelling surge shall free,
And lift and launch into the sea!
So, Marie, yet shall aid divine
Restore that failing heart of thine!
Though to its centre wounded, griev'd,
Though deeply, utterly bereav'd.
There genial warmth shall yet reside,
There swiftly flow the healthful tide;
And every languid, closing vein,
Drink healing and delight again!

At present all around her fades,
Her listless ear no sound pervades.
Her senses, wearied and distraught,
Perceive not how the stream of thought,

Rising from her distressful song,
In hurrying tide has swept along,
With startling and resistless swell,
The panic-stricken Isabel!
Who--falling at her father's feet,
Like the most lowly suppliant, kneels;
And, with imploring voice, unmeet
For one so fondly lov'd, appeals.--

"Those looks have been to me a law,
And solely by indulgence bought,
With zeal intense, with deepest awe,
A self-devoted slave, I caught
My highest transport from thy smile;
And studied hourly to beguile
The lightest cloud of grief or care
I saw those gracious features wear!
If aught induced me to divine
A hope was opposite to thine,
My fancy paus'd, however gay;
My silent wishes sunk away!
Displeasure I have never seen,
But sickness has subdued thy mien;
When, lingering near, I still have tried
To cheer thee, and thou didst approve;
But something still each act belied,
My manner chill'd, restrain'd my love!
E'en at the time my spirit died
With aching tenderness, my eye,
Encountering thine, was cold and dry!
To maim intention, fondness,--came
The sudden impotence of shame.
Thy happiness was thriftless wealth,
For I could only hoard by stealth!
Affection's brightly-glowing ray
Shone with such strong, o'erpowering sway,
That service fainted by the way!

"But now an impulse, like despair,
Makes me these inner foldings tear!
With desperate effort bids me wrest
The yearning secret from my breast!
Far be the thought that any blame
Can fix on thy beloved name!
The hapless Minstrel may not feign;
But thou, I know, canst all explain--
Yet let me from this place depart,
To nurse my fainting, sicken'd heart!
Yet let me in a cloister dwell,
The veiled inmate of a cell;
To raise this cowering soul by prayer!--
Reproach can never enter there!

"Turn quickly hence that look severe!
And, oh! in mercy, not a tear!
The most profuse of parents, thou
Didst every wish fulfil--allow;
Till that which us'd to please--invite,
Had ceas'd to dazzle and delight;
And all thy gifts almost despis'd,
The love that gave alone I priz'd.

"My yielding spirit bows the knee;
My will profoundly bends to thee:
But paltry vanities resign'd,

Wealth, gauds, and honours left behind,
I only wanted, thought to quit
This strange, wild world, and make me fit
For one of better promise--given
To such as think not this their heaven!
Nay, almost in my breast arose
A hope I scarcely dare disclose;
A hope that life, from tumult free,--
 A life so harmless and so pure,
 A calm so shelter'd, so secure,
At length might have a charm for thee!
That supplications, patient, strong,
Might not remain unanswered long!
And all temptations from thee cast,
The altar prove thy home at last!"

The artless Isabel prevails--
That hard, unbending spirit fails!
Not many words her lips had past,
Ere round her his fond arms were cast;
But, while his vengeful conscience prais'd,
He chid; and, frowning, would have rais'd
Till her resistance and her tears,
 The vehemence of youthful grief,
Her paleness, his paternal fears,
 Compell'd him to afford relief;
And forc'd the agonizing cry--
That he could never her deny!

Of what ambition sought, beguil'd,
His crimes thus fruitless! and his child,
The beautiful, the rich and young--
 Now, in his most triumphant hours!
 The darling he had nurs'd in flowers!
His pride, the prais'd of every tongue!
So gentle as she was!--the rein
Of influence holding, to restrain
His harsher power, without pretence,
In graceful, gay beneficence--
An angel deem'd, her only care
 To comfort and to please!
Whose smiling, whose unconscious air,
 Bespoke a heart at ease--
By her--on whom sweet hopes were built,
His cup when fill'd thus rashly spilt!
 The treasures he had heap'd in vain,
 Thrown thankless on his hands again!
 While--father to this being blest,
 He saw a dagger pierce her breast,
In knowledge of his former guilt!
And of his projects thus bereft,
What had the wretched parent left?
Oh! from the wreck of all, he bore
A richer, nobler freight ashore!
And filial love could well dispense
On earth a dearer recompense,
If he its real worth had known,
Than full success had made his own.

So ardent and so kind of late,
Is Marie careless of their fate,
That, wrapt in this demeanour cold,
Her spirits some enchantments hold?
That thus her countenance is clos'd,
Where high and lovely thoughts repos'd!

Quench'd the pure light that us'd to fly
To the smooth cheek and lucid eye!
And fled the harmonizing cloud
Which could that light benignly shroud,
Soothing its radiance to our view,
And melting each opposing hue,
Till deepening tints and blendings meet
Made contrast' self serene and sweet.

Vainly do voices tidings bring,
That succours from the former king,
Too late for that intent,--are come
To take the dead and wounded home;
Waiting, impatient, in the bay,
Till they can safely bear away,--
Not men that temporize and yield,
But heroes stricken in the field;
True sons of England, who, unmov'd,
Could hear their fears, their interest plead;
Led by no lure they disapprov'd,
Stooping to no unsanction'd deed!
Spirits so finely tun'd, so high,
That grovelling influences die
Assailing them! The venal mind
Can neither fit inducement find
To lead their purpose or their fate--
To sway, to probe, or stimulate!
What knowledge can they gain of such
Whom worldly motives may not touch?
Those who, the instant they are known,
Each generous mind springs forth to own!
Joyful, as if in distant land,
Amid mistrust, and hate, and guile,
Insidious speech, and lurking wile,
They grasp'd a brother's cordial hand!
Hearts so embued with fire from heaven,
That all their failings are forgiven!
Nay, o'er, perchance, whose laurel wreath
When tears of pity shine,
We softer, fonder sighs bequeath;
More dear, though less divine.

Can kind and loyal bosoms bleed,
And Marie not bewail the deed?
Can England's valiant sons be slain,
In whose fair isle so long she dwelt--
To whom she sang, with whom she felt!
Can kindred Normans die in vain!
Or, banish'd from their native shore,
Enjoy their sire's domains no more!
Brothers, with whom her mind was nurs'd,
Who shar'd her young ideas first!--
And not her tears their doom arraign?

Alas! no stimulus avails!
Each former potent influence fails:
No longer e'en a sigh can part
From that oppress'd and wearied heart.

What broke, at length, the spell? There came
The sound of Hugh de Lacy's name!
It struck like lightning on her ear--
But did she truly, rightly hear?
For terror through her senses ran,
E'en as the song of hope began.--

His charge arriv'd on England's coast,
Consign'd where they had wish'd it most,
Had brave De Lacy join'd the train
Which sought the Norman shores again?--
Then liv'd her darling and her pride!
What anguish was awaken'd there!
A joy close mating with despair--
He liv'd for whom her Eustace died!

Yes! yes! he lives! the sea could spare
That Island warrior's infant heir!
For whom, when thick-surrounding foes,
Nigh spent with toil, had sought repose,
Slow stealing forth, with wary feet,
From covert of secure retreat,--
A soldier leading on the way
To where his dear commander lay,--
Over the field, at dead midnight,
By a pale torch's flickering light,
Did _Friendship_ wander to behold,
Breathing, but senseless, pallid, cold,
With many a gash, and many a stain,
Him,--whom the morrow sought in vain!
Love had not dar'd that form to find,
Ungifted with excelling grace!
Nor, thus without a glimpse of mind,
Acknowledg'd that familiar face!
Disfigur'd now with many a trace
Of recent agony!--Its power
Had not withstood this fatal hour!
Friendship firm-nerv'd, resolv'd, mature,
With hand more steady, strong, and sore,
Can torpid Horror's veil remove,
Which palsies all the force of _Love!_

What is _Love's_ office, then? To tend
The hero rescued by a friend!
All unperceiv'd, with balmy wing
To wave away each restless thing
That wakes to breathe disturbance round!
To temper all in peace profound.
With whisper soft and lightsome touch,
To aid, assuage,--relieving much
Of trouble neither seen nor told--
Of pain, which it alone divines,
Which scarcely he who feels defines,
Which lynx-like eyes alone behold!

And heavy were De Stafford's sighs,
And oft impatient would they rise;
Though Friendship, Honour's self was there,
Until he found a nurse more fair!
A nicer tact, a finer skill,
To know and to perform his will--
Until he felt the healing look,
The tones that only Marie spoke!

How patient, then, awaiting ease,
And suffering pain, he cross'd the seas!
How patient, when they reach'd the shore,
A long, long tract he journey'd o'er!
Though days and months flow'd past, at length,
Ere he regain'd his former strength,
He yet had courage to sustain,
Without a murmur, every pain!

"At home once more--with friends so true--
 My boy recover'd thus"--he cried,
 "His mother smiling by my side--
 Resigned each lesser ill I view!
 As bubbles on the Ocean's breast,
 When gloriously calm, will rise;
 As shadows from o'er-clouded skies,
 Or some few angry waves may dance
 Nor ruffle that serene expanse;
 So lightly o'er my comfort glides
 Each adverse feeling--so subsides
 Each discontent--and leaves me blest!"

NOTES.

NOTE I.

The Lay of Marie.--Title.

The words _roman_, fabliau_, and _lai_, are so often used indifferently by the old French writers, that it is difficult to lay down any positive rule for discriminating between them. But I believe the word _roman_ particularly applies to such works as were to be supposed strictly historical: such are the romances of Arthur, Charlemagne, the Trojan War, &c. The _fabliaux_ were generally, stories supposed to have been invented for the purpose of illustrating some moral; or real anecdotes, capable of being so applied. The _lai_, according to Le Grand, chiefly differed from the _fabliau_, in being interspersed with musical interludes; but I suspect they were generally translations from the British. The word is said to be derived from _leudus_; but _laoi_ seems to be the general name of a class of Irish metrical compositions, as "Laoi na Seilge" and others, quoted by Mr. Walker (Hist. Mem. of Irish Bards), and it may be doubted whether the word was not formerly common to the Welsh and American dialects.--_Ellis's Specimens_.

The conclusion of Orfeo and Herodiis, in the Auchinlech MS, seems to prove that the lay was set to music:

That lay Orfeo is yhote,
 Gode is the lay, swete is the note.

In Sir Tristrem also, the Irish harper is expressly said to sing to the harp a merry _lay_.

It is not to be supposed, what we now call metrical romances were always read. On the contrary, several of them bear internal evidence that they were occasionally chaunted to the harp. The Creseide of Chaucer, a long performance, is written expressly to be read, or else sung. It is evident that the minstrels could derive no advantage from these compositions, unless by reciting or singing them; and later poems have been said to be composed to their _tunes_.--_Notes to Sir Tristrem_.

NOTE II.

Baron De Brehan seem'd to stand--p. 6. l. 10.

Brehan--Maison reconnue pour une des plus anciennes. _Vraie race d'ancienne Noblesse de Chevalerie_, qui dans les onzieme et douzieme siecles, tenoit rang parmi les _anciens Barons_, avant la reduction faite en 1451.

NOTE III.

Where does this idle Minstrel stay?--p. 5. l. 13.

It appears that female minstrels were not uncommon, as one is mentioned in the Romance of Richard Coeur de Lion, without any remark on the strangeness of the circumstance.

A goose they dight to their dinner
In a tavern where they were.
King Richard the fire bet;
Thomas to the spit him set;
Fouk Doyley tempered the wood:
Dear about they that good!
When they had drunken well, a fin,
A minstralle com theirin,
And said, "Gentlemen, wittily,
Will ye have any minstrelsy?"
Richard bade that she should go;
That turned him to mickle woe!
The minstralle _took in mind_[1]
And said, "Ye are men unkind;
And, if I may, ye shall _for-think_[2]
Ye gave me neither meat ne drink.
For gentlemen should bede
To minstrels that abouten yede,
Of their meat, wine, and ale;
For _los_[3] rises of minstrale."
She was English, and well true,
By speech, and sight, and hide, and hue.

Ellis's Specimens of early English Metrical Romances.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Was offended.

[2] Repent.

[3] Reputation, glory.

NOTE IV.

On which the slightest touch alone would kill--p. 24. l. 6.

An unfortunate mistake in printing the word _trill_ instead of _kill_, has made this appear ridiculous: it alludes to the old proverb--

You should neither tell friend nor foe
Where life-blood go.

Any wound in a place while this pulsation passed through being esteemed fatal.

NOTE V.

Abrupt his native accents broke--p. 50. l. 7.

The Anglo-Norman dynasty, with their martial nobility, down to the reign of Edward III. continued to use, almost exclusively, the Romance or ancient French language; while the Saxon, although spoken chiefly by the vulgar, was gradually adopting, from the rival tongue, those improvements and changes, which fitted it for the use of Chaucer and Gower. In the introduction to the Metrical Romance of _Arthur and Merlin_, written during the minority of Edward V. it appears that the English language was then gaining ground. The author says, he has even seen many gentlemen who could speak no French (though generally used by persons of that rank), while persons of every quality understood English.--_Sir Tristrem_.

NOTE VI.

The broider'd scarf might wave in vain--p. 57. l. 1.

To such as were victorious, prizes were awarded by the judges, and presented by the hands of the ladies; who also honoured the combatants with the wreath or chaplet, silken drapery, and other appropriate ornaments; and by presenting them with ribbands, or scarfs, of chosen colours, called liveries, spoken of in romance, appear to have been the origin of the ribbands which still distinguish knighthood.

NOTE VII.

Laden with presents and with praise--p. 57. l. 9.

In the ancient metrical romance of Sir Tristrem, an Irish earl arrives at the court of Cornwall, in the disguise of a minstrel, and bearing a harp of curious workmanship. He excites the curiosity of King Mark, by refusing to play upon it till he shall grant him a boon. The king having pledged his knighthood to satisfy his request, he sings to the harp a lay, in which he demands the queen as his promised gift--

"Y prove the for fals man,
Or Y shall have thi quen."

He accordingly carries her off; but her lover Tristrem, who had been absent at the time,

"chidde with the king,
Gifstow glewemen thy quen,
Hastow no other thing?"

The usual gifts to minstrels when they sung were often profuse; rich clothes, &c. They were, by rank, classed with knights and heralds, and permitted to wear silk robes, a dress limited to persons who could spend a hundred pounds of land rent.--_Sir Tristrem, edited by Walter Scott, Esq_.

Generosity to minstrels is perpetually recommended in the lays, of fabliaux and romances.

NOTE VIII.

The peacock crown with all its eyes--p. 57. l.17.

According to Menestria and St. Palaye, the troubadours, or poets of Provence, were adorned by the ladies with crowns, interwoven with peacock's feathers; (the eyes of which expressed the universal attention they attracted)--a plumage in great request, and equivalent to the laurel of the academic bards. Differing, perhaps, little in intrinsic value, but superior in beauty and permanence, and more consonant with the decorations of chivalry. They were not restricted to the troubadours; for such a diadem, ornamented with gold, was sent by Pope Urban III. to Henry II. wherewith one of his sons was crowned King of Ireland; as mentioned by Selden, under the title Lord, and by Lord Lyttleton, under the year MCLXXXVI. _A Summary Review of Heraldry, by Thomas Brydson, F.A.S. Edinburgh_.

APPENDIX I

Extracts from a Dissertation on the Life and Writings of Marie, an Anglo-Norman Poetess of the thirteenth century. By Monsieur La Rue. Archaeologia, vol. 13.

Mary must be regarded as the Sappho of her age; she made so considerable a figure amongst the Anglo Norman _Trouveurs_, that she may very fairly lay claim to the minutest investigation of whatever concerns her memory. She informs us that she was born in France, but has neither mentioned the province that gave her birth, her family name, nor the reasons of her going to England. As she appears, however, to have resided in that country at the commencement of the 13th century, we may reasonably conclude that she was a native of Normandy. Philip Augustus having made himself master of that province in 1204, many Norman families, whether from regard to affinity, from motive of adventure, or from attachment to the English government, went over to Great Britain, and there established themselves. If this opinion be not adopted, it will be impossible to fix upon any other province of France under the dominion of the English, as her birth-place, because her language is neither that of Gascony, nor of Poitou, &c. She appears, however, to have been acquainted with the _Bas-Breton_, or Armoric tongue; whence it may be inferred that she was born in Bretayne. The Duke of that province was then Earl of Richmond in England; many of his subjects were in possession of knight's fees in that honour, and Mary might have belonged to one of these families. She was, besides, extremely well versed in the literature of this province; and we shall have occasion to remark, that she frequently borrowed much from the works of its writers in the composition of her own. If, however, a preference should be given to the first opinion, we must suppose that Mary got her knowledge, both of the Armoric and English languages, in Great Britain. She was, at the same time, equally mistress of the Latin; and from her application to three several languages, we must take it for granted that she possessed a readiness, a capacity, and even a certain rank in life, that afforded time and means to attain them. It should seem that she was solicitous to be personally known only at the time she lived in. Hence we find in her works those general denominations, those vague expressions, which discourage the curious antiquary, or compel him to enter into dry and laborious discussions, the result of which, often turns out to be little more than conjecture. In short, the silence or the modesty of this lady, has contributed, in a great degree, to conceal from us the names

of those illustrious persons whose patronage her talents obtained.

The first poems of Mary are a collection of Lays, in French verse; forming various histories and gallant adventures of our valiant knights: and, according to the usage of those times, they are generally remarkable for some singular, and often marvellous catastrophe. These Lays are in the British Museum, among the Harleian MSS. No. 978. They constitute the largest, and, at the same time, most ancient specimen of Anglo-Norman poetry, of this kind, that has been handed down to us. The romances of chivalry, amongst the old Welsh and Armorican Britons, appear to have furnished the subjects of these various Lays; not that the manuscripts of those people were continually before her when she composed them; but, as she herself has told us, depending upon an excellent memory, she sometimes committed them to verse, after hearing them recited only: and, at others, composed her poems from what she had read in the Welsh and Armorican MSS.

Plusurs en ai oi conter,
Nes voil laisser ne oublier, &c.[4]
Plusurs le me ant conte et dit
Et jeo l'ai trove en escrit, &c.[5]

She confined herself to these subjects, and the event justifies her choice. To the singularity of such a measure was owing its celebrity. By treating of love and chivalry, she was certain of attuning her lyre to the feelings of the age; and consequently of ensuring success. Upon this account her Lays were extremely well received by the people. Denis Pyramus, an Anglo-Norman poet, and the contemporary of Mary, informs us that they were heard with pleasure in all the castles of the English barons, but that they were particularly relished by the women of her time. He even praises them himself; and this from the mouth of a rival, could not but have been sincere and well deserved, since our equals are always the best judges of our merit.[6] Insomuch as Mary was a foreigner, she expected to be criticised with severity, and therefore applied herself with great care to the due polishing of her works. Besides, she thought, as she says herself, that the chief reward of a poet, consists in perceiving the superiority of his own performance, and its claims to public esteem. Hence the repeated efforts to attain so honourable a distinction, and the constant apprehensions of that chagrin which results from disappointment, and which she has expressed with so much natural simplicity.

Ki de bone mateire traite,
Mult li peise si bien n'est faite, &c.[7]

She has dedicated her lays to some king,[8] whom she thus addresses in her Prologue:

En le honur de vos nobles reis,
Ki tant estes preux et curteis,
M'entremis de Lais assembler.
Par rime faire et raconter;

En mon quoeur pensoe et diseie,
Sire, le vos presentereie.
Si vos les plaist a recevoir.

Mult me ferez grant joie avoir,
A tuz jurs mais en serai lie, &c.[9]

But who is this monarch? 1. We may perceive in it her apprehension of the envy which her success might excite in a strange country: for this reason she could not have written in France. 2. When at a loss for some single syllable, she sometimes intermixes in her verses words that are pure English, when the French word would not have suited the

measure.--"Fire et chaundelez alumez." It should seem, therefore, that she wrote for the English, since her lines contain words that essentially belong to their language, and not at all to the *Romance*. 3. She dedicates her lays to a king who understood English, because she takes care to translate into that tongue all the Welsh and Armorican proper names that she was obliged to introduce. Thus in the Lay of *Bisclaveret*, she says, the English translate this name by that of *Garwaf*, (Were-wolf); in that of *Laustic*, that they call it *Nihtgale* (Nightingale); and in that of *Chevrefeuille*, *Gotelef*, (Goatleaf) &c. It is certain, then, she composed for a king who understood English. 4. She tells us that she had declined translating Latin histories into *Romance*; because so many others having been thus occupied, her name would have been confounded with the multitude, and her labours unattended with honour. Now this circumstance perfectly corresponds with the reign of Henry III. when such a number of Normans and Anglo-Normans had, for more than half a century, translated from the Latin so many romances of chivalry; and especially those of the Round Table, which we owe to the Kings of England. 5. Fauchet and Pasquier inform us, that Mary lived about the middle of the 13th century, and this would exactly coincide with the reign of that prince.[10] 6. Denis Pyramu[11], an Anglo-Norman poet, speaks of Mary as an author, whose person was as much beloved as her writings, and who therefore must have lived in his own time. Now it is known that this poet wrote under Henry III. and this opinion could only be confuted by maintaining that it was rather a King of France of whom she speaks, which king must have been Louis VIII. or St. Louis his son. But this alteration will not bear the slightest examination; for how could it be necessary to explain Welsh and Armorican words to a French king in the English language? How could the writer permit herself to make use of English words, in many parts of her work, which would most probably be unintelligible to that prince, and most certainly so to the greatest part of his subjects? It is true that she sometimes explains them in *Romance*, but not always; and when, upon the other hand, she makes a constant practice of translating them into English, she proves to what sort of readers she was principally addressing herself. The list of the lays of Mary is omitted here, as a translation follows.

The smaller poems of Mary are, in general, of much importance, as to the knowledge of ancient chivalry. Their author has described manners with a pencil at once faithful and pleasing. She arrests the attention of her readers by the subjects of her stories, by the interest which she skilfully blends in them, and by the simple and natural language in which she relates them. In spite of her rapid and flowing style, nothing is forgotten in her details--nothing escapes her in her descriptions. With what grace has she depicted the charming deliverer of the unhappy Lanval! Her beauty is equally impressive, engaging, and seductive; an immense crowd follows but to admire her; the white palfrey on which she rides seems proud of his fair burden; the greyhound which follows her, and the falcon which she carries, announce her nobility. How splendid and commanding her appearance; and with what accuracy is the costume of the age she lived in observed! But Mary did not only possess a most refined taste, she had also to boast of a mind of sensibility. The English muse seems to have inspired her; all her subjects are sad and melancholy; she appears to have designed to melt the hearts of her readers, either by the unfortunate situation of her hero, or by some truly afflicting catastrophe. Thus she always speaks to the soul, calls forth all its feelings, and very frequently throws it into the utmost consternation.

Fauchet was unacquainted with the Lays of Mary, for he only mentions her fables[12]. But, what is more astonishing, Monsieur le Grand, who published many of her lays, has not ascribed them all to her. He had probably never met with a complete collection like that in the British Museum; but only some of those that had been separately transcribed; and, in that case, he could not have seen the preface, in which Mary has

named herself.

The second work of our poetess consists of a collection of fables, generally called Aesopian, which she translated into French verse. In the prologue she informs her readers that she would not have engaged in it, but for the solicitation of a man who was "the flower of chivalry and courtesy," and whom, at the conclusion of her work, she styles Earl William.

Por amor le counte Guillaume,
Le plus vaillant de cest royaume,
Mentremis de cest livre faire,
Et de l'Anglois en Romans traire, &c.[13]

M. le Grand, in his preface to some of Mary's fables, which he has published in French prose, informs us that this person was Earl William de Dampierre. But William, Lord of Dampierre, in Champagne, had in himself no right whatever to the title of Earl. During the 13th century, this dignity was by no means assumed indiscriminately, and at pleasure, by French gentlemen; it was generally borne by whoever was the owner of a province, and sometimes of a great city, constituting an earldom: such were the earldoms of Flanders, of Artois, of Anjou, of Paris, &c. It was then, that these great vassals of the crown had a claim to the title of earl, and accordingly assumed it.[14] Now, the territory of Dampierre was not in this predicament during the 13th century; it was only a simple lordship belonging to the lords of that name.[15]

Convinced, as I am, that Mary did not compose her fables in France, but in England, it is rather in England that the Earl William, alluded to by Mary, is to be sought for; and luckily, the encomium she has left upon him is of such a nature, as to excite an opinion that he was William Longsword, natural son of Henry II. and created Earl of Salisbury and Romare by Richard Coeur de Lion. She calls him "the flower of chivalry, the most valiant man in the kingdom," etc.; and these features perfectly characterize William Longsword, so renowned for his prowess.[16] The praise she bestows on him expresses, with great fidelity, the sentiments that were entertained by his contemporaries; and which were become so general, that for the purpose of making his epitaph, it should seem that the simple eulogy of Mary would have sufficed.

Flos comitum, Wilhelmus obit, stirps regia, longus
Ensis vaginam capit habere brevem.[17]

This earl died in 1226;[18] so that Mary must have written her fables before that time. The brilliant reputation she had acquired by her lays, had no doubt determined William to solicit a similar translation of Aesopian Fables, which then existed in the English language. She, who in her lays had painted the manners of her age with so much nature and fidelity, would find no difficulty in succeeding in this kind of apologue. Both require that penetrating glance which can distinguish the different passions of mankind; can seize upon the varied forms which they assume; and marking the objects of their attention, discover, at the same moment, the means they employ to attain them. For this reason, her fables are written with all that acuteness of mind, that penetrates into the very inmost recesses of the human heart; and, at the same time, with that beautiful simplicity so peculiar to the ancient romance language, and which causes me to doubt whether La Fontaine has not rather imitated our author, than the fabulists either of Rome, or of Athens. It most, at all events, be admitted that he could not find, in the two latter, the advantages which the former offered him. Mary wrote in French, and at a time when that language, yet in its infancy, could boast of nothing but simple expressions, artless and agreeable turns, and, on all occasions, a natural and unpremeditated phraseology.

On the contrary, Aesop and Phaedrus, writing in Latin, could not supply the French fabulist with any thing more than subject matter and ideas; whilst Mary, at the same time that she furnished him with both, might besides have hinted expression, manner, and even rhyme. Let me add, that through the works of La Fontaine will be found scattered an infinite number of words in our ancient language, which are at this day unintelligible without a commentary.

There are, in the British Museum, three MS. copies of Mary's fables. The first is in the Cotton library, Vesp. b. xiv. the second in the Harleian, No. 4333; and the third in the same collection, No. 978. In the first, part of Mary's prologue is wanting, and the transcriber has entirely suppressed the conclusion of her work. This MS. contains only sixty-one fables. The second has all the prologue, and the conclusion. It has 83 fables. The third is the completest of all, and contains 104 fables. M. le Grand says that he has seen four MSS. of these fables in the libraries of Paris, but all different as to the number. He cites one in the library of St. Germain des Pres, as containing 66 fables; and another in the Royal Library, No. 7615, with 102.[19] As he has said nothing about the other MSS. it is to be supposed that he has purposely mentioned that which had the greatest number of fables, and that which had the least. Under this idea, the Harleian MS. No. 978, is the completest of all that have been yet cited.

In examining the manner in which she speaks of herself, we shall perceive she does not call herself *Marie de France*, as he has stated, but says *she is from France*.

Al finement de cest escrit,
Me nomerei par remembrance,
Marie ai non si suis de France, &c.[20]

If we consider well the latter verse, there will be no difficulty in perceiving that Mary wrote in England. Indeed, it was formerly a very common thing for authors to say that they were of such a city, and even to assume the name of it. Or even, when writing in Latin, state themselves either natives of England, or of France. But when an author writes in France, and in the language of the country, he does not say that *he is of France*. Now this precaution, on the part of Mary, implies that she wrote in a foreign country, the greater part of whose inhabitants spoke her native language; which was the case in England. She stated herself to be a native of France, that her works might be regarded as written in a purer and correcter style.

Monsieur le Grand does not believe that Mary really translated from a collection that existed in her time in the English language, under the title of the *Fables of Aesop*; but, if we examine the fables themselves, we shall discover in them internal evidence of their being translated from the English.

Mention is made of counties and their judges, of the great assemblies held there for the administration of justice, the king's writs, &c. &c. Now what other kingdom, besides England, was at that time divided into counties? What other country possessed similar establishments? But Mary has done more; in her French translation she has preserved many expressions in the English original; such as *welke*, in the fable of the Eagle, the Crow, and the Tortoise; *witecocs*, in that of the Three Wishes; *grave*, in that of the Sick Lion; *werbes and wibets*, in that of the Battle of the Flies with other Animals; *worsel*, in that of the Mouse and the Frog, &c.

The completest MS. of Mary's translation, has but 104 fables; out of which, 31 only are Aesop's. So the English version that she had before her, was not a true and complete translation of that fabulist, but a compilation from different authors, in which some of his fables had been

inserted. Nevertheless, Mary has intitled her work, "Cy Commence li Aesope;" she repeats, also, that she had turned this fabulist into romance language. Mary, therefore, imagined that she was really translating Aesop; but her original had the same title; and I am the more convinced of this, because, in the Royal MS. before cited, which contains a collection of Aesopian fables, there are but 56. According to the introduction, they had been already translated into Latin prose, and then into English prose; and in this MS. as well as in Mary's, there are many fables and fabliaux ascribed to Aesop, which never could have been composed by him.

Again, if we compare the fables which generally pass for Aesop's, with those written by Mary, we shall perceive that the translation of the latter could never have been regarded as a literal version of the former. She is a great deal more particular than Aesop; her moralizations are not the same. In a word, I think she comes nearer to Phaedrus than to the Greek writer.

It will, no doubt be answered, that the Works of Phaedrus have only been known since the end of the 16th century. This I admit; but am not the less persuaded that Mary was better acquainted with Phaedrus than with Aesop. It will, moreover, be contended, that she has herself declared, that the English version, which served her as a model, was a translation from the Greek. To this I reply; first, that Phaedrus's fables may very properly be stiled Aesopian, as he has himself called them:

Aesopus auctor quam materiam reperit,
Hanc ego polivi versibus senariis.[21]

And, secondly, that although Mary possessed the fire, the imagination, and the genius of a poet, she nevertheless had not the criticism, or erudition, of a man of letters. For example; she informs us, that before her fables were translated into English, they had already been turned from Greek into Latin by Aesop.[22] She then gives the fable of an ox that assisted at mass, of a wolf that keeps Lent, of a monk disputing with a peasant, &c.

Amongst these compilers of fables, we find the names of Romulus, Accius, Bernardus, Talon, and many others anonymous. The first is the most celebrated; he has addressed his fables to his son Tiberius; they are written in Latin prose, sixty in number, and many of them are founded upon those of Aesop and Phaedrus. Rimilius published them at the end of the 15th century, and Frederic Nilant gave an edition in 1709, at Leyden, with some curious and interesting notes. Fabricius, in his *Bibliotheca Latina*, says, that these sixty fables are more than five hundred years old.[23] I have already mentioned that there is a MS. of them in the Royal Library in the British Museum, 15 A. VII., which was written in the 13th century, and contains only fifty-six fables. They are said, in the preface, to have been translated out of Greek into Latin, by the Emperor Romulus. Mary likewise mentions this Romulus, and gives him the same title. After having remarked with how much advantage learned men might occupy themselves, in extracting from the works of the ancient philosophers, proverbs, fables, and the morals they contained, for the purpose of instructing men, and training them to virtuous actions, she adds, that the emperor had very successfully pursued the plan, in order to teach his son how to conduct himself with propriety through life[24].

Vincent de Beauvois, a contemporary of Mary, speaks likewise of this Romulus and his fables[25]; and lastly, Fabricius informs us that this author has very much imitated Phaedrus, and often preserved even his expressions.[26] But, after all, it is uncertain who is this Romulus, thus invested with the title of emperor; whether the last Roman emperor of that name, who is likewise called Augustulus or Romulus the

grammarian. I should rather attribute them to some monk of the 11th or 12th century. The rites of the Roman Catholic worship are several times alluded to, and entire passages of the Vulgate very frequently inserted.

It is, however, enough to know that in the time of Mary, there did actually exist a collection of fables called Aesopian, and published under the name of Romulus; that this author, whether real or imaginary, had very much imitated Phaedrus; that these Latin fables had been translated into English; that, without doubt, those of some other unknown writers were added to them; and, finally, that from this latter version Mary made her translation into French verse.

In a MS. of the fables of Mary, it is said this English version was the work of King Mires.[27] The Harleian MS. No. 978, makes the translation to have been King _Alurez_. The MS. cited by Pasquier, calls him King Auvert.[28] The MS. in the Royal Library, 15 A. VII. says the translation was made by the order of King _Affrus_; and, lastly, the Harleian MS. No. 4333, makes it the work of King _Henry_.

With respect to King _Alurez_ or _Auvert_, every one who has examined our ancient writers of romance, during the 12th and 13th centuries, must know that the name of Alfred was thus disfigured by them. Thus, two kings of England, Alfred and Henry, have a claim to that honour. But whence is it that the historian of Alfred, Asser, as well as William of Malmesbury, have mentioned the different translations of this prince, without having noticed that of Aesop?[29] Is it credible that an Anglo-Saxon version of the ninth century would have been intelligible to Mary, who had only learned the English of the thirteenth? Had not the lapse of time, and the descents of the Danes and Normans in the eleventh century, contributed, in the first place, to alter the Anglo-Saxon? and afterwards, during the twelfth, the rest of the people from the northern and western provinces of France, having become dependent upon England, did not they, likewise, by their commerce, and residence in that country, introduce a considerable change into its language? The names of Seneschal, Justiciar, Viscount, Provost, Bailiff, Vassal, &c. which occur in these fables, both in the Latin text and French translation by Mary, ought naturally to have been found in the English version. Now these several terms were all, according to Madox, introduced by the Normans;[30] and the morals to these fables, which make frequent allusion to the feudal system, prove more and more, that this English translation must have been posterior to the time of Alfred.

In the last place, the Harleian MS. No. 4333, ascribes the translation to King Henry. The Normans were acquainted with the fables of Aesop, or, at least, those which were attributed to him during the middle ages. The collateral heirs of Raoul de Vassy, who died in 1064, when, after the death of William the Conqueror, they found means to establish their claims against Robert Courthose; in asserting it, reproach his father with having made the _lion's partition_ in seizing Upon their inheritance.[31]

This proverbial expression very clearly shews that the writings of the Greek fabulist, or at least of those who had followed him, were known to the Normans from the eleventh century. It is possible, therefore, that Henry I. might have studied and translated them into English. Again, all historians agree in giving this prince the title of _Beauclerk_, though no one has assigned any reason for a designation so honourable: and this opinion would justify history, which has given to Henry a name with which authors alone were dignified.

Whether Mary followed the English version literally cannot be ascertained, as we do not even know whether it now exists; and are therefore under the necessity of collating her fables with those of the middle ages: and it appears, she translated from the English 104 fables into French verse; and of this number there are 65, the subjects of

which had already been treated of by Aesop, Phaedrus, Romulus, and the anonymous author of the *_Fabulae Antiquae_*, published by Niland.

The English translation was not only compiled from these different authors, but from many other fabulists, whose names are unknown to us; since, out of the 104 fables of Mary, there are 39 which are neither found in the before mentioned authors, nor in any other known to us.

The English version contained a more ample assemblage of fables than that of Mary, since out of the 56 in the Royal MS. 15 A. VII, which made a part of the former, it appears that she made a selection of subjects that were pleasing to her, and rejected others. It is very singular, that England appears to have had fabulists during the ages of ignorance, whilst Athens and Rome possessed theirs only amidst the most refined periods of their literature.

Some may, perhaps, be disposed to conclude that the 39 additional fables were actually composed by Mary; but I believe, upon reflection, this opinion must be abandoned. She terms her work a translation, glories in the enterprize; and, if it had been only in part the labours of her genius, would scarcely have passed over that circumstance in silence.

Monsieur Le Grand has published 43 of Mary's fables in prose. His translation, however, is not always literal; and seems, in many places, to have departed from the original. He has likewise published many of the *_fabliaux_*, or little stories, which he has unadvisedly attributed to the transcribers of them, and which belong indisputably to her.

I have examined La Fontaine, to ascertain whether he were acquainted with the fables of Mary, and had actually borrowed his subjects from the 39 fables which are wanting in all the writers of this kind with whom we are at present acquainted; and have actually discovered, that he is indebted to them for those of the Drowning Woman, the Fox and the Cat, and the Fox and the Pigeon. From others he has only taken the subject, but changed the actors; and, by retouching the whole in his peculiar manner, has enriched them with a new turn, and given them an appearance of originality.

The third work of Mary consists of a history, or rather a tale, in French verse, of St. Patrick's Purgatory. This performance was originally commenced in Latin, at the Abbey of Saltrey, and dedicated to the abbot of that monastery, and is to be found in MS. in many public libraries. There are two translations of it into French verse. The first of these is in the Cotton Library, Domit. A. IV. and the second in the Harleian, No. 273, but they are not from the same pen: the former consists of near 1000 lines, and the latter of about 700. M. Le Grand has given an analysis of one of these translations in his *_fabliaux_*, vol. V.; and it is upon the authority of this writer that I have ascribed it to Mary, as he maintains that she was the author of it, but without adducing the necessary proofs for this assertion. The Cotton MS. however, contains nothing that gives the least support to M. Le Grand's opinion, or even screens it with probability. Neither is Mary's name mentioned in the Harleian MS.; but as the translator, in his preface, entitles the work "a lay," and professes he had rather engage in it than *_relate fables_*, it may afford a conjecture that Mary has sufficiently developed herself in speaking of her labours. This, however, is merely a conjecture. It is not impossible that the MS. which M. Le Grand consulted contained more particular details on this subject; but he is certainly mistaken in one respect, and that is, in supposing Mary to have been the original author of this piece, whilst all the MSS. that exist attest that she could have been only the translator: and if the translation in the Harleian MS. actually be her performance, she there positively declares that she had been desired to translate the work from Latin into Romance.

This poem was, at a very early period, translated into English verse. It is to be found in the Cotton library, Calig. A. II. under the title of *Owayne Miles*, on account, of Sir Owen being the hero of the piece, and whose descent into St. Patrick's purgatory is related. Walter de Metz, author of the poem entitled *Image du Monde*, mentions also the wonders of St. Patrick's purgatory, the various adventures of those who descended into it, and the condition of those who had the good fortune to return from it; but I am uncertain whether he speaks from the original Latin of the monk of Saltrey, or from Mary's French translation. In the latter case it should appear that Mary finished her translation before 1246, the year in which Walter says he composed his work.[32]

Whether Mary was the author of any other pieces I have not been able to ascertain: her taste, and the extreme facility with which she wrote poetry of the lighter kind, induce a presumption that she was; but I know of none that have come down to us.

FOOTNOTES:

[4] *Prologue des Lais de Marie.*

[5] *Lai du chevrefeuille.*

[6] *Pyramus, Vie de St Edmund, Bibl. Cotton. Domit. A. XI.*

[7] *Prolog. des Lais de Marie.*

[8] It is reasonable to conclude, that writers flocked in greater numbers to the court where they were most in request, and were likely to be most liberally rewarded. Now it is evident that the Dukes of Normandy, when possessed of the crown of England, were incomparably more wealthy, though not in the same proportion more powerful, than the contemporary Kings of France; and it may be presumed that the crowd of candidates for their patronage, was consequently, much more numerous. Our Henry the Second possessed, in right of his father, Maine, Anjou, and Touraine; in right of his wife Eleanor, divorced by Louis le Jeune, the counties of Poictou and Guienne; in right of his mother Matilda, Normandy and England; and his power in the latter, the most valuable part of his dominions, was paramount and uncontrolled, while Louis was surrounded by powerful and rival vassals. We are, therefore, justified in suspecting that the courts of our Norman sovereigns, rather than those of the Kings of France, produced the birth of romance literature; and this suspicion is confirmed by the testimony of three French writers, whose authority is the more conclusive, because they have formed their opinion from separate and independent premises.

The first of these is M. de la Ravallere. In his *Essay on the Revolutions of the French Language*, a work of considerable learning, supported by original authorities, whose words he almost constantly quotes, he distinctly asserts that the pretended patronage of the French princes, anterior to Philippe Auguste, had no visible effect on their domestic literature; that while so many poets were entertained at the courts of the Anglo-Norman princes, no one can be traced to that of Louis le Jeune; that the chronicles of Britain and Normandy, the subjects chosen by Wace and his contemporaries, were not likely to interest the French, &c.

The second authority is M. le Comte de Tressan, a writer, perhaps, of no deep research, but whose good taste is conclusive on points of internal evidence. In his preface to the prose romance of *"La Fleur des Batailles,"* (one of those relating to Charlemagne) he says—The style and character of these romances lead us to think that they were composed at the court of the English kings, descended from William the Conqueror. We find in those of the Round Table, a marked affectation of dwelling on

every thing which can contribute to the glory of the throne and court of England, whose princes and knights always play the chief and most brilliant part in the piece.

Thirdly, the Abbe de la Rue may be considered as having proved the fact, by pointing out, in English history, the persons to whom the original romances were addressed. His three dissertations on the Anglo-Norman poets, in the twelfth and thirteenth volume of the *Archaeologia*, will convince the reader that no man has studied, with more attention, the early history and poetry of France; and he has given it as his decided opinion, that "it was from England and Normandy that the French received the first works which deserve to be cited in their language."--Ellis's *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*.

[9] Prolog. des Lais de Marie.

[10] Oeuvres de Fauchet, 579. *Recherches de la France*, l.8. s. i.

[11] Pyramus loco citate.

[12] Oeuvres de Fauchet, p. 579.

[13] Conclusion of Mary's Fables.

[14] *Dictionnaire Raisonnee de Diplomatie* Verbo _Comte_.

[15] Martineus Dict. Geographique, v. Dampierre.

[16] Sandford's *Genealogical History of the Kings of England*, p. 114.

[17] Ibid, p. 116, and M. Paris, p. 817

[18] Sandford, ibid.

[19] Fabliaux, vol. iv. p.330.

[20] Conclusion of Mary's Fables.

[21] Phaedr. Prolog. lib. i.

[22] Preface to Mary's Fables.

[23] Fabric. Bibl. Latin, lib. ii. c. 3.

[24] Preface to the Fables of Mary

[25] Vincent Bellovac, lib. iv. c. 2.

[26] Fabric. loco citato.

[27] *Menage Diction. Etymol. V. Romans*. Duchesne, *Oeuvres de Maistre Alain Chartris*, p. 861.

[28] Pasquier *Recherches*, liv. viii. c. 1.

[29] Asser, *Vita Alfredi*, Malsmb.

[30] Madox's *Hist. of the Exchequer*, c. 4.

[31] Ordoric. Vitalis Hist. apud Duchesne, pp. 488, 681, & 1084.

[32] See his Works amongst the Harleian MSS. No. 4333.

APPENDIX II.

MARIE'S LAYS.

Versions of only two of the Lays can be given; but it will be better to lay before the reader an abstract of the whole collection, which is in many respects interesting, because it was certainly written in this country, was never printed, and is known to exist only in one manuscript, viz. Harl. MSS. No. 978.

About 56 lines at the beginning of the work are intended as a general prologue; and 26 more form the introduction to the first Lay. This prefatory matter is written in a style of considerable obscurity, which the author defends by the example of the ancients, and quotes Priscian as her authority. But the doctrine she means to inculcate is, that those who possess talents are bound to employ them; and that study is always good as a preservative from vice and from affliction. She tells us, she had therefore form'd a plan of translating, from Latin into romance, *_some good history_*, but found her project had been anticipated by others. She then thought of the numerous lays which she *_had heard*, and carefully treasured in her memory_. These, she was sure, must be new to the generality of her readers; and, in this confidence, she offers to the king the fruits of her labours. After complaining she has met with envy and persecution where she deserved praise, she declares her intention to persevere, and relate, as briefly as possible, such stories as she *_knows to be true_*, and to have been *_formed into lays by the Britons_*.

Les contes ke jeo sai *_rerrais*,
Dunt li Bretun ont fait ces lays_,
Vus conterai asez briefment, &c.

The Lays are twelve in number; nine of which, with the above introduction, are extracted, with some trifling abridgment, from the Specimens of early English Metrical Romances, by George Ellis, Esq.; the two in verse from Way's Fabliaux; and the other from the notes to Sir Tristrem, by Walter Scott, Esq.

No. 1.--_The Lay of_ SIR GUGEMER, *_or_* GUIGEMAR.

While Arthur reign'd, (so chim'd, in earlier day,
Loud to the twanging harp the Breton lay,)
While Arthur reign'd, two kingdoms born to bless,
Great Britain's king, and suzerain of the less;
A lord of Leon, one of fair report
Among the vassal barons of his court,
Own'd for his son a youth more bravely thew'd
Than aught both countries yet had seen of good.
Dame Nature gave the mould; his sire combin'd
Due culture, exercise of limbs and mind,
Till the rare stripling, now no longer boy,
Chang'd his fond parents' fearful hope for joy.

His name was Gugemar: as strength grew on,
To Arthur's court the sire consign'd his son.
There soon in feats of arms the youth excell'd,

Magnanimous, in sports, or deadly field.

Chief of the Table-round, from time to time
Illustrious Arthur mark'd his opening prime,
Then dealt him noble meed; the honour high,
From his own hand, of glorious chivalry.

Knightly in arms he was; one grievous blot,
So deem'd full many a courtly dame, I wot,
Cross'd the full growth of his aspiring days,
And dimm'd the lustre of meridian praise:
With bootless artifice their lures they troll'd;
Still, Gugemer lov'd not, or nothing told.

The court's accustom'd love and service done,
To his glad sire returns the welcome son.
Now with his father dwelt he, and pursued
Such pastimes as are meet for youth of noble blood.
The woods of Leon now would shrilly sound
Oft with his joyous shout and choral hound
At length, one morn his disadventurous dart,
Lanc'd, as the game was rous'd, at hind or hart,
Wing'd through the yielding air its weetless way,
And pierc'd unwares a metamorphos'd fay.
Lo! back recoiling straight, by fairy craft,
Back to its master speeds the reeking shaft;
Deep in his sinewy thigh inflicts a wound,
And strikes the astonish'd hunter to the ground,
While, with a voice which neither bray'd nor spoke,
Thus fearfully the beast her silence broke:--
"Pains, agonizing pains must thou endure,
Till wit of lady's love shall work the cure:
Wo, then, her fated guerdon she shall find
The heaviest that may light on womankind!"

Sir Gugemer, who strove, with courage vain,
Up from the earth to rise, distraught with pain,
While hies his varlet home for succour strong,
Crawls slow with trailing limb the sward along;
'Twas part precipitate, steep rocky shore;
Hoarse at its foot was heard old Ocean's roar;
And in a shelter'd cove at anchor rode,
Close into land, where slept the solemn flood,
A gallant bark, that with its silken sails
Just bellying, caught the gently rising gales,
And from its ebon sides shot dazzling sheen
Of silvery rays with mingled gold between.
A favouring fairy had beheld the blow
Dealt the young hunter by her mortal foe:
Thence grown his patroness, she vows to save,
And cleaves with magick help the sparkling wave:
Now, by a strange resistless impulse driven,
The knight assays the lot by fortune given:
Lo, now he climbs, with fairy power to aid,
The bark's steep side, on silken cordage stay'd;
Gains the smooth deck, and, wonders to behold,
A couch of cypress spread with cloth of gold,
While from above, with many a topaz bright,
Two golden globes sent forth their branching light:
And longer had he gaz'd, but sleep profound,
Wrought by the friendly fairy, wrapt him round.
Stretch'd on the couch the hunter lies supine,
And the swift bark shoots lightly o'er the brine.

For, where the distant prospect fading dies,
And sea and land seem mingling with the skies,
A massy tower of polish'd marble rose;

There dwelt the fair physician of his woes:
Nogiva was the name the princess bore;
Her spouse old, shrewd, suspicious evermore,
Here mew'd his lovely consort, young and fair,
And watch'd her with a dotard's bootless care.
Sure, Love these dotards dooms to jealous pain,
And the world's laugh, when all their toil proves vain.

This lord, howe'er, did all that mortal elf
Could do, to keep his treasure to himself:
Stay'd much at home, and when in luckless hour
His state affairs would drag him from his tower,
Left with his spouse a niece himself had bred,
To be the partner of her board and bed;
And one old priest, a barren lump of clay,
To chant their mass, and serve them day by day.

Her prison room was fair; from roof to floor
With golden imageries pictur'd o'er;
There Venus might be seen, in act to throw
Down to the mimic fire that gleam'd below
The 'Remedies of Love' Dan Ovid made;
Wrathful the goddess look'd, and ill-repaid;
And many more than I may well recall,
Illumining throughout the sumptuous wall.

For the old ghostly guide--to do him right--
He harbour'd in his breast no jailor's spite;
Compassionate and poor, he bore in mind
His prisoner's health might languish, much confin'd
And oft would let her feet and fancy free,
Wander along the margin of the sea.

There then it chanc'd, upon the level sand,
That aunt and niece were pacing hand in hand,
When onward to the marble tower they spied
With outspread sail the fairy vessel glide:
Both felt a momentary fear at first,
(As women oft are given to think the worst)
And turn'd for flight; but ere they far were fled,
Look'd round to view the object of their dread;
Then, seeing none on board, they backward hied,
Perchance by fairy influence fortified,
Where the trim bark was run its course to end,
And now both dames its ebon deck ascend;
There on a couch, a silken pall beneath,
So wrapt in sleep he scarcely seem'd to breathe,
Sir Gugemer they spied, defil'd with gore,
And with a deadly pale his visage o'er:
They fear them life was fled; and much his youth,
And much his hap forlorn did move their ruth:
With lily hand his heart Nogiva press'd,
"It beats!" she cried, "beats strong within his breast!"

So loud her sudden voice express'd delight,
That from his swoon awoke the wondering knight:
His name, his country, straight the dames demand,
And what strange craft had steer'd his bark to land?
He, on his elbow rais'd, with utterance weak,
Such as his feeble strength avail'd to speak,
Recounts his piteous chance, his name, his home,
How up the vessel's side ere while he clomb,
And then sunk down in sleep; but who impell'd
Its ebon keel, or tissued canvas swell'd,
He wist not: faint, and lacking vital heat,
He sought some needful aid from looks so sweet.

"So brave a knight!--to yield of succour nought--
What heart of flint could cherish such a thought?
Yet where to harbour him, and how to hide?--
The husband not at home, means must be tried!"--

So thought these dames, I ween, that fateful hour,
While feebly onward to the marble tower,
Propp'd, right and left, by snowy shoulders twain,
Sir Gugemer repair'd with mickle pain.
There on a bed of down they plac'd their guest,
Cleans'd the deep wound, with healing balsam dress'd,
Brought, for his plight most fit, choice simple food,
And, watchful how he far'd, attendant stood;
Till now returning strength grew swiftly on,
And his firm voice confess'd his anguish gone.

In sooth, the fay, protectress of his worth,
Had shower'd down balm, unknown to wights on earth;
One night achieves his cure; but other smart
Plays o'er the weetless region of his heart;
Pains, such as beam from bright Nogiva's eyes,
Flit round his bed, and quiral [Errata: genial] slumber flies.

Now, as the ruddy rays of morning peer,
Him seem'd his kind physician's step drew near;
She comes; his cheeks with new-found blushes burn;
Nogiva--she, too, blushes in her turn:
Love sure had neither spar'd; yet at the last
Faintly she asks him how the night had pass'd?
O! how the trembling patient then confess'd
Strange malady at heart, and banish'd rest:
And sued once more for life, restor'd so late,
Now hers alone to grant, the mistress of his fate.
She speaks assurance kind with witching smile,
"No ill from sickness felt so little while!"
Yet nought the knight believes; a kiss, I ween,
Fell from her dainty lips, and clos'd the scene.

One year or more within some secret bower,
So dwelt the knight beneath the marble tower;
Thoughts of his sire, at last, how he might bear
His son's long absence, so awaken'd care,
Needs must he back to Leon: vainly here
Sues fond Nogiva's interdicting tear.
"Sad leave reluctantly I yield!" she cries,
"Yet take this girdle, knit with mystick ties,
Wed never dame till first this secret spell
Her dextrous hands have loosen'd:--so farewell!"
"Never, I swear, my sweet! so weal betide!"
With heavy heart Sir Gugemer replied;
Then hied him to the gate, when lo! at hand
Nogiva's hoary lord is seen to stand,
(Brought by the fairy foe's relentless ire,)
And lustily he calls for knight and squire:
Now with his trusty blade, of temper good,
The stout knight clears his course to ocean's flood,
Sweeps right and left the scatter'd rout away,
And climbs the bark of his protectress fay;
Light glides the ebon keel the waters o'er,
And his glad footsteps press his native shore.

His father, who had long time, woe-begone,
Bewail'd the absence of his darling son;
Ween'd the best course to hold him now for life,
Should be to link him closely to a wife.
Sir Gugemer, urg'd sore, at length avows,
He never will take woman's hand for spouse,
Save her's, whose fingers, skill'd in ladies' lore,
Shall loose that knot his mystick girdle bore.

Straight all that Bretany contain'd of fair,
Widows, and dainty maids, the adventure dare:

Clerks were they all, I ween; but knots like these
May not be loos'd when earthly beauties please.

Thus while it fares with those, in dungeon deep
See sad Nogiva never cease to weep!
Doom'd by her jealous lord's revengeful mood,
The well her beverage, bitter bread her food,
Lo there with iron gyves chain'd down she lies,
And wails unheard her hopeless miseries:
Scarce brooking longer life, but that the thought
Of Gugemer some gleams of solace brought:
Him would she name full oft, and oft implore
Heaven, but to view his winning face once more.
Long had she sorrow'd thus; her fairy friend
Hears at the last, and bids her sufferings end:
Burst by her magic touch the fetters fall,
Wide springs the gate, and quakes the obdurate wall;
Close to the shore the enchanted pinnacle glides,
Feels its fair guest within its arching sides,
Then ploughs the foaming main with gallant state,
Till Bretany's far coast receives the freight.

Meriadus--(that name the monarch bore,
Where first Nogiva's footsteps prest the shore,)
Meriadus such charms not vainly view'd;
He saw, felt love, and like a sovereign woo'd:
She briefly answers:--"None this heart may move,
This bosom none inspire with mutual love,
Save he whose skill this girdle shall unbind,
Fast round my waist with mystick tie confin'd."

Much strove Meriadus, strove much in vain,
Strove every courtly gallant of his train:
All foil'd alike, he blazons far and wide
A tournament, and there the emprise be tried!
There who may loose the band, and win the expectant bride!

Sir Gugemer, when first the tidings came
Of the quaint girdle, and the stranger dame.
Ween'd well Nogiva's self, his dame alone,
Bore this mysterious knot so like his own.
On to the tournament elate he hies,
There his liege lady greets his wistful eyes:
What now remain'd? "Meriadus! once more
I view," he cries, "the mistress I adore;
Long have our hearts been one! great king, 'tis thine
Twin [Errata: Twain] lovers, sadly sunder'd long, to join.
So will I straight do homage, so remain
Thy liegeman three full years, sans other gain,
Thine with a hundred knights, and I their charge maintain."

Brave was the proffer, but it prosper'd nought;
Love rul'd alone the unyielding monarch's thought.
Then Gugemer vows vengeance, then in arms
Speaks stern defy, and claims Nogiva's charms:
And, for his cause seem'd good, anon behold
Many a strange knight, and many a baron bold,
Brought by the tourney's fame, on fiery steeds
Couch lance to aid; and mortal strife succeeds.

Long time beleagur'd gape the castle walls;
First in the breach the indignant monarch falls:
Nogiva's lord next meets an equal fate;
And Gugemer straight weds the widow'd mate.

A prince of Bretagne, so passionately attached to chivalrous amusements, that he cared neither for business nor gallantry. Nothing but the necessity of heading his troops could withdraw him from the pleasures of hunting and hawking; and all affairs of state were managed by his steward, a man of equal loyalty and experience. Unfortunately this steward had a beautiful wife: the prince heard her much praised; and insensibly began to think his sport most agreeable, when it conducted him, at the end of the day, to the steward's castle; where he had a natural opportunity of seeing and conversing with the lovely hostess. Overcome by his passion, almost before he was conscious of it, he began by reflecting on the baseness of the part he was preparing to act; and ended, by determining not to endure the misery of privation and disappointment, if he could succeed in seducing her. Having devised, in the course of a sleepless night, as many arguments as were necessary to satisfy his own morality, and formed a plan for securing a long interview, he set off for the chase; returning after a short time, under pretence of sudden indisposition, and retiring to bed, he sent to request a visit from the lady, who then received a very long and eloquent declaration of love. To this she replied, at first, by proper expostulations; but when at length assured, with the utmost solemnity, that if her husband was dead she should become the partner of his throne, she suddenly gave way, and proposed, with his assistance, to destroy the steward, so artfully, that neither should incur the slightest suspicion. Equitan, far from being startled at this atrocious proposition, assured her of his concurrence, and she continued thus: "Return, sir, for the present, to your court; then come to pursue your diversion in this forest, and again take up your abode under our roof. You must once more pretend to be indisposed; cause yourself to be blooded; and on the third day order a bath, invite my husband to bathe and afterwards to dine with you. I will take care to prepare the bathing tubs: that which I destine for him shall be filled with boiling water, so that he will be instantly scalded to death; after which you will call in your and his attendants, and explain to them how your affectionate steward had expired in the act of bathing." At the end of three months every thing was arranged for the execution of this diabolical plot; but the steward, who had risen early for some purpose of business or amusement, happening to stay rather beyond the time, the lovers had met during his absence, forgetting that their guilty project was not yet accomplished. A maid was stationed at the door, near which stood the fatal bath; but the husband returning with precipitation, suddenly forced it open, in spite of her feeble opposition, and discovered his wife in the arms of Equitan. The prince, under the first impulse of surprize and remorse, started from the bed, and, heedlessly plunging into the boiling bath, was instantly suffocated or scalded to death. The husband, almost at the same instant, seized on his guilty partner, and threw her headlong after her paramour. Thus were the wicked punished, by the means which they contrived for the destruction of another; and such is the substance of the lay which was composed by the Bretons under the name of Equitan.

* * * *

No. III.--LAY LE FRAINE.

This ancient and curious little poem, translated from the French of Marie, is preserved in the Auchinlech MSS. It was communicated by Mr. Walter Scott to Mr. Ellis, and is inserted amongst his Miscellaneous Romances. It is mutilated in two places, and wants the conclusion. These defects are supplied from the French prose.

The prologue begins by observing, that in ancient times, lays, intended to be accompanied by the harp, were composed on all sorts of subjects.

Some both of war, and some of woe;
And some of joy and mirth also;

And some of treachery and of guile;
Of old adventures that fell while;
And some of _bourdes_[33] and ribaudy;
And many there beth of fairy;
Of all thinges that men seth,
Most of love, forsooth, there beth.
In Bretayne, by old time,
These lays were made, so sayeth this rhyme, &c.

The Bretons never failed converting into lays all the anecdotes they thought worth consigning to memory; and the following was thus composed, and called Lay le Fraine (frene), or "The Aventure of the Ash."

In the "West countrie" lived two knights, men of opulence, friends from their infancy, and married about the same time. One of the ladies having twins, her husband sent to announce the event to his friend.

The messenger goth, and hath nought forgete,
And findeth the knight at his mete;
And fair he gret, in the hall,
The lord, the levedi, the meyne all;
And sith then, on knees down him set,
And the lord full fair he gret.
"He bade that thou should to him _te_, [34]
And, for love, his _gossibbe_[35] be."
"Is his levedi deliver'd _with sounde? _"[36]
"Ya, sir, y-thonked be God, _yestronde._"[37]
"And whether a maiden child, other a knave?"
"Tway sones, sir, God hem save!"
The knight thereof was glad and blithe,
And thonked Godes sonde swithe,
And granted his errand in all thing,
And gaf him a palfray for his tiding.
Then was the lady of the house
A proud dame, and malicious,
Hoker-full, iche mis-segging, [38]
Squeamous, and eke scorning;
To iche woman she had envie;
She spake these words of felonie:
"Ich have wonder, thou messenger,
Who was thy lordes conseilior,
To teach him about to send,
And tell shame _in iche an end! _"[39]
"That his wife hath tway children y-bore!
Well may iche man wite therfore
That tway men her han hodde in bower:
That is hir bothe dishonour!"

The messenger was sorely abashed by these unexpected and unjust reflections; the husband reprimanded his wife very severely for the intemperance of her tongue; and all the women of the country, amongst whom the story rapidly circulated, united in prayer, that her calumny might receive some signal punishment. Accordingly, the lady shortly after brought into the world two daughters. She was now reduced to the alternative of avowing herself guilty of a calumny against her innocent neighbour, or of imputing to herself, in common with the other, a crime of which she had not been guilty; unless she could contrive to remove one of the twins. The project of destroying her own child, was, at first, rejected with horror; but after revolving the subject in her mind, and canvassing with great logical acuteness the objections to this atrocious measure, she determined to adopt it, because she could ultimately cleanse herself from the sin, by doing private penance, and obtaining absolution.

Having thus removed her scruples, she called the midwife, and directed

her to destroy one of the infants, and to declare that one only had been born. But she refused; and the unnatural mother was reduced to seek for a more submissive and supple agent. She had a maid-servant, educated in the family, to whom she imparted her difficulties; and this confidential counsellor at once proposed a contrivance for removing them: "Give me the child," said she, "and be assured that, without destroying, I will so remove it, that it shall never give you any further trouble. There are many religious houses in the neighbourhood, whose inhabitants cannot be better employed than in nursing and educating orphan children. I will take care your infant shall be discovered by some of these good people, under whose care, by the blessing of Providence, it will thrive and prosper; and in the mean time I will take such means that its health shall not suffer. Dismiss your sorrow, therefore, and trust in my discretion." The lady was overjoyed, and accepted the offer with assurances of eternal gratitude.

As it was her wish that those who should find the child might know it was born of noble parents,

She took a rich _baudekine_, [40]
That her lord brought from _Constantine_, [41]
And lopped the little maiden therein;
And took a ring of fine gold,
And on her arm it knit,
With a lace of silk in _plit_, [42]

The maid took the child her _mid_, [43]
And stole away in an even tide,
And passed over a wild heath;
Thorough field and thorough wood she _geth_, [44]
All the winter-long night.
The weather was clear, the moon was light,
So that she com by a forest side;
She wox all weary, and gan abide.
Soon after she gan heark,
Cockes crow, and dogs bark;
She arose, and thither wold;
Near and nearer, she gan behold,
Walls and houses fell the seigh,
A church, with steeple fair and high;
Then was there nother street no town,
But an house of religion;
An order of nuns, well y-dight,
To servy God both day and night.
The maiden abode no _lengore_, [45]
But yede her to the church door,
And on her knees she sate her down,
And said, weepand, her orisones.
"O Lord," she said, "Jesus Christ,
That sinful mannes _bedes_, [46]
Underfong, [47] this present,
And help this seli innocent!
That it mote y-christen'd be,
For Marie love, thy mother free!"
She looked up, and by her seigh
An asche, by her, fair and high,
Well y-boughed, of mickle price;
The body was hollow, as many one is.
Therin she laid the child for cold,
In the _pel_, [48] as it was, _byfold_, [49]
And blessed it with all her might.
With that it gan to dowe light.
The fowles up, and sung on bough,
And acre-men yede to the plough,
The maiden turned again anon,

And took the way she had ere gon.
 The porter of the abbey arose,
 And did his office in the close;
 Rung the bells and tapers light,
 Laid forth books, and all ready dight.
 The church door be undid,
 And seigh anon, in the _stede_, [50]
 The pel liggen in the tree,
 And thought well that it might be,
 That thieves had y-robbed somewhere,
 And gone there forth, and let it there.
 Therto he yede, and it unwound,
 And the maiden child therin he found.
 He took it up between his honde,
 And thanked Jesu Christes sonde,
 And home to his house he it brought,
 And took it to his daughter, and her besought
 That she should keep it as she con,
 For she was _melche, and couthe thon_. [51]
 She bade it suck, and it wold,
 For it was nigh dead for cold.
 Anon, fire she a-light,
 And warmed it well _aplight_, [52]
 She gave it suck upon her _barm_, [53]
 And siththen, laid it to sleep warm.
 And when the mass was y-done,
 The porter to the abbess com full soon.
 "Madame, what rede ye of this thinge?
 To-day, right in the morning,
 Soon after the first _stound_, [54]
 A little maiden child ich found
 In hollow ash thin out
 And a pel her about;
 A ring of gold also was there;
 How it came thither I wot ne'er."
 The abbess was a-wondered of this thing.
 "Go," she said, "on _hying_ [55]
 And fetch it hither, I pray thee;
 It is welcome to God and me.
 Ich will it helpen as I can,
 And segge it to my kinswoman."
 The porter anon it gan forth bring,
 With the pel, and with the ring.
 The abbess let clepe a priest anon,
 And let it christen in function.
 And for it was in an ash y-found,
 She cleped it _Frain_ in that stound.
 The name [56] of the ash is a frain,
 After the language of Bretayn;
 Forthy [57] Le Frain men clepeth this lay,
 More than ash, in each country.
 This Frain thriv'd from year to year;
 The abbess niece men ween'd it were.
 The abbess her gan teach, and _beld_. [58]
 By that she was twelve winter eld,
 In all England there was none
 A fairer maiden than she was one.
 And when she couthe ought of _manhede_, [59]
 She bade the abbess her _wisse_ [60] and rede,
 Which were her kin, one or other,
 Father or mother, sister or brother.
 The abbess her in council took,
 To tellen her she nought forsook,
 How she was founden in all thing;
 And took her the cloth and the ring,

And bade her keep it in that stede;
 And, therwhiles she lived, so she did.
 Then was there, in that cuntre,
 A rich knight of land and fee,
 Proud, and young, and jollif,
 And had not yet y-wedded wife.
 He was stout, of great renown,
 And was y-cleped Sir Guroun.
 He heard praise that maiden free,
 And said, he would her see.
 He dight him in the way anon,
 And jolliflich thither is gone,
 And bode his man segge, verament,
 He should toward a tournament.
 The abbesse, and the nonnes all,
 Fair him grette in the guest-hall;
 And damsel Frain, so fair of mouth,
 Grette him fair, as she well couth.
 And swithe well he gan devise,
 Her semblant, and her gentrise,
 Her lovesome eyen, her _rode_[61] so bright.
 And commenced to love her anon-right;
 And thought how he might take on,
 To have her for his lemon [Errata: leman].
 He thought, "Gif iccome her to
 More than ich have y-do,
 The abbesse will _souchy_[62] guile,
 And _wide_[63] her away in a little while."
 He compassed another _suchesoun_[64]
 To be brother of that religion.
 "Madam," he said to the abbesse,
 "I-lovi[65] well, in all goodness,
 Ich will give one and other
 Londes and rentes, to become your brother,[66]
 That ye shall ever fare the _bet_[67]
 When I come to have recet."[68]
 At few wordes they ben _at one._
 He graithes him[69], and forth is gone.
 Oft he com, by day and night,
 To speak with that maiden bright;
 So that, with his fair _behest_[70]
 And with his glosing, at lest
 She granted him to don his will,
 When he will, loud and still.
 "Leman," he said, "thou must let be
 The abbesse _thy neice_[71] and go with me;
 For ich am riche, of swich powere,
 Ye finde bet than thou hast here."
 The maiden grant, and to him trist,
 And stole away, that no man wist;
 With her took she no thing
 But her pel and her ring.
 When the abbess gan aspy
 That she was with the knight _owy_[72]
 She made mourning in her thought,
 And her _bement_[73] and gained nought.
 So long she was in his castel,
 That all his meynie loved her well.
 To rich and poor she gan her 'dress,
 That all her loved more and less;
 And thus she led with him her life,
 Right as she had been his wedded wife.
 His knightes com, and to him speke,
 And holy church commandeth eke,
 Some lordis daughter for to take,

And his leman all forsake.
 And said, him were well more fair
 In wedlock to get him an heir,
 Than lead his life with swiche one,
 Of whose kin he knew none.
 And said, "Here besides, is a knight
 That hath a daughter fair and bright,
 That shall bear his heritage,
 Taketh her in marriage!"
 Loth him was for that deed to do,
 Oc, at last, he granted therto.
 The _forward_[74] was y-marked aright,
 And were at one, and troth plight.
 Allas! that he no had y-wit,
 Ere the forward were y-suit!
 That she, and his leman also,
 Sistren were, and twinnes two!
 Of o father begeten they were,
 Of o mother born _y-fere_[75]
 That _hi_[76] so were ne wist none,
 Forsooth, I say, but God alone.
 The new bride was graithed with oil,
 And brought home to the lord is host,
 Her father come with her also,
 The levedi her mother, and other mo.
 The bishop of the lond, withouten fail,
 Come to do the spousail.

* * * * *

The young rival of Le Frain was distinguished like her sister, by a sylvan appellation; her name was _Le Codre_ (Corylus, the Hazel), and the knight's tenants had sagaciously drawn a most favourable prognostic of his future happiness, from the superiority of nuts to vile ash-keys; but neither he nor any of his household were disposed to augur favourably of a marriage which tended to deprive them of the amiable orphan. The feast was magnificent, but dull; and never were apparent rejoicings more completely marred by a general feeling of constraint and formality. Le Frain alone, concealing the grief which preyed on her heart, was all zeal and activity; and, by her unceasing attentions, conciliated the pity and esteem of the bride, and even of her mother, who had hitherto felt the utmost anxiety to procure her dismissal. At the conclusion of the banquet she employed herself in the decoration of the bridal chamber, and having observed that the covering of the bed was not sufficiently costly, spread over it the magnificent mantle she had received from the abbess, and had hitherto preserved with the utmost solicitude. She had scarcely left the room when the bride entered it accompanied by her mother, who casting her eyes on this splendid mantle, surveyed it with feelings of the most poignant remorse, and immediately recognized the testimony of her crime. She questioned the chamberlains, who were unable to explain the appearance of an ornament they had never before beheld; she then interrogated Le Frain, and, at the end of a short examination, fell into a swoon, exclaiming, "Fair child, thou art my daughter!" Her husband was then summoned, and she confessed to him with tears, and every expression of penitence, the sinful act she had committed, and the providential discovery of her daughter by means of the mantle and the ring, both of which were presents from himself. The knight embraced his child with the utmost tenderness, and prevailed on the bishop to dissolve the just solemnized marriage, and unite their son-in-law to the original object of his affections. The other sister was shortly after bestowed on a neighbouring lord, and the adventures of Le Frain and Le Codre were formed into a Lay, which received its name from the former.

FOOTNOTES:

- [33] Jests.
- [34] Perhaps a mistake in the MS. for ge, i.e. go.
- [35] Gossip, godfather.
- [36] Health, safety.
- [37] Yesterday.
- [38] Full of frowardness, each mis-saying or reviling.
- [39] Each an end, i.e. in every quarter.
- [40] A rich mantle, lined with fur.
- [41] Constantinople.
- [42] Plaited, twisted.
- [43] With.
- [44] Goeth.
- [45] Longer.
- [46] Prayers.
- [47] Receive.
- [48] Fur.
- [49] Folded.
- [50] Place.
- [51] She had milk, and was able to suckle it.
- [52] Certainly, I plight; I promise you.
- [53] Lap.
- [54] Hour.
- [55] In haste.
- [56] In the MS. it is "freyns," which maybe a mistake of the transcriber.
- [57] Therefore.
- [58] Protect, defend.
- [59] Manhood, here used for the relation of consanguinity.
- [60] Teach and advise her.
- [61] Complexion.
- [62] Suspect.
- [63] Void, carry away.
- [64] Excuse.

[65] Beloved.

[66] Of the same religious fraternity.

[67] Better.

[68] Lodging, abode.

[69] Agreed.

[70] Promise.

[71] It should be _thy aunt._

[72] Away.

[73] Bemoaned.

[74] Contract.

[75] Together.

[76] They, Sax.

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No. IV.--BISCLAVERET.

This is the Breton name for an animal, which the Normans call Garwolf; into whose form men were often formerly metamorphosed; and during such times were the most ferocious and destructive inhabitants of the forest.

There lived formerly in Bretagne a baron, comely in his person, wise, courteous, adored by his neighbours, much beloved by his sovereign, and married to a noble and beautiful lady, for whom he felt the warmest affection, which she appeared to return. But she had observed, her husband was regularly absent during three days in the week; and, suspecting there must be something mysterious in this periodical disappearance, resolved, if possible, to extort the secret. She redoubled her expressions of tenderness, bitterly lamented her frequent intervals of solitude, and, affecting to be persuaded that they were spent with a mistress, conjured him to calm her apprehensions by a disclosure of the truth. The good baron in his turn begged her to desist from an enquiry which would only lead to their permanent separation, and the extinction of all her fondness; but her tears and blandishments prevailed, and he confessed that, during half the week, he became a Bisclaveret. The lady, though she felt a secret horror at finding herself the wife of a wolf, pursued her enquiry;--Were his clothes also transformed at the same time? the baron answered, that he was naked: where, then, did he leave his dress? To this question he endeavoured to avoid giving an answer; declaring, should that be discovered, he should be condemned to wear his brute form through life; and observing that, if she loved him, she could have no wish to learn a secret, useless to her, and in its disclosure fatal to himself. But obstinacy is always an over-match for rational argument: she still insisted; and the good-natured husband ultimately told that, "by the side of an old chapel, situated on the road to the thickest part of the forest, was a bush, which overhang and concealed an excavated stone, in which he constantly deposited his garments." The wife, now mistress of his fate, quickly sent for a gallant, whose love she had hitherto rejected; taught

him the means of confirming the baron's metamorphosis; and, when their friends had renounced all hope of his return, married her new favourite, and conveyed to him a large inheritance, the fruit of their joint treachery. In about a year the king went to hunt in the forest, and after a chase which lasted the whole day, had nearly run down the unfortunate Bisclaveret, when the persecuted animal rushed from the thicket, and running straight up to him, seized his stirrup with his fore-paw, began to lick his feet, and with the most piteous whinings to implore his protection. The king was, at first dreadfully frightened, but his fear gave way to pity and admiration. He called his attendants to witness the miracle; ordered the dogs to be whipped off, solemnly took the brute under his royal protection; and returned to his palace, closely followed by his savage attendant. Bisclaveret became an universal favourite; he was fed with the greatest care, slept in the royal apartments, and though indefatigable in attentions to his master, returned the caresses of the courtiers, who admired and esteemed, without envying his superior intelligence and accomplishments. At length, the king having summoned a plenar at court, his barons flocked from all quarters, and, among the rest the husband of the false lady. No one had thought of paying the least attention to Bisclaveret, whose gentleness was even more remarkable than his sagacity; but no sooner did the knight make his appearance than the animal attacked him with the greatest fury, and was scarcely prevented, even by the interposition of the king himself, from tearing him to pieces. The same scene occurred a second time, and occasioned infinite surprise. Not long after this, the king went to hunt in the same forest, and the wicked wife, as lady of the manor, having sent before her a magnificent present, set forth to pay her court to her sovereign. Bisclaveret saw her approach, flew upon her, and instantly tore her nose from her face. This act of discourtesy to a lady excited universal indignation: even the king took part against his favourite, who would have been punished with instant death, but for the interference of an aged counsellor. "This lady, Sir," said he to the king, "is wife of that knight whom you so tenderly loved, and whose unaccountable disappearance you have so long regretted." The baron whom Bisclaveret first assaulted is her present husband. He becomes ferocious only on the appearance of these two; there is some mystery in this, which the lady, if imprisoned and interrogated would probably discover. Britany is the country of wonders--

Mainte merveille avuns veu
Qui en Bretagne est avenu.

In compliance with this advice the lady was put in close confinement, the whole secret extorted, and the clothes of Bisclaveret duly restored. But when they were brought before him the animal appeared to survey them with listlessness and inattention; and the king had again recourse to his sapient counsellor, by whose advice they were transferred to the royal bed-chamber, where Bisclaveret was left, without witnesses, to effect, if possible, his metamorphosis. In due time the king, attended with two of his barons, repaired to the chamber, and found the knight in his natural form, asleep on the royal bed. His master immediately embraced him with the utmost affection, restored all his estates; added more, and banished the wicked wife, together with her paramour, from the country. It is remarkable that afterwards she had several children, all of whom were females, and distinguished by the disagreeable singularity of being born without noses. Be assured that this adventure is strictly true, and that the Lay of Bisclaveret was composed for the purpose of making it known to the latest posterity.

* * * * *

No. V.--_The Lay of SIR LANVAL_.

It was the time of Pentecost the bless'd,

When royal Arthur held the accustom'd feast,
When Carduel's walls contained the vast resort
That press'd from every land to grace his plenar court.
There did the sovereign's copious hand dispense
Large boons to all with free magnificence,
To all but one; from Bretany he came,
A goodly knight, Sir Lanval was his name.
Long had the king, by partial temper sway'd,
His loyal zeal with cold neglect repaid;
Yet from a throne Sir Lanval drew his birth,
Nor could all England boast more comeliness and worth.
Whate'er the cause, no gift the monarch gave,
The knight with honest pride forbore to crave,
Till at the last, his substance all forespent,
From his lord's court the hopeless liegeman went.

No leave he took, he told no mortal wight,
Scarce had he thought to guide his steps aright,
But all at random, reckless of his way,
He wander'd on the better half of day.
Ere evening fell he reached a pleasant mead,
And there he loos'd his beast, at will to rest or feed;
Then by a brook-side down his limbs he cast
And, pondering on the waters as they pass'd,
The while his cloak his bended arm sustain'd,
Sadly he sat, and much in thought complain'd.

So mus'd he long, till by the frequent tread
Of quickening feet constrain'd, he turn'd his head;
Close by his side there stood a female pair,
Both richly clad, and both enchanting fair;
With courteous guise the wondering knight they greet
With winning speech, with invitation sweet
From their kind mistress, where at ease she lay,
And in her tent beguil'd the lingering day.
Awhile Sir Lanval reft of sense appear'd;
Then up at once his mailed limbs he rear'd,
And with his guides impatient to proceed,
Though a true knight, for once forgot his steed.

And now with costliest silk superbly dight,
A gay pavilion greets the warrior's sight;
Its taper spire a towering eagle crown'd,
In substance gold, of workmanship renown'd.
Within, recumbent on a couch, was laid
A form more perfect than e'er man survey'd:
The new-blown rose, the lily's virgin prime,
In the fresh hour of fragrant summer-time,
Though of all flowers the fairest of the fair,
With this sweet paragon might ill compare;
And o'er her shoulders flow'd with graceful pride,
Though for the heat some little cast aside,
A crimson pall of Alexandria's dye,
With snowy ermine lin'd, befitting royalty;
Yet was her skin, where chance bewray'd the sight,
Far purer than the snowy ermine's white.
'Lanvall!' she cried, as in amazed mood,
Of speech and motion void, the warrior stood,
'Lanvall!' she cried, 'tis you I seek for here;
Your worth has won me: knight, I love thee dear;
And of my love such proof will soon impart,
Shall wing with envy thy proud sovereign's heart:
Then slighted merit shall be fully known,
And kings repine at wealth beyond their own.'
Words such as these arous'd the astonish'd knight,
He felt love's kindling flame inspire his spright,
And, 'O pure paragon,' he straight replied,
'Thy love is all! I hold no wish beside!

If bliss so rare thy favouring lips decree,
No deed shall foil thy champion's chivalry;
No toil shall wear, no danger shall dismay,
Let my queen will, and Lanval must obey:
So may I thrive as, from this moment bless'd,
One hope I cherish, one sole boon request,
Thy winning form, thy fostering smiles to see,
And never, never more to part from thee.'

So speaking ceas'd awhile the enraptur'd knight,
For now the two fair damsels met his sight;
Each on her arm resplendent vestments brought,
Fresh from the loom, magnificently wrought:
Enrob'd in them, with added grace he mov'd,
As one by nature form'd to be belov'd;
And, by the fairy to the banquet led,
And placed beside her on one genial bed,
Whiles the twain handmaids every want supplied,
Cates were his fare to mortal man denied:
Yet was there one, the foremost of the feast,
One food there was far sweeter than the rest,
One food there was did feed the warriors flame,
For from his lady's lovely lips it came.

What feeble wit of man might here suffice,
To point with colours dim Sir Lanval's extacies!
There lapt in bliss he lies, there fain would stay,
There dream the remnant of his life away:
But o'er their loves his dew still evening shed,
Night gathered on amain, and thus the fairy said;
'Rise, knight! I may not longer keep thee here;
Back to the court return and nothing fear,
There, in all princely cost, profusely free,
Maintain the honour of thyself and me;
There feed thy lavish fancies uncontroul'd,
And trust the exhaustless power of fairy gold.
'But should reflection thy soft bosom move,
And wake sad wishes for thy absent love;
(And sure such wishes thou canst never frame,
From any place where presence would be shame),
Whene'er thou call thy joyful eyes shall see
This form, invisible to all but thee.
One thing I warn thee; let the blessing rest
An unrevealed treasure in thy breast;
If here thou fail, that hour my favours end,
Nor wilt thou ever more behold thy friend:'--
Here, with a parting kiss, broke off the fay,
'Farewell!' she cried, and sudden pass'd away.
The knight look'd up, and just without the tent
Beheld his faithful steed, and forth he went;
Light on his back he leap'd with graceful mein,
And to the towers of Carduel turn'd the rein;
Yet ever and anon he look'd behind
With strange amaz'd uncertainty of mind,
As one who hop'd some further proofs to spy
If all were airy dream or just reality.

And now great Arthur's court beheld the knight
In sumptuous guise magnificently dight;
Large were his presents, cost was nothing spar'd,
And every former friend his bounty shar'd.
Now ransom'd thralls, now worthy knights supplied
With equipage their scanty means denied;
Now minstrels clad their patron's deeds proclaim,
And add just honour to Sir Lanval's name.

Nor did his kindness yield a sparing meed
To the poor pilgrim, in his lowly weed;
Nor less to those who erst, in fight renown'd,
Had borne the bloody cross, and warr'd on paynim ground:
Yet, as his best belov'd so lately told,
His unexhausted purse o'erflow'd with gold.
But what far dearer solace did impart,
And thrill'd with thankfulness his loyal heart,
Was the choice privilege, that, night or day,
Whene'er his whisper'd prayer invok'd the fay,
That loveliest form, surpassing mortal charms,
Bless'd his fond eyes, and fill'd his circling arms.

Now shall ye hear how these delights so pure
Chang'd all to trouble and discomfiture.

'Twas on the solemn feast of sainted John,
When knights past tale did in the castle won,
That, supper done, 'twas will'd they all should fare
Forth to the orchard green, awhile to ramble there.
The queen, who long had mark'd, with much delight,
The gallant graces of the Breton knight,
Soon, from the window of her lofty tower,
Mid the gay band espied him in a bower,
And turning to her dames with blythe intent,
'Hence, all!' she cried; 'we join the merriment!'
All took the word, to the gay band they hied,
The queen, besure, was close to Lanval's side,
Sprightly she seem'd, and sportfully did toy,
And caught his hand to dance, and led the general joy,

Lanval alone was dull where all was gay,
His thoughts were fixed on his lovely fay:
Soon as he deftly might, he fled the throng;
And her dear name nigh trembled on his tongue,
When the fond queen, who well had trac'd his flight,
Stepp'd forth, and cross'd his disappointed sight.
Much had she sought to meet the knight alone;
Now in these words she made her passion known:
'Lanval!' she said, 'thy worth, long season past,
'In my deserv'd esteem hath fix'd thee fast:
'Tis thine this prosperous presage to improve:--
Say, gentle knight, canst thou return my love?

The knight, ye wot, love's paragon ador'd,
And, had his heart been free, rever'd his word;
True to his king, the fealty of his soul
Abhor'd all commerce with a thought so foul.
In fine, the sequel of my tale to tell,
From the shent queen such bitter slander fell,
That, with an honest indignation strong,
The fatal secret 'scap'd Sir Lanval's tongue:
'Yes!' he declar'd, 'he felt love's fullest power!
Yes!' he declar'd, 'he had a paramour!
But one, so perfect in all female grace,
Those charms might scarcely win her handmaid's place;
Those charms, were now one menial damsel near,
Would lose this little light, and disappear.'

Strong degradation sure the words implied;
The queen stood mute, she could not speak for pride;
But quick she turn'd, and to her chamber sped,
There prostrate lay, and wept upon her bed;
There vow'd the coming of her lord to wait,
Nor mov'd till promis'd vengeance seal'd her hate.

The king, that day devoted to the chace,
Ne'er till the close of evening sought the place;
Then at his feet the fair deceiver fell,
And gloss'd her artful tale of mischief well;
Told how a saucy knight his queen abus'd,
With prayer of proffer'd love, with scorn refus'd;
Thereat how rudely rail'd the ruffian shent,
With slanderous speech and foul disparagement,
And boastfully declar'd such charms array'd
The veriest menial where his vows were paid,
That, might one handmaid of that dame be seen,
All eyes would shun with scorn imperial Arthur's queen.
The weeping tale of her, his heart ador'd,
Wak'd the quick wrath of her deluded lord;
Sternly he menac'd some disastrous end
By fire or cord, should soon that wretch attend,
And straight dispatched three barons bold to bring
The culprit to the presence of his king.

Lanval! the while, the queen no longer near,
Home to his chamber hied with heavy cheer:
Much did he dread his luckless boast might prove
The eternal forfeit of his lady's love;
And, all impatient his dark doom to try,
And end the pangs of dire uncertainty,
His humble prayer he tremblingly prefer'd,
Wo worth the while! his prayer no more was heard.
O! how he wail'd! how curs'd the unhappy day!
Deaf still remained the unrelenting fay.
Him, thus dismay'd, the approaching barons found;
Outstretch'd he lay, and weeping, on the ground;
To reckless ears their summons they declar'd,
Lost was his fay, for nought beside he car'd;
So forth they led him, void of will or word,
Dead was his heart within, his wretched life abhorr'd.

They reach the presence; there he hears surpriz'd
The mortal charge of felony devis'd:
Stern did the monarch look, and sharp upbraid
For foul seducement of his queen assay'd:
The knight, whose loyal heart disdain'd the offence,
With generous warmth affirm'd his innocence;
He ne'er devis'd seduction:--for the rest,
His speech discourteous, frankly he confess'd;
Influenc'd with ire his lips forwent their guard;
He stood prepared to bide the court's award.
Straight from his peers were chosen judges nam'd:
Then fix the trial, with due forms proclaim'd;
By them 'tis order'd that the accus'd assign
Three men for pledge, or in a prison pine.

Lanval! 'tis told, had pass'd from foreign strand,
And kinsmen none there dwelt on English land;
And well he knew that in the hour of proof
Friends for the most part fail, and stand aloof:
Sue them he would not, but with manly pride
In silence turn'd, and toward his prison hied.
With generous grief the deed Sir Gawaine view'd;
Dear to the king was he, and nephew of his blood,
But liberal worth past nature's ties prevail'd,
And sympathy stood forth, if friendship fail'd;
Nor less good-will full many a knight inspir'd;
With general voice the prisoner all requir'd,
All pledg'd their fiefs he should not fail the day,

And homeward bore him from the court away.

His friends, for sure they well that title claim,
First thought the licence of his tongue to blame;
But, when they mark'd how deeply he was mov'd,
They sooth'd and cherish'd rather than reprov'd.
Each day, as mute he sat in desperate grief,
They spoke kind words of comfort and relief;
Each day, howe'er they sought, howe'er they sued,
Scarce might they win his lips to taste of food:
'Come, welcome death!' forever was his cry;
'Lo, here a wretch who wishes but to die!'
So still he wail'd, till woe such mastery won
They trembled for his nobler powers of man;
They fear'd lest reason's tottering rule should end
And to a moping idiot sink their friend.

At length came on the day, long since decreed,
When the sad knight should suffer or be freed.
From every part the assembling barons meet:
Each judge, as fore-ordain'd, assumes his seat;
The king, too strongly sway'd by female pride,
O'er the grave council will himself preside,
And, while the presence of his queen inspires,
Goads on the judgment as her wrath requires.
There might be seen that honourable band
Late for the prisoner pledg'd in fief and land;
Slow they advance, then stand before the board,
Whiles all behold the entrusted thrall restor'd.
With many a question next the accus'd was prov'd;
Then, while the votes were given, awhile remov'd.
But those brave warriors, when they weigh'd the plight
And the fair promise of this hapless knight,
His youth, for yet he reach'd not manhood's prime;
His gallant mien, his life without a crime,
His helpless state by kindred unsustain'd,
In a strange court and in a foreign land,
All cried aloud, were Lanval doom'd to die,
It were a doom of shame and cruelty.

At first 'twas mov'd, that straight conducted thence,
Some meet confinement should chastise the offence;
When one grave peer, in honest hope to wave
The dire debasement of a youth so brave,
Produc'd this purpose, with such reasoning grac'd,
'Twas with the general plaudit soon embrac'd:
"Twas urg'd," he said, 'and sure the offence he blam'd,
Their queen by base comparison was sham'd;
That he, the prisoner, with strange fury mov'd,
Had prais'd too proudly the fair dame he lov'd;
First, then, 'twere meet this mistress should be seen
There in full court, and plac'd beside the queen;
So might they judge of passion's mad pretence,
Or truth had wrought the ungrateful preference.'

So spoke the judge; Sir Lanval hears the doom,
And weens his hour of destiny is come;
Quench'd is the lore that erst, in happier day,
Won to his whisper'd prayer the willing fay;
And the last licence pitying laws devise,
Serves but to close the count of miseries!

When, lo! strange shouts of joy and clamorous cheers,
Rose from without, and stay'd the astonish'd peers:
At hand two damsels entering in were seen,

Lovely alike their look, and noble was their mien;
On a grey dappled steed each lady rode,
That pac'd for pride, as conscious of his load;
'Lo here!' 'twas murmured round with new delight,
'Lo here, the mistress of the Breton knight!
The twain meanwhile pass'd onward undelay'd,
And to the king their graceful greetings paid,
Then told their lady's coming, and desir'd
Such harbourage as highest rank requir'd.

E'en as they spoke, twain others, lovelier fair,
Of stature loftier, of more royal air,
Came proudly on: of gold their purpled vest,
Well shap'd, each symmetry of limb confess'd:
On goodly mules from farthest Spain they brought,
This pair the presence of the sovereign sought.

The impatient king, ere well their lips had power,
To claim fit harbourage of board and bower,
Led on their way; and, court'sies scanty done,
Back to the peers be sped, and press'd the judgment on;
For much, meseems, his vengeful heart misgave
Some thwarting chance the Breton knight might save.

Just were his boding fears: new shouts ascend
Of loud acclaim; and wide the welkin rend.
A female form the wondering peers behold,
Too bright for mixture of earth's mortal mould:
The gridelin pall that down her shoulders flow'd
Half veil'd her snow-white courser as she rode;
On her fair hand a sparrow-hawk was plac'd,
Her steed's sure steps a following grey-hound trac'd
And, as she pass'd, still pressing to the right
Female and male, and citizen and knight,
What wight soe'er in Carduel's walls was found,
Swell'd the full quire, and spread the joy around.

Lanval, the while, apart from all the rest,
Sat sadly waiting for his doom unblest:
(Not that he fear'd to die: death rather sued;
For life was nought, despoil'd of all its good.)
To his dull ears his hastening friends proclaim
The fancied form and presence of his dame;
Feebly he rais'd his head: and, at the sight,
In a strange extacy of wild delight,
'Tis she! 'tis she!' was all his faltering cry,
'I see her once again now satisfied I die!'

Thus while he spake, the peers with seemly state.
Led by their king, the illustrious stranger wait;
Proud Carduel's palace hail'd its princely guest,
And thus the dame the assembled court address'd.
'List, king, and barons!--Arthur, I have lov'd
A knight most loyal in thy service prov'd;
Him, by thy foul neglect, reduc'd to need,
These hands did recompense; they did thy deed.
He disobey's me; I forbore to save;
I left him at the portal of the grave:
Firm loyalty hath well that breach repair'd--
He loves me still, nor shall he lack reward.
'Barons! your court its judgment did decree,
Quittance or death, your queen compar'd with me:
Behold the mistress of the knight is come,
Now judge between us? and pronounce the doom.'

All cry aloud, the words of love were right,
And one united voice acquits the knight.
Back from the palace turns the parting fay,
And with her beauteous damsels speeds away:
Her, as she pass'd the enraptur'd Lanval view'd;
High on the portal's marble steps he stood;
On his tall steed he sprang with vigorous bound;
Thenceforth their footsteps never wight hath found.

But 'tis the Breton tale, they both are gone
To the fair isle of fertile Avalon;
There, in the lap of love for ever laid,
By sorrow unassail'd, in bliss embay'd,
They make their won: for me, where'er they dwell,
No farther tale befalls me here to tell.

Thomas Chestre translated this tale in the reign of Henry 6, but the extracts published by Mr. Warton, differ in some particulars from the tale here given.

No. VI.--LES DEUX AMANTS.

In Neustria, now called Normandy is a single mountain of unusual height and verdure, railed the mountain "of the two lovers," in consequence of an adventure to which it gave rise, and of which the Bretons have formed a lay. Close to it are the remains of a city, now reduced to a few houses, but formerly opulent, founded by the king of the Pistreins, whence it was called Depistreins, and the neighbouring valley Val de Pistre. This king had one only daughter, whom he loved so much that he could not bear to be separated from her. With a view to check the pursuits of the lovers, whom her beauty and accomplishments attracted, he published a decree, that her hand should never be granted but to a suitor who should be able to carry her, without resting, from the bottom to the top of the adjoining mountain. Many attempted the enterprise, for presumption is common; none achieved it, because its execution was barely possible. The suitors disappeared, one by one, and the beautiful princess seemed doomed to eternal celibacy. There was one youth, the son of a neighbouring baron, who was a favourite with the king and the whole court, and whose assiduities, which were dictated by an unconquerable and sincere passion, ultimately gained the lady's warmest affections. It was long a secret to all the world: but this discretion became, at length, almost intolerable; and the youth, hopeless of fulfilling the condition which alone could obtain her hand, earnestly conjured her to fly from her father's court. To this she would not consent, but suggested a mode of accomplishing their wishes more compatible with her filial piety: "I have," said she, "a rich aunt, who resides, and has studied during thirty years, at Salerno. In that celebrated school she has so completely acquired the art of medicine; has learned so many _salves_ and drugs; has so studied _herbs_ and _roots_, that she will be enabled to compose for you _electuaries_ and _drinks_, capable of communicating the degree of vigour necessary to the accomplishment of the trial prescribed by my father. To her you shall bear a letter from me, and at your return shall demand me from the king, on the terms to which he has himself assented." The lover thanked her; went home, provided the necessary assortment of rich clothes, and other merchandize, of palfreys, beasts of burthen and attendants, and set off for Salerno. His mission was successful: the good aunt's electuaries rendered him much more athletic than before; and he brought back, in a small vial, an elixir capable of instantly restoring strength at the moment of complete exhaustion. He therefore was full of confidence, and

claimed the trial. The king having summoned all his principal vassals to behold the ceremony, conducted his daughter into the great plain on the banks of the Seine, and found the youth already stationed at the foot of the mountain. The lovely princess had scarcely tasted food since the departure of her lover; she would gladly have wasted herself to the lightness of air for the purpose of diminishing his labour. She wore only a single robe which closely enveloped her. Her lover catching her up with one hand, and bearing the precious vial in the other, appeared perfectly unconscious of the burthen, and bore her, with the rapidity of lightning, more than half way up the mountain: but here she perceived his breath began to fail, and conjured him to have recourse to his medicine. He replied, that he was still full of vigour; was too much within sight of the multitude below, that their cries on seeing him stop, even for an instant, would annoy and dishearten him; and that, while able to proceed alone, he would not appeal to preternatural assistance. At two-thirds of the height she felt him totter under the weight, and again repeated her earnest entreaties. But he no longer heard or listened: exerting his whole remains of strength, he staggered with her to the top, still bearing the untasted vial in his hand, and dropped dead on the ground. His mistress, thinking he had only fainted, knelt down by his side, applied the elixir to his lips, but found that life had left him. She then dashed the vial on the ground, uttered a dreadful shriek, threw herself on the body, and instantly expired. The king and his attendants, much surprized at not seeing them return, ascended the mountain, and found the youth fast locked in the arms of the princess. By command of her father they were buried on the spot in a marble coffin, and the mountain still retains the name of "The Two Lovers." Around their tomb the ground exhibits an unceasing verdure; and hither the whole country resort for the most valuable herbs employed in medicine, which owe their origin to the contents of the marvellous vial.[77]

No. VII.--YWONEC.

There lived once in Britain a rich old knight, lord of Caerwent, a city situated on the river Duglas. He had married, when far advanced in years, a young wife of high birth, and transcendant beauty, in hopes of having an heir; but when, at the end of seven years, this hope was frustrated, he locked her up in his strong castle, under the care of his sister, an aged widow lady, of great devotion and asperity of temper. His own amusements were confined to the chace; those of his sister to thumbing the Psalter, and chanting its contents: the young lady had no solace but tears. One morning in April, when the birds began to sing the songs of love, the old gentleman had risen early, and awakened his sister, who carefully shut the doors after him, while he sallied forth for the woods, and his young wife began her usual lamentations. She execrated the hour when she was born, and the fatal avarice of her parents, for having united her to an old, jealous tyrant, afraid of his own shadow, who debarred her even from going to church. She had heard the country round her prison was once famed for adventures; that young and gallant knights used to meet, without censure or impediment, beautiful and affectionate mistresses; but her lot was endless misery (for her tyrant was certainly immortal), unless the supreme Disposer of events should, by some miracle, suspend the listlessness of her existence. She had scarcely finished this ejaculation, when the shadow of a bird, which nearly intercepted all the light proceeding from the narrow window of her room, arrested her attention, and a falcon of the largest size flew into the chamber, and perched at the foot of her bed. While she gazed, it gradually assumed the figure of a young and handsome knight. She started, changed colour, and drew a veil over her face, but still gazed and listened, with some fear, much astonishment, but more pleasure. The knight soon broke silence. He begged her not to be alarmed; confessed his mode of visiting was new, and rather mysterious;

but that a falcon was a gentle and noble bird, whose figure ought not to create suspicion. He was a neighbouring prince, who had long loved her, and wished to dedicate the remainder of his days to her service. The lady, gradually removing her veil, ingenuously told him, he was much handsomer, and apparently more amiable, than any man she had ever seen; and she should be happy to accept him as a lover, if such a connection could be legitimate, and if he was orthodox. The prince entered at large into the articles of his creed; and concluded by advising that she should feign herself sick, send for his chaplain, and direct him to bring the host; "when," said he, "I will assume your appearance, and receive the Sacrament in your stead." The lady was satisfied with this proposal; and, when the old woman came in, and summoned her to rise, she professed to be at the point of death, and entreated the immediate assistance of the chaplain. Such a request, in the absence of her lord, could not be regularly granted; but a few screams, and a fainting fit, removed the old lady's doubts, and she hobbled off in search of the chaplain, who immediately brought the host; and Muldumaric (the falcon-prince) assuming the appearance of his mistress, went through the sacred ceremony with becoming devotion, which they both considered as a marriage contract. The lady's supposed illness enabled the prince to protract his visit; but at length the moment of separation came, and she expressed her wish for the frequent repetition of their interviews.--"Nothing is so easy," said Muldumaric; "whenever you express an ardent wish to see me, I will instantly come. But beware of that old woman: she will probably discover our secret, and betray it to her brother; and I announce to you, the moment of discovery will be that of my death." With these words he flew off. His mistress, with all her caution, was unable to conceal entirely the complete change in her sensations. Her solitude, formerly so irksome, became the source of her greatest delight; her person, so long neglected, again was an object of solicitude; and her artful and jealous husband, on his return from the chase, often discovered in her features the traces of a satisfaction his conscience told him he was not the author of. His vague suspicions were, after a time, communicated to his sister; but being, as she thought, the young lady's sole companion, and not able to reproach herself with any enlivening qualities, she could not account for this contented demeanour. At length she was commanded to conceal herself in his wife's apartments during his absence, to watch indefatigably, and report whatever she could discover. The result was a full confirmation of all his suspicions. He now exerted himself in devising means of vengeance: he secretly prepared and placed before the fatal window a trap, composed of sharpened steel arrows, and, rising long before day, set off on his usual occupation. The old lady, carefully shutting the doors after him, returned to her bed till day break; and his wife, awakened at this unusual hour, could not refrain from uttering an ardent wish for the company of her dear Muldumaric. He was instantly at her side; but had received his death wound, and she found herself sprinkled with his blood. Overpowered by fear and surprise, she could scarcely hear him say he died for her, and that his prophecy was accomplished. She fainted in his arms; but he conjured her to preserve her life, and announcing she would have a son, whom she must call Ywonec, and who was destined to be the avenger of both his parents. He then hastily departed through an open and unguarded window. His mistress, uttering a piteous scream, threw herself out of the same window, and pursued his flight by the trace of his blood, which the first beams of morning enabled her to distinguish. At length she arrived at a thick wood, where she was soon surrounded with darkness; but pursued the beaten track, and emerged into a meadow, where, recovering the trace of blood, she pursued it to a large city of unexampled magnificence, which she entered, and proceeded to the palace. No one was visible in the streets. In the first apartment she found a knight asleep. She knew him not, and passed on to the next, where she found a second equally unknown to her. She entered the third room; and on a bed, which almost dazzled her by the splendour of its ornaments, and which was surrounded by numerous torches blazing in golden candlesticks, she recognised her dear Muldumaric, and sunk almost

lifeless with fatigue and terror by his side. Though very near his last moments, he was still able to comfort and instruct her. He adjured her to return instantly, while she could escape the notice of his subjects, to whom, as their story was known, she would be particularly obnoxious. He gave her a ring, in virtue of which he assured her she would in future escape the persecution, and even the jealousy of her husband. He then put into her hands his sword, with directions that it should never be touched by man till his son was dubbed a knight; when it must be delivered to him with due solemnity, near the tomb of his father, at the moment he should learn the secret of his birth, and the miseries produced by it. She would then see the first use to which her boy would put it. The prince had nearly spent his last breath in the service of his beloved mistress; he could only instruct her by signs to put on a magnificent robe which lay near him, and hasten her departure. She staggered through the town, arrived in the solitary fields, heard the distant knell announce her lover's death, and sunk exhausted to the ground. At length the air revived her; she slowly renewed her journey, and returned to her castle, which, by virtue of her ring, she entered undisturbed. Till the birth of her son, and from that time to the conclusion of his education, she lived in silent anguish, and in patient expectation of the day of vengeance. The young Ywonec, by his beauty and address, recalled to her mind the loved image of his father; and at length she beheld him, with a throbbing heart, invested, amidst the applause of all the spectators, with the dignity of knighthood. The hour of retribution was now fast approaching. At the feast of St. Aaron, in the same year, the baron was summoned with his family to Caerleon, where the festival was held with great solemnity. In the course of their journey they stopped for the night in a spacious abbey, where they were received with the greatest hospitality. The good abbot, for the purpose of detaining his guests another day, exhibited to them the whole of the apartments, the dormitory, the refectory, and the chapter-house, in which they beheld a vast sepulchral monument, covered with a superb pall, fringed with gold, and surrounded by twenty waxen tapers in golden candlesticks, while a vast silver censer, constantly burning, filled the air with fumes of incense. The guests naturally inquired concerning the name and quality of the person who reposed in that splendid tomb; and were told it was the late king of that country; the best, the handsomest, the wisest, the most courteous and liberal of mankind; that he was treacherously slain at Caerwent, for his love to the lady of that castle; that since his death his subjects had respected his dying injunctions, and reserved the crown for a son, whose arrival they still expected with much anxiety. On hearing this story the lady cried aloud to Ywonec, "Fair son, thou hast heard how Providence hath conducted us hither. Here lies thy father whom this old man slew with felony. I now put into thy hands the sword of thy sire; I have kept it long enough." She then proceeded to tell him the sad adventure of his birth, and, having with much difficulty concluded the recital, fell dead on the tomb of her husband. Ywonec, almost frantic with grief and horror, instantly sacrificed his hoary stepfather to the manes of his parents, and having caused his mother to be interred with suitable honours, accepted from his subjects the crown they had reserved for the representative of a long line of royal ancestors.

FOOTNOTES:

[77] The subject of this romance appears to have been taken from the ecclesiastical history of Normandy. There is still remaining, near Rouen, the priory of the Lovers, which tradition reports to have been founded by the father on the very same spot where they perished, and on the tomb which contained them. M. de la Mere's Dissertation.

The author tells us, this lay is called, in the Breton tongue, Laustic,[78] and in "right English," the Nihtegale (Nightingale). It is very well written, and contains many picturesque descriptions; in the district of St. Malos is the town of Bon, which derives its name from the goodness of two knights who formerly dwelt in it. One was married; the other was in love with his neighbour's wife, who returned his affection. The houses were so near, being only separated by a wall, that they could easily, from the windows of their respective bed chambers, interchange glances, talk without being overheard, and toss to each other little presents and symbols of attachment. For the purpose of enjoying this amusement, the lady, during the warm nights of spring and summer, used to rise, and throwing a mantle over her, repair to the window, and stay there till near the dawn of day. Her husband, much annoyed by this practice, roughly asked what was the object which so constantly allured her from her bed, and was told that it was the sweet voice of the Nightingale. Having heard this he set all his servants to work, spread on every twig of his hazels and chesnut trees a quantity of bird-lime, and set throughout the orchard so many traps and springs, that the nightingale was shortly caught. Immediately running to his wife, and twisting the bird's neck, he tossed it into her bosom so hastily that she was sprinkled with the blood; adding that her enemy was now dead, and she might in future sleep in quiet. The lady, who, it seems, was not fertile in expedients, submitted to the loss of her nightly conversations, and was contented with exculpating herself towards her lover by sending him the dead bird inclosed in a bag of white satin, on which she embroidered the history of its fate; and her gallant paramour caused his mistress's present to be inclosed in a golden box, richly studded with gems, which he constantly carried about his person.[79]

FOOTNOTES:

[78] Laustic is still a Nightingale in the Breton language, and l'eaustic is the French manner of speaking.

No. IX.--MILUN.[80]

Milun was a knight of South Wales. His strength and prowess were such, that he never met an adversary who was able to unhorse him. His reputation spread far beyond the borders of his own country, and he was known and admired in Ireland, Norway, Gothland, Loegria (England), and Albany (Scotland). At no great distance from his castle dwelt an opulent baron, who had an only daughter, courteous and beautiful. Hearing his praises from all quarters, she became enamoured, and sent a messenger to say, her heart was at his service if he thought it worth acceptance. Milun, whose affections were not pre-engaged, returned an answer expressive of gratitude, sent his gold ring as a symbol of inviolable constancy; and, having fixed her messenger in his interests by magnificent presents, arranged with him a secure place of meeting. Their intercourse was managed so discreetly as to excite no suspicion; till the young lady, sending for her lover, represented to him that longer concealment was impossible. By an ancient law she was subject, on discovery, at her father's option, to be punished with instant death or sold as a slave; and she saw no means of escaping this frightful alternative. Milun listened in silent horror, but could suggest no expedient, when her old nurse undertook to conceal the rest, if the child could be properly disposed of; and for this the young lady found a ready contrivance. She had a sister richly married in Northumberland, to whom Milun might cause the child to be conveyed, with a letter explaining all, and his gold ring, by means of which it might, in due time, discover and make itself known to its parents. It proved to be a boy; the ring was hung about its neck, with a purse containing the letter; he was placed in a soft cradle, swathed in the finest linen,

with an embroidered pillow under his head, and a rich coverlid edged with sable to protect him from the cold. Milun, in delivering him to the attendants, ordered that during the journey he should stop seven times in the day, for the purpose of being washed, fed, and put to sleep. The nurse, and all the servants who attended, had been selected with great care, and performed their charge with fidelity; and the Northumbrian lady assured her sister, by a letter which they brought back, that she accepted the charge with pleasure. This being settled, Milun left his castle for a short time on some military business, and during his absence the young lady's father resolved to bestow her in marriage on a neighbouring baron. She was now almost reduced to despair, her lover, to whom she was more than ever attached, was absent; to avow to her new husband what had happened was impossible, and to conceal it extremely difficult. But she was compelled to submit. The marriage took place; and Milun, on his return, was scarcely less distressed than his mistress, till he recollected she was still in the neighbourhood, and he might perhaps be able to devise some means of procuring an interview. He had a favourite swan, long accustomed to feed out of his hand. Having written and sealed a letter, he tied it round its neck, and finding it effectually concealed by the feathers, called a favourite servant, and directed him to repair to the lady's habitation, devise some contrivance for gaining admission, and deliver the same into her own hands. The man executed his commission with great ingenuity. He represented himself to the porter of the castle as a poacher; stated that he had just caught a fine swan close to Caerleon; and much wished to conciliate the future intercession of the lady by presenting it to her. The porter, after some hesitation, went to explore the anti-chamber; and, finding in it only two knights, intent on a game of chess, returned immediately, and conducted the man to his lady's apartment, which, on his knocking, was opened to them. Having graciously accepted the present, she was going to recommend the swan to the care of one of her valets; but the messenger observing "it was a royal bird, who would only accept food from her own hand," and desiring her to caress it, she soon perceived the letter, and changed colour, but recovering herself, dismissed the messenger with a present, turned out her own attendants, excepting one maid, and proceeded to examine the mystery. It contained the warmest protestations of her lover's unalterable attachment, expressed a hope that she might be able to point out a secure place of meeting; and shewed her an easy method of continuing the correspondence. "The swan, already tame, might, by good feeding, be easily attached to her; after which, if debarred from meat during three days, he would, when set at liberty, fly back to his old master." After kissing the welcome letter till she had nearly obliterated its contents she proceeded to put in practice his injunctions; and having by stealth procured some parchment and ink, made an equally tender reply, which, being tied round the swan's neck, was rapidly and faithfully conveyed to Milun. During twenty years they kept up, by this means, a regular correspondence, and their frequent interviews were managed with a secrecy which secured them against detection. In the mean time their son, after receiving an excellent education, had been dubbed a knight, and learned from his aunt the name of his father, and the mystery of his birth. Inflamed with a noble ambition, he resolved instantly to set off for foreign countries and to surpass his sire in military glory. The next day he communicated the project to his aunt, who gave him a number of instructions for his future conduct; which, lest he should forget, she repeated more than once, and accompanied her admonitions with such liberal presents as would enable him to rival in splendour the richest of his competitors. He repaired to Southampton; landed at Barbefluet (Barfleur); passed into Britany; engaged, by his generosity, a numerous attendance of poor knights, eclipsed the proudest of his rivals by superior liberality; vanquished the stoutest; gained the prize in every tournament; and, though he concealed his name, was quickly known through the country by the appellation of "The Knight without a Peer." The fame of this youthful warrior at length reached the care of his father. From the first moment of his bestriding a horse, that father had never

encountered an equal; and as he trusted age had added to his address more than it had yet subtracted from his vigour, he hoped to prove, by the overthrow of this unknown, that his high renown was owing to the absence of Milun. After this exploit he meant to go in quest of his son, whose departure into foreign countries he had lately learnt, and having obtained the permission of his mistress, embarked for Normandy, and thence proceeded into Bretagne. The tournaments did not begin till the festival of Easter; Milun, therefore, who arrived before the end of winter, spent the interval in travelling from place to place, in exercising hospitality, and searching out the most meritorious knights, whom he attached to himself by his liberality. At length the festival took place, at Mont St. Michel, and was attended by a crowd of French, Flemish, Norman and Breton, knights, though by very few English. Milun enquired minutely into the arms and devises of the unknown knight, and had no difficulty in procuring ample information. The tournament began: the two rivals separately acquired a manifest superiority, and bore down all who opposed them, but the opinions of the assembly were divided between the two. The strength and address of the veteran appeared invincible, yet the suppleness and activity of the youth attracted still more admiration. Even Milun himself beheld him with a mixture of wonder and delight, and summoned all his skill and strength when he rode to encounter this formidable adversary. His spear was too well-directed to miss its aim; but it flew into a thousand splinters, while that of the youth remained entire, and threw him at some distance upon the ground. By the violence of the shock the ventail of his helmet was broken off, and displayed his beard and hair, gray with age; when the youth, bringing back his horse, courteously requested him to remount, expressing his regret at having, by his accidental victory, sullied the fame of a respectable veteran. Milun, surveying him with increased admiration, discovered on his finger, while he held the rein, his own ring, and earnestly conjured him to relate his history, and the names of his parents. He obeyed, and was proceeding to tell all he knew, when the old knight again springing from his horse, and catching him by the skirts of his coat of mail, hailed him as his son, and received him in his arms as he dismounted to request the paternal benediction. The tournament being over, they retired amidst the tears and applauses of the assembly, and retreated to their inn, where Milun related the whole series of his adventures. The young man listened till the end with respectful attention; and then exclaimed, "In faith, fair sire, I will unite you to my mother. I will kill her present husband, and you shall marry her." This being arranged, they parted for the night. On the next day they arrived at the sea: embarked; landed in Wales after a short and pleasant passage; and were proceeding to Milun's castle, when they were met by a messenger bearing a letter to Milun from his lady, in which she announced the death of her husband, and requested him to hasten his return. At this joyful news they hurried on to the lady's castle; and she had the satisfaction of being for ever united to her lover, at the same time that she embraced a son every way worthy of his accomplished parents. On this occasion says the author, "the ancients made a lay which I have here set down in writing, and which I always relate with fresh pleasure."

FOOTNOTES:

[79] This lay has been translated into English metre, under the title of "the Nythingale." Bibl. Cotton. Calig. A. 11.

[80] Perhaps Milwr, a warrior.

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There lived formerly, at Nantes in Bretagne, a lady of such exquisite beauty that no one could behold her with impunity. All the young men of the town were rivals for her smiles; but four, nearly of the same age, and of equal birth and accomplishments, soon eclipsed all the rest of the competitors. Each of these four deserved, and obtained, a place in her affections; but their merits were so equal that she was unable to make a choice. At tournaments she sent to all some mark of distinction; a ring, a scarf, a pennant, or other ornament; and all ascribed to her, as mistress of their actions, the exploits they had the good fortune to perform. It happened once, that Nantes was appointed for the celebration of a tournament at the Easter festival. The four knights set out to meet the foreign ones, and proposed to joust with an equal number: the offer was accepted, and the contest ended to the advantage of the town. On the following day the four young lovers still further distinguished themselves; but the spectacle at length degenerated, as was frequently the case, into a real combat, in which three out of the four were accidentally slain, and the fourth dangerously wounded. They were brought back to the lady, who caused the three to be magnificently interred, and summoned the best physicians of the town to assist her attendance on the survivor. Their joint efforts were at length successful. He became convalescent; and, finding his passion revive with his returning health, daily importuned the lady for her hand, to which there now remained no other equal claimant. But she gave him to understand, that feeling herself singular in misfortune, by having lost in one day three admirers of superior merit, she would not consent to bear to the bridal ceremony a heart consumed by eternal regret; and that, as a monument of her grief, she intended to compose a lay, the title of which should be "Les quatre Dols," (the four griefs). The lover, instead of attempting to argue her out of this resolution, only employs his eloquence in convincing her that the title of the new lay ought to be "Le Chaitivel," (the wretch), because his rivals had found in death the end of their disappointments, while he was doomed to a life of sorrow and privation. The lady having assented to this change, the story is abruptly brought to a conclusion.

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No. XI.--_Translation of the Lai DEE CHEVREFOIL_:

(From Notes to Sir Tristrem, edited by Walter Scott, Esq.)

I am much pleased with the lay which is called Chevrefoil. Let me relate to you truly on what occasion it was made, and by whom. Many persons have narrated the story to me; and I have also found it in writing, in the work which treats of Tristrem, and of the Queen; and of their constant love, from which they suffered a thousand sorrows; and expired on the same day.[81]

King Markes had been much offended with his nephew, Tristrem; and had banished him on account of his attachment to the queen. The knight retired into the country where he was born; spent there a whole year of affliction; and, being still forbidden to return, became careless of life. Do not wonder at this; for a true lover, where his wishes are crossed by insuperable obstacles, can set no bounds to his grief. Tristrem, therefore, thus driven to despair, left his home; passed into Cornwall, the abode of the queen, and concealed himself in the thickest part of the forest; from which he issued only at the close of the day, at which time he took up his lodgings among the peasants and the poorest of mankind. After frequent questions to these his hosts, concerning the public news of the court, he at length learned the king had convoked his barons, and summoned them to attend him at Pentecost, at the castle of Tintagel. Tristrem was rejoiced at this news; because it was impossible the queen could arrive at the meeting without giving him an opportunity of getting sight of her during the journey. On the appointed day, therefore, he took his station, in that part of the wood through which

the road passed, cut down a branch of _codre_ (hazel), smoothed it, wrote his name on it with the point of his knife, together with other characters, which the queen would well know how to decypher. He perceives her approaching; he sees her examine with attention every object on her road. In former times they had recognized each other by means of a similar device; and he trusts, that, should she cast her eyes on the stick, she will suspect it to belong to her lover. This was the purport of the characters traced on it: "That he had long been waiting at a distance, in hopes of being favoured with some expedient which might procure him a meeting, without which he could no longer exist. It was with these two, as with the _chevrefoil_ and the _codre_. When the honey-suckle has caught hold of the _codre_, and encircled it by its embraces, the two will live together and flourish; but if any one resolves to sever them, the _codre_ suddenly dies, and the honey-suckle with it. Sweet friend, so it is with us; I cannot live without you, nor you without me."

The queen slowly riding on, perceives the stick, and recognizes the well-known characters. She orders the knights who accompany her to stop. She is tired; she will get off her horse for a short time, and take some repose. She calls to her only her maid, her faithful Brenguein; quits the road, plunges into the thickest part of the forest, and finds him whom she loved more than all the world. Both were delighted beyond measure at this meeting, which gives them full leisure to concert their future projects. She tells him, that he may now be easily reconciled to his uncle. That the king has often regretted his absence, and attributes to the malicious accusations of their common enemies, the severe measure of his banishment. After a long conversation, the queen tears herself from him; and they separate with mutual grief. Tristrem returned to South-Wales, from whence he was soon recalled by his uncle; but, in the mean time, he had repeated to himself, over and over again, every word of his mistress's late conversation; and, while full of the joy he felt at having seen her, he composed (being a perfect master of the lays) a new lay, describing his stratagem, its success, his delight, and the very words uttered by the queen. I will tell you the name of this lay it is called _Goat-leaf_ in English, and _Chevre-foil_ in French. I have now told you the whole truth.[82]

FOOTNOTES:

[81] Marie, who drew all her materials from Bretagne, probably refers to some Armorican edition, of the history of these ill-fated lovers.

[82] From this, which forms no part of the Sir Tristrem of Thomas, the Rhymer, it is evident that the same tale was popular in France, at least thirty years before the probable date of that work.

No. XII.--ELIDUC.

This is stated to be a _very_ old Breton lay. Its original title was "Guiludeluc ha Gualadun," from the names of the two heroines; but it was afterwards more commonly stiled, The Lay of Eliduc.

Eliduc was a knight of Bretagne, much admired for military prowess, courtesy, and political sagacity; in consequence of which, his sovereign, who loved and admired him, was in the habit of entrusting to his management the most important cares of government. Indeed, so great was his influence at court, that he enjoyed, almost as completely as the king, the privilege of the chace in the royal forests. But the favour of sovereigns is always precarious; and so adroit were his enemies, that he

was suddenly deprived of all his honours, and even banished the country, without being able to obtain from his once indulgent master, the privilege of knowing his crimes, or being confronted with his accusers. Fortunately he was in the prime of life, fond of adventure, and not of a temper to despond. He retired to his castle, convened his friends, and communicated to them the king's injustice, and his own projects; which were, to embark for England, and there enter into the pay of the first king who might want his assistance. But he had a wife, the fair and amiable Guildehuec, whom he tenderly loved; and whom, as he was unwilling to carry her into exile, he earnestly recommended to their care and attentions. He then selected ten knights as his companions, and departed for the sea-coast, escorted by nearly all his friends and vassals, and accompanied by his wife, who was almost frantic with grief at this cruel separation, and whom he could scarcely reconcile to her fate, by repeating again and again the most solemn assurances of eternal and inviolable fidelity. At length he embarked with a fair wind, and landing at Totness, in Devonshire, proceeded towards Exeter. The king of this district had an only daughter, heiress of his dominions; and, having refused to bestow her on a neighbouring prince, was at that time involved in a most distressful war, and besieged in his capital. Eliduc went no further: he sent a message to the distressed king, offering his assistance; and requesting, should the proposal be rejected, a safe conduct through the country. The king most gladly accepted the offer, and ordered his constable to prepare a house for the reception of the welcome guests, and issue a suitable sum of money, with a supply of provisions for their monthly expenditure. Eliduc and his attendants were magnificently entertained. His inn was the house of the richest burgess in the town, and _the grand tapestry room_[83] was surrendered to the knight by its proprietor. Eliduc on his part was equally liberal. He issued strict orders to his attendants, that during the first forty days, none of them should accept either pay or provisions from the court; and during this time kept, at his own expence, a profuse table for the accommodation of such knights as were unprovided with other means of subsistence. On the third day, an alarm was spread that the enemy had again over-run the country, and might shortly be expected at the gates. Eliduc flew to arms; and, having assembled his ten knights, was soon after joined by fourteen more from different parts of the city, who declared themselves ready to encounter, under his commands, any inequality of numbers. Eliduc praised their zeal; but observed, that this intemperate valour was more fitted for the lists of a tournament than for useful service; and requested that they, who knew the country, would shew him some defile in which he could hope to attack the enemy on equal terms. They pointed out a hollow way in the neighbouring forest, by which the invaders usually passed and returned; and Eliduc, while hastening there, described the measures he meant to pursue, and exhorted them to follow him with vigour. All was so well planned and executed, that the foe were surprized laden with booty; and their commander, with thirty principal officers, seized on his palfrey, and made prisoners almost without resistance. The squires and other attendants at the same time secured a large quantity of baggage, and the troop immediately hastened their return towards the city, where their appearance excited no small consternation. The king, having mounted a watch-tower, had descried his small garrison of knights engaged in a distant action with very superior numbers; after which, seeing a large body in full march for the city, he concluded Eliduc had betrayed him; caused the gates to be shut, the alarm to be sounded, and commanded the citizens to defend the walls. But being quickly undeceived, he welcomed his deliverer with transports of joy and gratitude; and, after receiving his oath of allegiance for a year, invested him with the supreme military command, and assigned ample pensions to himself and all his attendants. The king's daughter, the beautiful Guiliadun, became anxious in her turn to behold the extraordinary stranger, who had confirmed her father in his throne, by means of a troop of knights, who scarcely appeared competent to the defence of the walls. She invited him to an audience, to which he was formally introduced by one of her chamberlains; seated him near her

on a bed; and entered into conversation on a variety of indifferent topics. But during the discourse, she could not help remarking that this consummate warrior and statesman was young and handsome; and found her heart completely engaged. After sighing and turning pale, and making many reflections on the indelicacy of avowing her passion, she would probably have done it, if the knight had not, by respectfully taking leave, put an end to the interview. He, in the mean time, had not been blind to her perfections, her youth, beauty, simplicity and frankness of character, and, above all, those artless sighs which assured him of her affection, had made an indelible impression on his heart. At length the image of his wife, and his solemn assurances of fidelity, interrupted the dream of happiness in which he had involuntarily indulged; but the interruption became painful; and while he mentally repeated the promise of adhering to duty, he felt that promise disavowed by his inclination. Guilliadun, after a sleepless night, found it impossible to keep her secret, and having summoned a trusty chamberlain, confided to him her sudden, and, as she thought, inexplicable passion. After a long discussion, she at length, at his suggestion, dispatched him to the knight with the usual salutations of courtesy, and with the present of her ring and a rich girdle. Eliduc immediately replied by an equally courteous message; put the ring on his finger; bound the girdle round his loins; offered a rich present to the chamberlain, who declined it; but avoided all discussion on the subject of his message. The impatient princess was almost driven to despair by the report of her chamberlain, who, though convinced that Eliduc could not be insensible to the kindness of his mistress, was unable to satisfy her mind, or even his own, concerning the cause of such extreme discretion. Both, indeed, were ignorant of the conflicts by which he was agitated. To recall his former fondness for his wife, and to conciliate his duty and affection, was no longer possible: to betray and dishonour the amiable Guilliadun would be infamous; and to encourage her passion and his own, without being hurried too far, was extremely difficult; yet on this he ultimately resolved; and, having mounted his horse, set off for the palace under pretence of paying his court to the king, but with the real view of obtaining an interview with his daughter. The monarch was at that moment in the apartment of the princess, to whom, while he played a game of chess with a foreign knight, he explained the moves. On the entrance of Eliduc he immediately introduced him to her, enjoining her to entertain and form an acquaintance with a knight, who had few equals in merit; and the young lady, gladly obeying the injunction, retired with her lover to the farther end of the apartment. After a long silence equally painful to both, and which each ineffectually attempted more than once to interrupt, Eliduc luckily bethought himself of returning thanks for the ring and girdle; which, as he assured her, he valued far beyond all his earthly possessions. This warmth of expression encouraging the princess, she frankly proceeded to make an avowal of her passion, declaring, if he should reject her hand, there was no other man on earth whom she would ever accept as a husband; and, when he mysteriously replied, that, as far as his wishes were concerned, there could be no bar, but that it was his purpose, after the year of service for which he was pledged to her father, to return and establish himself in his own country, she told him she had full confidence in his honour, and was persuaded, when the time arrived, he would make all proper arrangements for her future destiny. Thus ended the interview to their mutual satisfaction. Eliduc, watchful, enterprising, and indefatigable, soon recovered for her father all the lost provinces, and insured future tranquillity by the capture of his enemy; but scarcely was the war concluded, when the knight received an embassy from his former master, whose ingratitude had been punished by the loss of half his kingdom, and the jeopardy of the rest, adjuring him to come with all speed to the rescue of a country which was now purged of the monsters whose false accusations had occasioned his exile. Such an embassy, a few months sooner would have been most welcome, but to part with Guilliadun now appeared the heaviest of misfortunes. He felt, however, that duty called him away, and determined to obey the summons. He went to the king; read the letters he had received; and earnestly

requested leave to depart, though his stipulated term of service was not expired; observing, at the same time, that the state of his majesty's affairs no longer required his attendance; and, promising at the first appearance of difficulty, he would return with a powerful body of knights. The king, after making the most splendid offers to detain him, unwillingly yielded; but to obtain the consent of Guilliadun was far more difficult. Trusting that she possessed the whole heart of her lover, and perfectly unconscious that his hand had been previously given to another, she insisted on accompanying him, and threatened to destroy herself in case of his refusal. His remonstrances were accompanied by fainting fits, which terrified Eliduc into a solemn promise of unqualified submission to her will; but he represented, that having sworn fealty to her father, she could not now go with him, without a breach of his oath; whereas, after the expiration of his term of service, he could, without disgrace, comply with her wishes; and he promised, on the honour of a knight, that if she would fix a day, he would return and carry her off. With this promise she was satisfied, and after many tears, and a mutual exchange of rings, ultimately permitted him to depart. The return of Eliduc gave infinite pleasure to his friends, to the king his master, and above all, to his excellent wife, who now hoped she should be indemnified, by his beloved society, for her long and dreary hours of widowhood. But she beheld, with surprise and consternation that he harboured some secret grief, and anxiously enquired if any thing in her conduct had given him displeasure. Eliduc assured her of the contrary, but told her, in apparent confidence, that he was forced by his oath to return to the king whom he had lately quitted, so soon as he should have settled the affairs of his own country; that he had much to endure, much to accomplish; and that, harassed as he was on all sides, he should never regain his former gaiety till he should have extricated himself from all his difficulties. In the mean time, his mere name had inspired the enemy with alarm; his re-appearance at the head of the armies brought back victory to the royal standard; he saw and seized the moment of making an advantageous peace; and, having done so, prepared for the execution of a more pleasing enterprise. Taking with him only two nephews, a chamberlain and a trusty squire, all of whom he swore to secrecy, he embarked for Loegria; stationed his vessel at some distance from the harbour of Totness; and landing his chamberlain alone, and in disguise, sent him, with secret instructions to the princess. The confidant executed his commission with address; made his way unobserved to the chamber of Guilliadun, informed her of his master's arrival, and explained the measures he had devised for her escape. They waited for the approach of night; when Guilliadun, without any other attendant, having muffled herself in a short and warm mantle, which concealed the richness of her usual garments, followed him out of the town, to a small wood, where Eliduc, who had deferred his landing till evening, awaited her. The knight instantly placed her on a horse, springing on another, and taking her rein in his hand, hurried forward to the sea, and embarked without having excited the slightest suspicion of the enterprise, to which none were privy excepting those on board. Both wind and tide were favourable; they arrived near the coast of Bretagne, and were on the point of entering the harbour, when a sudden squall from the shore split their mast, rent their sail, and exposed them for some hours to the most imminent danger. All exertions to guide the vessel being ineffectual, they had recourse to prayers, invoking St. Nicholas and St. Clement, and requesting the intercession of the blessed Virgin and her Son, that they might be permitted to land in safety. The storm continued; when one of the sailors suddenly exclaimed, "Sir knight, you carry with you the cause of our calamity. In defiance of God, religion, justice and honour, you are carrying off that lady, having already a beautiful and lawful wife in your own country. Permit us to throw your paramour into the sea, and we shall speedily find our prayers effectual." The princess was then lying, almost exhausted with fatigue, sickness, and fear, in the arms of her lover; who, though bursting with rage, could only express it by execrations, which he vented as loudly as he could in the hope of

drowning the hateful voice of the mariner, but the fatal assurance "Eliduc was already married," had reached the ear, and sunk deeply into the heart of Guilliadun. She fainted, and though he and his friends employed all the means in their power for her recovery, they were unable to produce any symptom of returning animation, a general exclamation of grief pronounced her dead; when the knight, starting from the body, seized an oar, felled at one blow the presumptuous seaman, threw him by the foot into the sea, took possession of the helm, and directed it so skilfully that the vessel reached the harbour in safety. They all landed, and in a very few hours might reach the castle of Eliduc, which was not far from the coast; but where could he deposit the body of his mistress, how inter it with all the honours suitable to her rank and merit? he at length recollected, that in the forest which surrounded his mansion, dwelt an aged hermit, at whose cell the corpse might remain till its interment: he could then enjoy the sad pleasure of visiting daily the object of all his solicitude, and he determined to found on the spot an abbey, in which a number of monks should pray for ever for the soul of the lovely and injured Guilliadun. He then mounted his palfrey, and, carrying the body in his arms, proceeded with his attendants to the hermitage. The door was shut; and they discovered, after having at length procured an entrance, the grave of the holy man, who had expired a few days before. Eliduc caused a bed to be made within the chapel; and placing on it his mistress, whose deadly paleness had not yet injured her beauty, burst into a flood of tears, kissed her lips and eyes, as if in the hopes of restoring their animation; and solemnly pronounced a vow, that from the date of her interment he would never more exercise the functions of a knight; but, after having erected an abbey on the spot, sanctified by her remains, would assume himself the monastic habit, and daily visit her tomb to express his love, his grief, and his remorse. He then, with difficulty tore himself from the body, and departed; having first sent a messenger to his castle to announce that he was arrived, but so much fatigued and way-worn, as to require nothing but repose and solitude. His wife met him with her usual gentleness of affection; but instantly saw in his haggard looks that his heart laboured with some misery which her tenderness was unable to remove. His manners were such as to awaken without satisfying her curiosity. He rose at day break, spent some hours at prayers, walked alone into the forest, proceeded instinctively to the fatal hermitage, and returned late in the evening, bearing with him, as it appeared, an additional load of misery. He saw with astonishment that death seemed to abstain from ravaging the beauties of Guilliadun; he involuntarily gave way to the most flattering hopes; and, after many long sad hours of tears and fruitless prayer, retired in anguish and disappointment. On the third day he gave notice he should go to court, and pass the evening with the king. His wife, in the mean time, by the promise of the most tempting rewards, had engaged one of her pages to follow his master at a distance, during his forest walk, and report what he should see and hear; and the page, having on that morning executed his commission, she determined to take advantage of Eliduc's absence to visit the hermitage, and discover, if possible, the cause of that excessive grief to which he gave way; and of which the death of the old hermit, much as he might have loved him, was far from affording a satisfactory explanation. She set forth with the page, entered the chapel, beheld, with much surprize, a bed handsomely ornamented; and, on lifting up the covering, saw, with still more astonishment, the young and blooming Guilliadun, "_qui resemblot rose nuvele_." The faultless beauty of a living rival might have excited some indignation in the bosom of the most patient wife, but the eyes of the lovely object before her, appeared closed for ever; and Guiddeluec could find no place in her heart, for any sentiments but those of admiration and pity. After calling her page to survey the spectacle which fully explained and excused her husband's immoderate grief, she sat down by the bed to reflect on the past, and decide on her own future conduct. During, the long absence of Eliduc she had devoted the greater part of her time to religious exercises, and now clearly saw that to them only could she look for comfort. Having

convinced herself of this necessity, she turned, with tears in her eyes, to the fair object of her husband's regret; when a circumstance, apparently trifling, involuntarily arrested her attention. A weasel, creeping from under the altar, ran upon the bed, and passing several times over the face of the entranced Guilliadun, so far incensed the page, that with a blow of his stick he laid it dead at his feet, and then threw it on the floor. The animal had lain there only a few moments, when another weasel, coming from the same hole, ran up, and attempted awhile to sport with it, and then, after exhibiting every appearance of grief, suddenly ran off into the wood, and returned with a flower of a beautiful vermilion colour, which it carefully inserted into the mouth of the dead animal. The effect was sudden, the weasel instantaneously got upon its legs, and was preparing to escape; when the lady exclaimed to the page, to strike it again, and he aimed a second blow, that caused the creature to drop the flower, which Guildeluec instantly seized, and carefully placed between the lips of Guilliadun. The plant had not lost its efficacy. The princess, awakening from her trance, expressed her surprise at having slept so long, and then gazed with astonishment at the bed on which she lay, at the walls of the chapel by which she was surrounded, and at the two unknown figures, of Guildeluec and the page; who, kneeling by her side, loudly expressed their thanksgiving to the Almighty for what they thought her miraculous resurrection. At length the good lady, having finished her devotions, began to question the fair stranger respecting her birth and preceding adventures, which she related with the utmost candour and exactness, till the fatal moment when the discovery of Eliduc's prior marriage had deprived her of sense and motion. The rest was better known to her hearers than herself; and Guildeluec, more and more charmed with her innocence, and frankness, after avowing herself, lost no time in comforting her, by the assurance that all her hopes and wishes might now be speedily gratified. "Your youthful beauty," said she, "might captivate any heart, and your merit will fix for ever that of Eliduc, who is unalterably attached to you, and whose grief for your loss was such as to preclude all hopes of consolation. It is my intention to take the veil, and abandon all claim to those affections which are estranged from me for ever. In restoring you to the now wretched Eliduc, I shall promote, by the only means in my power, that happiness to which I have hitherto been the unintentional obstacle." Guilliadun consented, with silent gratitude, to accept the sacrifice so generously offered, and was united to her lover as soon as the solemn ceremony had taken place, by which Guildeluec consecrated the remainder of her days to heaven, in a nunnery erected and endowed by her husband, on the site of the ancient hermitage. Their union was followed by many years of happiness; and they closed a life of charity and benevolence by following the pious example of Guildeluec, who received Guilliadun into her order, while Eliduc took the cowl in a monastery, to the endowment of which he dedicated the remainder of his worldly possessions. From the adventure of these three, "the olde gentil Bretons" (li auncien Bretun curteis) formed a lay to transmit to future ages.

FOOTNOTES:

[83]

La bele chambre encurtinee
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END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAY OF MARIE

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