

LITERATURE, &c.

THE WIDOW.

MINE has been a troublous and perilous life in matters of love, no sooner have I emerged from one ocean of sighs and tears, than I have plunged headlong into another. It is passing strange that I never fell into matrimony in my very early days, my father did so, and so did my mother, and also my respected granddame. She, good soul, originally Miss Letitia Simpson, at fifteen married her first husband, a Mr Jeffrey Wilson; at sixteen gave birth to my mother. Her husband then died without any other issue, leaving her more than well provided for. At seventeen, she espoused a Mr Winckworth, who, in his turn, consigned her to single blessedness and a fat dowry; after which, having quarrelled with all her race, or all her race with her, she abjured them and 'he realm, betook herself to the Continent, and was barely heard of afterwards. My mother following one part of her example married at sixteen, and enriched the world with me at seventeen. Fate, I supposed, (for I am a believer in fate,) destined me to—

'Waste my sweets upon the desert air;

and thus only can I account for my escaping all the matronly and matrimonial snares that beset me in my youth. But to my tale.

On my arrival on the Continent, I had been but a short time at —, when my health visibly and seriously declined, and the medical men who attended me advised a visit to — for its restoration. In accordance with their directions, I, nothing loth, (for a seat at a desk never was a desideratum with me,) sat out; and, as I was alone, and was not over-enamoured of my monosyllabic patronyma, assumed one more suited to the euphony of a billet-doux; and having, therefore, rebaptized myself, I made my appearance at the journey's end as Augustus Montagu, with, moreover, a dash of black down on my upper lip, which I dignified to my own mind, with the title of *moustache*. Thus veiled, and thus accoutred I began my way at —; and, by dint of my modest looks, a little foppery, and my good name, I shortly won my way into a circle of acquaintance.

At a party to which I had, through these means, been asked, I one night met a Madame Perollet, whose appearance, and more, her sufferage of my attentions, made some impression upon me. She was an extremely fine woman, and English, seemingly about five-and-thirty, though less-favored fair ones spoke of her having numbered fifty years. Her hair and eyes were of the blackest; her eye-lashes of the same colour, and long, thick and silky; her complexion fair, but not ruddy, such as best contrasts with, and best becomes, the raven lock, her features were more beautiful in their expression than in their individuality, although then even they were beautiful; her teeth were the finest I ever saw; and I opine no woman can lay claim to beauty who cannot show, nay, even display her teeth. She bore an easy, dignified and complacent smile: her figure was of the strictest proportions, and her carriage most graceful; moreover, she was rich, and consequently amiable. She was a widow, too; and, with all these qualifications of course was greatly sought after by the men. But she had sense and caution; and while she smiled on all, and enamoured many, she never gave more than hope, and preserved all her own freedom. The woman, who wished her dead or married, consequently called her a coquette, and some of the *vieux garçons* agreed with them—but this was suspicious evidence; while the younger men, whom the aunts and mothers of standing spinsters admonished to beware of the widow, only bowed, and then turned on their heel to laugh. The first time I met her, a glove which she dropped, and which I proffered her, gave me an opportunity of opening a conversation with her. At first conscious of youth, I hesitated a little, although my looks bespoke an age riper, by some years, than I had attained; but her answers were so mild, so suave, and so condescending—her manner to me so kind and easy—and her whole conduct so engaging and assuring,—that, before I left her, I had, although blushing, adventured on some little gallant badinage, for which, to the mortification of my elder competitors, she shook her delicate finger at me, and tapped me with her fan. Encouraged thus, I might have proceeded farther; but as she knew how to commence a conquest, so she knew how to continue one; and assuming a dignity, not violent, but perceptible, she restrained my further advances; and being even then sensible that an independent respect is the surest way to a woman's heart, (for I had begun to think of hers) I contented myself for that time, by expressing a hope that I should have the happiness to meet her again, and bowed myself away. That night I rose 50 per cent. in my own esteem, 'truly,' said I to myself, 'the man whom that woman distinguishes must own some attractions: she is a lovely and intellectual specimen of her sex, to possess the love of such a one would be something to pride one's self on. What honour is the love of a giddy, indiscriminating girl, who runs the market of matrimony with her heart in her hand, eager to bestow it on the first bidder!—Truly, I'll be a Chapman no longer for such common wares. But vanity! vanity! Can the rich, beautiful, sought, and at an age when prudence has mastered passion, think of such a one as me? Yet she seemed very kind. But kindness never marries,' said a still, small voice. 'Yet she oft times gives birth to love,' I thought, in answer. 'But she is wealthy, has a wide range for choice, is a widow; and has the whole town after her,' replied my monitor. 'True, true,' I whispered; 'but she has interested me, and I'll try it!'

Again we met—'Et je contais encore quelques fleurettes.' The widow smiled at them, and threatened, if I persisted, to reprove me, 'Cala va bien,' said I to myself, and I retired; for my vanity or little else was yet interested. A third time we met. 'Now then, Ephraim,' said I, 'for the *coup d'essai*—this time you must be serious and distant, and if she has thought upon you, the result will tell.' I approached her with a low

and most respectful reverence; inquired after her health; without giving her time to answer, made some dry remarks on the wet weather; broached a recent murder; remarked on the almanac, and the last new flounce; and was retiring, when she said—'But, Mr Montagu, I wish to trouble you with a commission if you can find time to execute it for me.' I assured her I was at her service. 'Then will you have the goodness to see my carriage ordered here at twelve, as I have been out all the week and am fatigued. Perhaps you will let me know when it is at the door, as I don't wish to be seen leaving so early.' 'Allons, mon bon ami, Ephraim,' thought I; 'cela va du mieux.' And thanking her for the honor of her commands in a tone of deep and grateful respect, I left her to execute them. That done, and 12 o'clock came, I made my way to her. She was seated near the door, and whispering to her, (for the secrecy she wished me to practise gave me the privilege to do so) that the carriage was ready, I offered myself as her escort to it. She accepted my offer, and placed her arm within mine; as she did so, I felt a fluttering in my heart I was unprepared for, and as the stair-case was deserted, I looked up in trembling and confusion into her face, and perceived she looked at me. One instant our eyes met, and the next they were cast down or averted, and I thought the confusion was mutual—I positively shook. As I handed her into the carriage I stammered out an expression of hope that she would feel relieved from her fatigue next day, and begged her permission to call and inquire after her health in the morning; a gracious smile and a graceful inclination of the head, answered me, and the coach drove off.

'Fool,' said I, 'as I slowly reascended, to match your puny wits against a woman's charms and wiles! your own weak snares have entrapped you.' In the morning, having dressed myself with more than ordinary care, I found myself, about two o'clock, with a very unsettled pulse, at Madame Perollet's door; and being announced, was ushered into the drawing room where the widow was seated on a couch, at a small and elegantly carved writing-table, drawing her small white hands over some invitation cards. The usual enquiries made and answered, our conversation turned on the previous night's party, and she informed me she was busy when I entered, writing cards for one of her own. 'But do you know?' she said, 'I write so little lately that my hand is quite stiff, and I am so awkward.' 'See,' said she, laying it over the table to me, 'see how I have blackened my fingers with the ink.' 'Indeed,' said I, rising and advancing to the table, and with an affection of short sight, taking her hand in mine to examine it. 'This ink of yours is a most sacrilegious violator. Would you permit me,' I added, as she drew her hand away, 'to finish your task.' 'Oh, indeed,' she answered, 'rising and vacating her place to me, 'you will oblige me much if you will undertake that kind office for me.' 'Rather say for myself,' I said; 'for I fear I am selfish in seeking the pleasures I ask.' She made me no reply, but smiled, and placed herself opposite with a list of names to dictate. 'What is this?' said I, taking up the last she had finished. 'This is my name. Am I the only Mr Montagu of your acquaintance?' She nodded acquiescence. 'Am I to have the honour of attending you?' 'If,' she answered, 'no better, no more agreeable engagement.' 'Heavens!' said I, 'what better what more agreeable engagement is it possible I could have? what other engagement could induce me to forego—' 'Mr Montagu,' said the widow, 'I will read the names.' 'I thank you—but Madam,' I resumed, 'you must first permit me to thank you for the honour you have done me, or you will make me believe you think so meanly of me as to deem me insensible of it.' 'If your thanks are on each recurrence of the occasion to be as fervent,' said the widow; 'I fear the task will soon be irksome to you, for I have just made up my mind, if you will promise to write all my cards and be a little more sedate in your gratitude, to put your name down in my book for the season.' 'Is it possible madam! then will I be sworn, like the Hebrew copyist, never to pen aught else; and will attend you, too happy at your bidding, your bounteous scribe—nay, but there is no room for that dubious smile—I will swear.' 'Don't, pray,' she replied; 'remember, if you write for me only, how many damsels will die for lack of the elegant food of your billets-doux.' 'Not one, I assure you madam; if I have polluted paper with a line to a woman since my arrival, or dared to harbour thoughts of more than one and she, one to whom I can never presume to aspire.' 'Then there is one, Mr Montagu; but pray remember my cards. I fear you will make a very negligent amanuensis.' 'There is indeed one, madam, if I dared reveal her.' 'Well, well, Mr Montagu,' she said, 'I don't wish to confess you.' 'And yet madam,' I answered, 'who could absolve me.' 'Mr Montagu,' said the widow hastily, do, pray think of my cards, or I must write them; and only see how that nasty ink has stained my fingers.' 'It only serves as a foil to the snowy lustre of the rest,' I said. 'But yet you would not like it if the hand were yours—' 'If it were mine—if it ever could be mine,' said I warming as I spoke, and raising it to my lips. 'Have done then, have done, Mr Montagu; see now how you have kept your promise, not one card written—oh, fie! and now we really must leave it till to-morrow, for I must go out.' 'I hope not,' I said, 'I will complete them instantly.' 'But indeed I must go out.' 'To-morrow then, perhaps you will permit me to show my industry?' 'Yes,' she said, 'if you will promise very faithfully, really to write.' 'As closely as a pundit, on my honour; and once more pressing her hand, and having fully received pardon for my sins, I withdrew.

The next day and the next, our seats were resumed. I pen in hand. Madam with her pocket-book; but still the cards remained stationary. Not so with other matters; I progressed in love and boldness, until I won from the widow's lips a confession of regard, and the sweetest assurance of it that lips can give. Never did love sit so lightly or so happily on me though my passion for Matilde, for that she told me was her name, was

ardent and she was beautiful, fascinating and every way engaging; but she was not to be treated with continual scenes, and her own demonstrations of love were of that nature which satisfied without ever exciting the heart. We felt rather than told each other's hopes, and thoughts, and wishes, and I enjoyed serenely what I had before and have often since squandered in unnecessary or unavailing suffering. Her actions spoke more than her words, and I was too proud to doubt her for her silence—her, and her only have I loved rationally—I loved her as a woman, others I have adored as angels, till adoration became torture; and I have phrenzied myself in seeking and worshipping their attributes. About four months I led in this way a very happy life, when it was agreed we should be married: a *contrat de mariage* was necessary, and I was to wait upon a notary to instruct him to prepare it. To enable me to do so, Matilde explained to me the nature and amount of her property, which was ample. 'And now Augustus,' said she, 'I must own I have deceived you in one point.' 'Indeed!' said I. 'I am sure it is in a very venial one.' 'It is so indeed; but it is necessary I should now explain it to you—my name is not Matilde Perolet.' 'Indeed!' said I, at the same time thinking to myself how easy a way this confession would make for my own on the same subject. 'That name I assumed to escape the importunities of relations in England. Listen, and you shall soon be made acquainted with the brief story of my life. My maiden name you must know was Simpson.' 'Indeed!' I said, 'we have that name already in our family.' 'On my first marriage with Mr Wilson—' 'Who?' I cried. 'Wilson!' she answered. My hair stood on end—'were you married a second time?' 'I was.' 'To whom?' 'To Mr Winckworth!' 'Winckworth!' I exclaimed, 'Simpson, Wilson, Winckworth! you are my Grandmother!'

SICILY.

In common apprehension, Sicily is a good place for the scene of a dark-blue romance about castles, and dukes, and priests and daggers. Nobody knows any thing about the place; and the writers of fiction, presuming on the public ignorance, have taken occasion to people it with a world of their own, which they might as well place in Great Britain, if it were not that they would be found out if they did. This is not right. Sicily has as good a right to be known for exactly what it contains, as any place; and we therefore present the following account of it from the work of a recent and most intelligent traveller.

The island of Sicily, which lies in the Mediterranean Sea, at the most southerly extremity of Italy, possesses a population of only a million and a half. The disproportion of nobles is great, there being in this small kingdom, exclusively of the royal family, the archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, and other church dignitaries, no less than one hundred and twenty-seven princes, seventy-eight dukes, one hundred and forty marquises, with counts, barons, and knights almost innumerable. Many of these titles, however, never wore the honorable badges of power and trust, but simply marks of distinction, conferring little more than local importance, and bestowed by the crown for various services. The baronial peers alone possess any influence in the country, and are entitled to sit in the Upper House of Parliament.

A few of the nobles attend to public affairs, and shew a considerable share of talent and sagacity; but, from defective education, and from being deprived of the advantages of travelling, the majority have narrow and contracted ideas, which lead them to prefer the dissipation and the heartless pleasures of the capital, to rural, literary, or scientific pursuits. So far from enjoying the varied beauties of Sicilian landscape, their country excursions, called *Villeggiature*, are confined to a residence of about a month in spring and autumn, at a small distance from the great towns, where the time is passed in the usual routine of paying and receiving visits, in those monotonous assemblies called *conversazioni*, and in gambling. In their deportment they are obliging, affable, and attentive, though very ceremonious. Those violations of truth and morality that so frequently cloud the brightest titles, may be attributed to the neglect of the domestic ties, to their indolence and to the effects of bad example.

In this elevated class the rights of primogeniture are so strictly exercised, that the eldest son alone is well provided for; the others, being retainers for life, on a small pension, called 'Il piatto,' or dinner-cover at the father's or elder brother's table, are driven to mean habits; and, as they are not allowed to marry, and are generally deficient in military or civil enterprise, they abandon themselves to idleness, vice, and debauchery.

There is also a class of nobility miserably poor, whose honors never had any patrimony annexed to them, and who are yet too vain to permit themselves or their progeny to engage in commercial or professional undertakings; and it is this class, that by its misdeeds, has lowered the respectability of the whole Sicilian peerage.

A pompous affectation of title is, indeed, the principal trait of the Sicilian character, and is as observable in the vain inscriptions which their public edifices, fountains, and statues display, as in the metaphoric