

Literature, &c.

THE FATAL MARRIAGE.

A SICILIAN FACT.

MASCALI, a thriving town on the eastern coast of Sicily, some miles distant from the city of Catania, is situated on the beach, at the foot of one of the most charming of the Etnean hills, whose gentle slope is covered with vineyards, corn fields and olive grounds—interspersed with gardens, and orange groves, which impart a delicious perfume to the air. The size and flourishing condition of its productions abundantly testify to the exuberant fertility of the soil. A little above the town, and overlooking it, is the modern residence of the ancient family of Z——, situated in one of the pleasantest spots imaginable, embowered in a wilderness of agurise, whose never fading verdure gives the appearance of perpetual spring to this favored region. The summit of this beautiful eminence is crowned by an antique castle, formerly the abode of the same family; and in still earlier times, the royal chateau, built by one of the kings of Sicily, for his reception when disposed to partake of the pleasures of the chase. It commands in front an enchanting view of the distant coast of Italy, the sea studded with craft of every denomination, and the shore variegated with town and village, winding streams, and promontories of lava. To the right, lay the superb city and vast plain of Catania, so renowned for its fertility. To the left, the silver currents of the Acis and the Fiume Freddo are seen paying tribute to the ocean. Behind, stretches an extensive wood, remarkable for the size and variety of its trees, and the inexhaustible stock of game with which it is furnished. In the distance, the most prominent and sublimest feature of the scene, the snow-crowned Etna, elevates its smoking head in the clouds.

This old edifice is called Il Castello della Zita, or the betrothed, from a daughter of an ancient lord of these possessions, whose father, as the tale runs arbitrarily promised her hand to one of her suitors, whilst her heart was engaged to another. In spite of her tears, prayers, and remonstrances, a day was designated for the marriage. On the evening preceding the morning on which the ceremony was to take place, it was observed that the intended bride had dried her tears, and appeared composed and resigned to her fate. In the morning the guests had arrived, the priest was ready, the bridegroom in attendance—but the bride was wanting. She was not in her apartment. The castle was searched from turret to dungeon, but the young lady was not found. At length, a pair of slippers was discovered on the edge of a window: they were recognized as those of the bride. On looking out, she was seen lying in her night dress, a corpse, in the ditch of the castle, into which she had precipitated herself to avoid a detested union.

The present story, though of a more modern date, as it happened somewhat after the middle of the last century, in some points resembles the foregoing; but the lady, although if possible still more unfortunate in her destiny, does not appear to have possessed the desperate resolution of her fair predecessor.

Baron Z——, the proprietor of these domains at that period, had led a single life until near fifty; and perhaps might have continued to do so, had not some disagreement with his brother, who in default of issue was his heir, determined him to disappoint his expectations by taking a period. Having formed this resolution, he proposed for the daughter of the Prince of P——, of Catania, a girl of eighteen, whom perhaps he had not seen twice in his lifetime. The baron being well known by his large possessions, the father consented at once to a match, which, reckoning for the disparity of years or the inclinations of his child, he esteemed highly advantageous.

When he communicated the offer to his daughter, and ordered her peremptorily to receive the baron as her future husband, the young lady was thunder-struck at intelligence so unlooked for and disagreeable, and remained silent, being incapable of utterance in the presence of the prince; but no sooner had he retired, than throwing herself at the feet of her mother, she conjured her to prevent a union which could not fail to plunge her in irremediable misery. The princess, though attached to her daughter, knowing the arbitrary and violent character of her husband, declined all interference in the matter, and recommended obedience as the wisest and fittest course. In fact, both her parents were aware that the principal objection

to the baron was an attachment she entertained for a cadet of a noble family, an officer in the army, then absent in Naples; but neither of them suspected that she had already become his wife. They had, previous to his departure, been privately married by the family chaplain, who had been won over by their entreaties. No wonder, then, that the unfortunate girl testified such repugnance to the match now proposed to her. In vain she expostulated and entreated—a deaf ear was turned to her prayers. Her union with the officer, she dare not reveal, well knowing from the vindictive temper of her father, that such confession would cost the life of her husband.

Whilst the young lady remained utterly at a loss what steps to take in so deplorable a condition, her father, aware as I have said, of her inclination for the officer, artfully procured a letter to be sent from Naples, detailing a fictitious account of his death—conceiving that when he had thus succeeded in shutting out all hope, he should find her more tractable. These dreadful tidings overwhelmed her with grief; but, far from answering the expectations of the prince, seemed only to have increased her aversion to the baron; until her father, designing to terrify her into consent, gave her choice of a convent, or the nobleman for a husband. Disappointed by her gladly embracing the former, he retraced his offer, which had been mere menace, and would not even hear of the alternative he had himself proposed. He then allowed her but three days to prepare herself, giving her to understand that the baron, at the expiration of that period, would come to the palace to be betrothed to her, as is the custom in Sicily, previous to the actual celebration of the marriage ceremony.

These three days were three whole ages of horror to the unfortunate young lady. At times her heart misgave her, and suspicions came over her mind that the story of her husband's death might be a fabrication—a notion which only served to the cruel embarrassment of her situation. She resolved still to hold out and to refuse her consent when the fatal hour arrived. When it did and the baron came in state, with a long train of relatives and friends to witness the event, she refused to appear, and remained in an undress within her chamber. But these were weak preservatives against the fury of her father, who violently tore her in that condition from her apartment, and apologizing to the baron for what he termed girlish waywardness, commanded her to signify her consent to the proposed union. Terrified by his menaces, and not gifted by nature with any great energy of character, she said in faltering accents, that she was compelled to comply with the will of her father. This dubious assent was esteemed sufficient by those with whom a direct refusal would have signified as little.

Soon after, the marriage ceremony took place. She was carried by force to the church, where she fainted at the altar, and remained in a state of insensibility during the greater part of the service. After its termination, the exulting baron returned to Mascah with his mourning bride, whose sorrow he attributed, as her father had hinted, to her being now, for the first time, removed from the paternal residence.

Her internal struggles, her grief for the supposed death of her real husband, the agitation she had undergone, affected her brain, and though not altogether amounting to insanity, she began to give proofs of aberration of intellect. There was at the time, and there still is, in the grounds, a beautiful reservoir of water, ornamented with a superb fountain. This was her favorite resort. She would sit by its margin for hours together, in utter listlessness, or mingling her tears with its pellucid stream. Even at night she would leave her bed, hasten there, and giving vent to her feelings, commit a thousand extravagances.—The baron, who it seems was much attached to her, was at first alarmed at these nightly wanderings; but having caused her to be watched, and finding she discovered no inclination to injure herself, he thought it best to let her have her own way, and gradually grew accustomed to her wild and eccentric habits. At length she became a mother—an event which gave great delight to the baron, and seemed for a time, to relieve the devouring melancholy which was on her heart.

It is not improbable that the flow of new feelings, maternal affection, and the assurance that her first husband was no more, might have finally succeeded in restoring reason, which had only been

occasionally clouded, to the empire of her mind. She gradually grew better, and appeared reconciled to her situation, when one day her favorite attendant, whom she had brought with her from Catania, told her that she had seen the ghost of her former husband in the garden; that it attempted to approach her, but overcome with terror, she had escaped into the house. The wretched young baroness, never entirely convinced of his death, saw at once through the deceit that had been practised on her, and broke into violent exclamations of grief, remorse, and despair. She directed the maid to watch the garden, and the next time she saw the appearance, (which she was convinced was not a spirit, but her beloved husband in person,) to speak to him, and relate how cruelly she had been beguiled into a marriage with the baron, and to acquaint him that she would the same night, meet him at her favorite haunt, the fountain. Next day the woman again fell in with him, and on his addressing her, soon found that he was no spectre, but the living husband of her mistress. Having imparted all her mistress desired, the young man said, that hearing of her marriage with baron Z——, he had felt assured that she had been made the victim of some artful misrepresentation, and that as soon as he could obtain leave of absence, he had hastened to Sicily, to hear the fatal story from her own lips—prepared, in case he found her union voluntary, to bury his own claim in oblivion, rather than destroy her peace, or injure her honor in the eyes of the world, whatever the effort might cost him.

That night the wretched wife and husband met at the fountain, and gave vent to the poignant anguish with which they were alike penetrated. They would willingly have fled together—but where would they be safe from the pursuing resentment of her father and the baron? To avow their marriage, and claim her as his wife, was a scheme equally hopeless and hazardous. There were no other witnesses to the marriage, which had taken place privately in the family chapel, than her own servant, and the priest who performed the ceremony—whose testimony no doubt, would be overruled, or themselves, if expedient, put out of the way. After several hours spent in fruitless deliberation, they at length parted; having resolved, as their only practicable plan, to attempt an escape to a foreign land, as they could not hope to be secure in their own.

Night after night the unhappy couple continued to meet at the fountain. The baron, aware of her mental infirmity, and of her similar excursions before confinement, paid little attention to what he supposed a return of the malady. In the meantime the officer, having collected what money he could command,—which, with the lady's jewels, was all they had to rely on for future assistance,—hired a felucca, which was to convey them to Trieste, whence they proposed making their singular story known to her family, and effecting, if possible, a reconciliation with them.

All, for some time, appeared to favor their plans; the day appointed for the sailing of the felucca and the flight of the lady approached. But their nightly meetings, carried on with too little precaution, had attracted the attention of the domestics; one of them, the game-keeper, to ingratiate himself with his master, betrayed the secret of the unhappy couple. The baron, infuriated at being thus, as he conceived, dishonored, ferociously gave orders to the informer and assistant, to lie in wait for, and dispatch the unhappy young man in the presence of his supposed mistress.—These men, though they accepted the horrible commission, less cruel than their master, had the compunction to forbear committing the dreadful deed before the eyes of the lady. The officer was, as usual, the first who came to the place of meeting. The assassins discharged their blunderbusses at him, a few paces distant from the fountain, willing that their mistress might at least be spared the terrible shock of discovering the body herself. But the dying man, badly wounded as he was, either to slake the dead thirst, or obtain, perhaps, a last sad look of his beloved, contrived to crawl to the margin of the fountain, and there expired, a few moments before his wretched wife came to the spot. When she saw and recognized her husband, heedless of discovery, she threw herself on the bleeding body, pressed it in his arms, and filled the air with her piercing screams. The murderers conjecturing the cause of the cries, drew near to the spot. When she saw them approach she sprung up, and endeavored

to precipitate herself in the water. Prevented in this design by the savage humanity of the assassins, she broke from them, and ran wildly through the grounds, frightfully shrieking, leaving behind her a track of her husband's blood, which dropped from her night dress, saturated with the crimson stream. When at length overtaken and reconveyed to the house, delirium followed delirium, and when they ceased, frenzy succeeded; the dark night of insanity had utterly quenched the light of reason. In her lucid intervals: which were few and far between, she was heard to pray for the return of madness as a relief from sufferings too acute to be endured. The baron, her husband, never mentioned the circumstance nor suffered it to be alluded to in the house. The morning after the event, he ordered the corpse to be consigned into the hands of the police, as that of a person killed by the servants, in the supposition that he was a robber, having been found trespassing by night on his premises.

During the short time the lady lived, she returned to her former habit of wandering by night. The spot stained with the blood of her husband was her favorite haunt; there was she accustomed to sit and linger for hours, seeming to hold converse with some invisible being, addressing the visionary creation of the brain with the most endearing epithets, and extending and folding her arms as if embracing a beloved object. Long after her death, the terrified domestics were wont to assert that they often beheld at night a female found weeping by the brink of the fatal fountain.

From Vigne's Travels in Kashmir.

EASTERN CRUELTY.

While I was at Kabal, Mihan Singh was guilty of an act of atrocity which may be considered as a specimen of the summary and vindictive justice administered to the unfortunate inmates of an eastern harem. He baked alive his favorite wife, the mother of his only son. She happened to be in the Punjab, where some of her enemies accused her of an intrigue, and Runjit sent her to her husband in Kashmir. Her son who feared the worst at the hands of his father, dashed his turban on the ground before him (the most imploring act of supplication that an oriental can make use of) and knelt bare headed at his feet.—Mihan Singh promised to forgive her. Soon afterwards the poor lad was sent to the Punjab, in order to be there when Sir Harry Vane, the commander in chief, was on his visit to Lahore. His unfortunate mother was then seized and forced into a bath, the temperature of which was increased for the purpose of destroying her by suffocation. This did not succeed as soon as was expected; her screams were so horrible that several people left the Shyr Gurb, that they might not be obliged to listen to them; and in the end her husband sent her a bowl of poison, which she swallowed.

From the Temperance Observer.

DEATH OF ALEXANDER.

When Alexander was at Babylon, after having spent a whole night in carousing, a second feast was proposed to him. He went accordingly, and there were twenty guests at the table. They drank the health of every person in the company, and then pledged them severally. After this, calling for Hercules's cup, which held an incredible quantity, it was filled, when he poured it all down, drinking to a Macedonian of the company, Proteas by name; and afterwards pledged him in the same extravagant bumper. He had no sooner swallowed it than he fell upon the floor. 'Here then,' cried Seneca, describing the fatal effects of drunkenness, 'this hero, unconquered by all the toils of prodigious marches, exposed to the dangers of sieges and combats, to the most violent extremes of heat and cold; here he lies, subdued by his intemperance, struck to the ground by the fatal cup of Hercules.' In this condition he was seized with a fever, which in a few days terminated in death. No one—says Plutarch and Arrian—then suspected that Alexander was poisoned. The true poison which brought him to his death was wine, which has killed many thousands beside Alexander.

From the Lickin Valley Register.

NOBILITY OF LABOUR.

The man who labours in some honest occupation and supports himself by his own industry is one of nature's noblemen. He carries with him an independence of feeling unknown to many a titled aristocrat who spurns the idea of labour, and holds in utter contempt the man who