

## Poet's Corner.

The following beautiful little sermon in verse is from the pen of William Roderick Laurence.—It is original, musical and touching—"healthy in sentiment and sound in moral."

The genial sun through tangled boughs doth shine;  
The purple shadows move upon the grass;  
Between the clustering foliage of the vine  
Bright golden bars of welcome sunlight pass.

The fragrant rose that blooms beside the wall,  
By zephyrs swayed, is wafted to and fro;  
Along the path the varying shadows fall,  
Now dancing swiftly—moving now more slow.

Soft, fleecy clouds that glide athwart the sun  
Float o'er green fields, and water deep & clear;  
Their shadows, oftentimes sombre, dark and dun,  
Scud o'er the landscape as impelled by fear.

Sweet shadows play upon a beauteous face,  
Expression giving to each feature fair;  
Imparting unto all bewitching grace,  
As they with rosy light alternate there.

What shades oft dwell within a speaking eye!  
Whate'er its color—violet or brown—  
Black, or else borrowed from the azure sky—  
How soon they change the sunshine to a frown!

And all who dwell in this fair world of ours  
Are shadows, and may not continue long—  
But fade and perish sooner than the flowers  
Renowned in story, or embalmed in song.

"What shadows we!—what shadows we pursue!"  
In truth was uttered by the bard of yore;  
Humiliating it may be, but true,  
We soon are gone and can return no more.

We dance attendance on some transient flower,  
Some bubble frail whose life is but a breath  
It fades and withers e'en within an hour,  
Gathered in silence by the reaper Death.

Thus, one by one, the fairest blossoms fade,  
The forms we love return again to clay;  
A moment here heart answereth to heart,  
But o'er our graves the shadows soon will play.

[From the London Times.]

## LORD RAGLAN AND THE WEATHER.

Lord Raglan might in September have taken  
Sebastopol duly and truly;  
But the weather (he raves about weather!) was  
warm  
And he wished to take it—coolly!

So he made what was, indeed, to our foes,  
A diversion: quoth he, "I'll con it  
"While, and in the meantime keep  
"My weather-eye upon it!"

October, November, December came on,  
As if missioned his army to kill off:  
"The weather is now too cold," quoth he,  
"I'll take it—with the chill off!"

For three months more despatches he wrote  
In meteorological form,  
Till the storms had passed; 'Tis too late now,"  
Quoth he, "to take it by storm!"

Thus, whether the weather be foul or fair,  
Sebastopol 'scapes the blow—  
Then, down with the weatherglass! give us a man  
Who will take it—whether or no!

## Select Tale.

## THE WIDOW'S ORDEAL.

BY WASHINGTON IRVING.

The world is daily growing older and wiser. Its institutions vary with its years, and mark its growing wisdom; and none more so than its modes of investigating truth, and ascertaining guilt or innocence. In its nonage, when man was yet a fallible being, and doubted the accuracy of his own intellect, appeals were made to heaven, in dark and doubtful cases of atrocious accusation.

The accused was required to plunge his hand in boiling oil, or to walk across red-hot ploughshares, or to maintain his innocence in armed fight and listed field, in person or by champion. If he passed these ordeals unscathed, he stood acquitted, and the result was regarded as a verdict from on high.

It is somewhat remarkable that, in the gallant age of chivalry, the gentler sex should have been most frequently the subjects of these rude trials and perilous ordeals; and that, too, when assailed in their most delicate and vulnerable part—their honour.

In the present very old and enlightened age of the world, when the intellect is perfectly competent to the management of its own affairs, and needs no special interposition of heaven in its affairs, the trial by jury has suspended these superhuman ordeals; and the unanimity of twelve discerning minds is necessary to constitute a verdict.

Such a unanimity would, at first sight, appear also to require a miracle from heaven; but it is produced by a simple device of human ingenuity. The twelve jurors are locked up in their box, there to fast till abstinence shall have so clarified their intellects that the whole jarring pannel can discern the truth, and concur in a unanimous decision. One point is certain, that truth is one, and is immutable—until the jurors all agree, they cannot all be right.

It is not our intention, however, to discuss this great judicial point, or to question the avowed superiority of the mode of investigating truth adopted in this antiquated and very sagacious era. It is our object merely to exhibit to the curious reader one of the most memorable cases of judicial combat we find in the annals of Spain. It occurred at the bright commencement of the reign, and in the youthful and, as yet, glorious days of Roderick the Goth; who subsequently tarnished his fame at home by his misdeeds, and, finally, lost his kingdom and his life on the banks of the Guadalete, in that disastrous battle which gave up Spain a conquest to the Moors. The following is the story:

There was, once upon a time, a certain Duke of Lorraine, who was acknowledged throughout his domains to be one of the wisest princes that ever lived. In fact, there was no one measure adopted by him that did not astonish his privy counsellors and gentlemen in attendance; and he said such witty things and made such sensible speeches, that the jaws of his high chamberlain were well-nigh dislocated from laughing with delight at one, and gaping with wonder at the other.

This very witty and exceedingly wise potentate lived for half a century in single blessedness; at length his courtiers began to think it a great pity so wise and wealthy a prince should not have a child after his own likeness, to inherit his talents and domains; so they urged him most respectfully to marry, for the good of his estate and the welfare of his subjects.

He turned the advice over in his mind some four or five years, and then sent forth emissaries to summon to his court all the beautiful maidens in the land, who were ambitious of sharing a ducal crown. The court was soon crowded with beauties of all styles and complexions, from among whom he chose one in the earliest budding of her charms, and acknowledged by all the gentlemen to be unparalleled for grace and loveliness. The courtiers extolled the duke to the skies for making such a choice, and considered it another proof of his great wisdom. "The duke," said they, "is waxing a little too old, the damsel, on the other hand, is a little too young; if one is lacking in years, the other has a superabundance; thus a want on one side is balanced by an excess on the other, and the result is a well-assorted marriage."

The duke, as is often the case with wise men who marry rather late, and take damsels rather youthful to their bosoms, became dotingly fond of his wife, and very properly indulged her in all things. He was, consequently, cried up by his subjects in general, and by the ladies in particular, as a pattern for husbands; and, in the end, from the wonderful docility with which he submitted to be reined and checked, acquired the amiable and enviable appellation of Duke Philibert the wife-ridder.

There was only one thing that disturbed the conjugal felicity of this paragon of husbands—though a considerable time elapsed after his marriage, there was still no prospect of an heir. The good Duke left no means untried to propitiate Heaven. He made vows and pilgrimages, he fasted, and he prayed, but all to no purpose. The courtiers were all astonished at the circumstance. They could not account for it. While the meanest peasant in the country had sturdy brats by dozens, without putting up a prayer, the duke wore himself to skin and bone with penances and fastings, and yet seemed further off from his object than ever.

At length the worthy prince fell dangerously ill, and felt his end approaching. He looked sorrowfully and dubiously upon his young and tender spouse, who hung over him with tears and sobs. "Alas!" said he, "tears are soon dried from youthful eyes, and sorrow lies lightly on a youthful heart. In a little while thou wilt forget in the arms of another husband him who has loved thee so tenderly."

"Never! never!" cried the duchess. "Never will I cleave to another! Alas! that my lord should think me capable of such inconstancy!"

The worthy and well-riden duke was soothed by her assurances; for he could not brook the thought of giving her up, even after he should be dead. Still he wished to have some pledge of her enduring constancy.

"Far be it from me, my dearest wife," said he, "to control thee through a long life. A year and a day of strict fidelity will appease my troubled spirit. Promise to remain faithful to my memory for a year and a day, and I will die in peace." The duchess made a solemn vow to that effect, but the uxorious feelings of the Duke were not yet satisfied. "Safe bind, safe find," thought he; so he made a will, bequeathing to her all his domains, on condition of her remaining true to him for a year and a day after his decease; but, should it appear that, within that time, she had in anywise lapsed from her fidelity, the inheritance should go to his nephew, the lord of a neighboring territory.

Having made his will, the good Duke died and was buried. Scarcely was he in his tomb when his nephew came to take possession, thinking as his uncle had died without issue, the domains would be devised to him of course. He was in a furious passion when the will was produced, and the young widow declared inheritor of the dukedom. As he was a violent, high-handed man, and one of the sturdiest knights in the land, fears were entertained that he might attempt to seize on the territories by force. He had, however, two bachelor uncles for bosom counsellors—swaggering, rake-helly old cavaliers, who, having led loose and riotous lives, prided themselves upon knowing the world, and being deeply experienced in human nature. "Prithee, man, be of good cheer," said they, "the duchess is a young and blooming widow. She has just buried our brother, who, God rest his soul! was somewhat too much given to praying and fasting, and kept his pretty wife always tied to his girdle. She is now like a bird from a cage. Think you she will keep her vow? Pooh, pooh—impossible! Take our words for it—we know mankind, and above all, womankind. She cannot hold out for such a length of time; it is not in womanhood—it is not in widowhood—we know it, and that's enough. Keep a sharp look-out upon the widow, therefore, and within the twelvemonth you will catch her tripping—and then the dukedom is your own."

The nephew was pleased with this counsel, and immediately placed spies round the duchess, and bribed several of her servants to keep watch upon her, so that she could not take a single step, even from one apartment of her palace to another, without being observed. Never was a young and beautiful widow exposed to so terrible an ordeal.

The duchess was aware of the watch thus kept upon her. Though confident of her own rectitude, she knew that it was not enough for a woman to be virtuous—she must be above the reach of slander. For the whole term of her probation, therefore, she proclaimed a strict non-intercourse with the other sex. She had females for cabinet ministers and chamberlains, through whom she transacted all her public and private concerns; and it is said that never were the affairs of the kingdom so adroitly administered.

All males were rigorously excluded from the palace; she never went out of its precincts, and whenever she moved about its courts and gardens, she surrounded herself with a body-guard of young maids of honour, commanded by dames renowned for discretion. She slept in a bed without curtains, placed in the centre of a room illuminated by innumerable wax tapers. Four ancient spinsters, virtuous as Virginia, and perfect dragons of watchfulness, who only slept during the day-time, kept vigils throughout the night, seated in the four corners of the room on stools without backs or arms, and with seats cut in checkers of the hardest wood, to keep them from dozing.

Thus wisely and warily did the young duchess conduct herself for twelve long months, and slander almost bit her tongue off in despair, at finding no room even for a surmise. Never was ordeal more burdensome, or more enduringly sustained.

The year passed away. The last, odd day arrived, and a long, long day it was. It was the twenty-first of June, the longest day of the year. It seemed as if it would never come to an end. A thousand times did the duchess and her ladies watch the sun from the windows of the palace, as he slowly climbed the vault of heaven, and seemed still more slowly to roll down. They could not help expressing their wonder, now and then, why the duke should have tagged this superannuated day to the end of the year, as if three hundred and sixty-five days were not sufficient to try and task the fidelity of any woman. It is the last grain that turns the scale—the last drop that overflows the goblet—and the last moment of delay that exhausts the patience. By the time the sun had sunk below the horizon, the duchess was in a fidget that passed all bounds, and, though several hours were

yet to pass before the day regularly expired, she could not have remained those hours in durance to gain a royal crown, much less a ducal coronet. So she gave orders, and her palfrey, magnificently caparisoned, was brought into the court-yard of the castle, with palfreys for all her ladies in attendance. In this way she sallied forth just as the sun had gone down. It was a mission of piety—a pilgrim cavalcade to a convent at the foot of a neighboring mountain—to return thanks to the Virgin, for having sustained her through this fearful ordeal.

The orisons performed, the Duchess and her ladies returned, ambling gently along the border of a forest. It was about that mellow hour of twilight when night and day are mingled, and all objects are indistinct. Suddenly, some monstrous animal sprang from out a thicket, with fearful howling. The female body-guard was thrown into confusion, and fled in different ways. It was some time before they recovered from their panic, and gathered once more together; but the duchess was not to be found. The greatest anxiety was felt for her safety. The hazy mist of twilight had prevented their distinguishing perfectly the animal which had affrighted them. Some thought a wolf, others a bear, others a wild man of the woods. For upwards of an hour did they beleaguer the forest, without daring to venture in; and were on the point of giving up the duchess as torn to pieces and devoured, when, to their great joy, they beheld her advancing in the gloom, supported by a stately cavalier.

He was a stranger knight, whom nobody knew. It was impossible to distinguish his countenance in the dark; but all the ladies agreed that he was of noble presence and captivating address. He had rescued the duchess from the very fangs of the monster, which, he assured the ladies, was neither a wolf nor a bear, nor yet a wild man of the woods, but a veritable fiery dragon, a species of monster peculiarly hostile to beautiful females in the days of chivalry, and which all the efforts of knight-errantry had not been able to extirpate.

The ladies crossed themselves when they heard of the danger from which they had escaped, and could not enough admire the gallantry of the cavalier. The duchess would fain have prevailed on her deliverer to accompany her to her court, but he had no time to spare, being a knight-errant, who had many adventures on hand, and many distressed damsels and afflicted widows to rescue and relieve in various parts of the country. Taking a respectful leave, therefore, he pursued his wayfaring, and the duchess and her train returned to the palace. Throughout the whole way, the ladies were unwearied in chanting the praises of the stranger knight; nay, many of them would willingly have incurred the danger of the dragon, to have enjoyed the happy deliverance of the duchess. As to the latter, she rode pensively along, but said nothing.

No sooner was the adventure of the wood made public, than a whirlwind was raised about the ears of the beautiful duchess. The blustering nephew of the deceased duke went about, armed to the teeth, with a swaggering uncle at each shoulder, ready to back him, and swore that the duchess had forfeited her domain. It was entirely in vain that she called all the saints and angels, and her ladies in attendance into the bargain, to witness that she had passed a year and a day of immaculate fidelity. One fatal hour remained to be accounted for; and into the space of one little hour sins enough may be conjured up by evil tongues, to blast the fame of a whole life of virtue.

The two graceless uncles, who had seen the world, were ever ready to bolster the matter through, and as they were brawny, broad-shouldered warriors, and veterans in brawl as well as debauch, they had great sway with the multitude. If any one pretended to assert the innocence of the duchess, they interrupted him with a loud ha! ha! of derision. "A pretty story, truly," would they cry, "about a wolf and a dragon, and a young widow rescued in the dark by a sturdy varlet, who dares not show his face in the daylight. You may tell that to those who do not know human nature; for our parts, we know the sex, and that's enough."

If, however, the other repeated his assertion, they would suddenly knit their brows, swell, look big, and put their hands upon their swords. A few people like to fight in a cause that does not touch their own interests, the nephew and the uncles were suffered to have their way, and swagger uncontradicted.

The matter was at length referred to a tribunal composed of all the dignitaries of the dukedom, and many and repeated consultations were held. The character of the duchess throughout the year was as bright and spotless as the moon in a cloud-