

Literature, &c.

From Lady Blessington's new work of 'The Lottery of Life.'

THE GAMESTERS.

A FRENCH STORY.

MADAME DE TOURNVILLE was left a widow at an early age, with an only child, a daughter of ten years old, whose beauty and docility were as remarkable as a certain nervous temperament, that gave to her a shyness and timidity which checked the playful gaiety of childhood, and rendered her susceptible of fear on the slightest occasions.

The long illness of her husband, and the anxiety it entailed, followed by her deep grief at his death had so impaired the naturally delicate health of Madame de Tournville, that in a few months she followed him to the tomb; leaving her daughter, with a large fortune, to the guardianship of a relation, the Comte de Breteul, who had been for many years the intimate friend of Monsieur de Tournville, and the adviser of his widow during the last few months that she survived him.

The Comte de Breteul was a widower with a son and daughter, both senior to Matilde de Tournville by six or seven years. The young De Breteul was in the army, where he had already distinguished himself, and Louise his sister, had already returned from the pension where she had been educated, to preside over the establishment in the paternal mansion. Louise de Breteul was beautiful, gentle, amiable, and accomplished, with a steadiness, and decorum remarkable for her years, and with manners whose suavity never failed to conciliate the good opinion of those who had opportunities of knowing her. She soon acquired the devoted affection of the youthful Matilde, and repaid it with sisterly attachment, and an unceasing care bestowed on her education. The Comte de Breteul's exterior was more *distingue* than attractive; for though he possessed *Pair noble* in an eminent degree, his countenance was forbidding, and in spite of the polished elegance of his manners, repelled confidence and familiarity.

He occupied a fine hotel in the Rue de Varennes, Faubourg-Saint Germain, and lived in a style suitable to the large fortune he inherited from his ancestors. It was with pleasure that Louise superintended the studies of her interesting *protegee*, and with pride that she marked her progress in them. Matilde had a great facility in acquiring all that was taught her, and an affectionate and grateful manner of evincing her sense of the kindness and zeal of her instructors, that increased their exertions in the pleasing task. Her beauty which had been remarkable from her infancy, developed itself with increased charms as she advanced towards womanhood; but the timidity of her character, instead of diminishing, appeared unhappily to become more fixed. The gazelle was not more shy than Matilde, nor more graceful, for her timidity had nothing of *gaucherie* in it. Those who could have seen her chasing the butterfly in the garden among the flowers scarcely more blooming than herself, or standing on the point of her delicate feet trying to peep into a bird's nest, while she held back the branches of shrub that concealed it, would have allowed that she looked like some fabled wood-nymph, whose element was showers and sunshine. A strange voice or step never failed to alarm her, and send her flying like a startled dove, to the side of Louise, whose presence always re-assured her.

Louise de Breteul had refused several unexceptionable offers of marriage, being determined not to leave her father, and above all her young *eleve*, until tempted by some offer in which her heart was more interested than in those she had already received. As yet she had seen nothing of the world, and Louise who preferred the calm enjoyment of the domestic circle to the gaieties that courted her abroad, had partaken but rarely of them. The hours fled cheerfully and happily by, occupied in reading, drawing, music, and embroidery. It was a pleasing sight to behold these two young and lovely girls engaged in their daily avocations: Matilde seated by the side of her friend, would read aloud to her; while Louise, at the end of each page, commented on the passages, or in turn read to Matilde, while she exercised her pencil, and the freshly-plucked roses in the vase, which she loved to copy, wore not a brighter hue than graced her cheek, when Louise commended the fidelity with which she had transferred them to paper.

They would wander for hours through

the umbrageous shades of the vast garden belonging to the hotel, watching the growth of the beautiful flowers and plants with which it abounded, and admiring the rare birds in the aviary, which they were accustomed to feed, and which sent forth joyful notes when they approached.

About this period, Gustave de Breteul arrived at Paris to visit his family, and was accompanied by a brother officer, the young Vicomte de Villeneuve, whose presence soon seemed as gratifying to Louise as it was disagreeable to her father. He would observe the movements of his son's friend with an anxious eye, and if he conversed with, or seemed to show any attention, towards Matilde, he became evidently discomposed, and almost stern towards the Vicomte de Villeneuve. The coldness of the reception given him by the Comte de Breteul, prevented not the frequent visits of that young gentleman to the Hotel de Breteul, and it soon became visible that he was more attracted there by the smiles of the fair sister of his friend, than even by the friend himself, warm and sincere as was his attachment to him. A mutual sentiment of the most tender nature had taken place between the Vicomte and Louise, which was soon revealed to the delighted Gustave, who loved his sister and his friend, better than aught else on earth, save a certain *demoiselle*, the only sister of that friend, to whom he had plighted his faith; having, during the last year, conceived for her a passion as sincere as it was reciprocal. In fact, his present visit was made expressly with the intention to solicit his father's consent to their union, and his friend had accompanied him to give all the necessary information relative to the fortune and prospects of his sister. The attachment which the Vicomte de Villeneuve had formed for Louise, seemed to complete the anticipations of happiness that Gustave nourished in his breast; and he looked forward with feelings of delight to the double alliance of the two families. Gustave was about to solicit an interview with his father, to lay open the state of his heart, when the Comte de Breteul required his presence in the library.

'I have sent for you, my son,' said he, 'to talk over future plans, in which you are deeply interested, and I flatter myself, that in fulfilling them, you will find that I have not been unmindful of your happiness. For a long period I have decided on bestowing on you the hand of my fair and amiable ward, Matilde de Tournville. Her person, all must admit to be lovely; her accomplishments, gentleness and good sense, no one can doubt; and her fortune leaves nothing to be desired by the most prudent father. But how is this? You seem far from feeling the delight I had anticipated; you have not, you cannot have, a single objection against Matilde.'

'Far from it, my father,' replied Gustave; 'no one can be more ready to acknowledge the charms and good qualities of Mademoiselle de Tournville than myself; but my affections are bestowed on another, and when you summoned me to your presence, I was on the point of demanding an audience to declare to you the state of my heart—I love, and am beloved by the sister of my friend; and only wait for your sanction to ratify the vows we have interchanged.'

'Do I hear right?' asked the angry father, while disappointment and rage strove for mastery in his agitated breast. 'Is it thus that you would dash to the ground the hopes which I have so long indulged? But no! you cannot be so ungrateful, so selfish—you will, now that you know my wishes, abandon this silly project, and give your hand to Matilde!'

'Never! my father,' said Gustave, firmly but respectfully; 'my vows are pledged to Elise de Villeneuve; her fortune—though to it I have not given a thought—is equal to that of Matilde; her family is more noble, and therefore no reason can exist for declining a marriage on which all my hopes of happiness depend.'

'Are my feelings, then,' said the father, 'to be counted for nothing? And how long is it since French fathers have ceased to exercise the right of disposing of the hands of their children? In England, where sons are so negligently educated that the heir of every noble house thinks he has a right to select a wife for himself, such infractions of duty may possibly occur; but in France, we are not yet arrived at this degree of licence; and I declare to you, that I never will consent to your marriage with any one but Matilde.'

So saying, he quitted the room, leaving Gustave perfectly confounded by this first display of harsh parental authority, but fully resolved to resist it. He determined on writing a letter of remon-

strance to his father; and unwilling to acquaint his friend with the unfavourable result of the interview, lest he should feel offended at the unaccountable objection of the Comte to the proposed union, he decided on leaving Paris for a couple of days, both to afford time to his father to reflect coolly on his letter, and give it a definitive answer, and to avoid meeting De Villeneuve, until he had received it. Writing, therefore, a brief note to his friend, to apologize for his absence, he departed from Paris, a prey to gloomy thoughts, which formed a painful contrast with the joyful anticipations in which he had indulged only a few hours before.

Ignorant of the state of irritation into which his son's declaration had plunged the Comte de Breteul, De Villeneuve, with the permission of Louise, had sought him, and demanded her hand. An angry refusal, and an angry intimation that his future visits would be dispensed with in the Rue de Varennes, was the answer that awaited the disappointed and astonished lover, who left the library, the scene of his audience, with nearly equal sentiments of dislike towards the father, as of passionate tenderness for the daughter. Previously to quitting the house, he sought his beloved Louise, and in a few words related to her the cruel disappointment he had encountered. He urged her to be firm, and should her father speak to her on the subject, he implored her to act with candor their attachment, and the conviction of its stability.

How had a few hours changed the happy prospects of the lovers! They were confounded by the unexpected turn affairs had taken; for so unexceptionable was the fortune and position of the Vicomte de Villeneuve, that a doubt of his proposals being listened to with pleasure by the Comte de Breteul, had never occurred to them. Louise felt this disappointment of the heart, with perhaps more severity, that it was the first she had known. Her feelings had not been deprived of their virgin purity by a succession of youthful fancies, each chasing away the recollection of the former; an evil which to often affects youthful minds, whose facility to receive impressions is in general greater than their power to retain them. Her attachment to De Villeneuve was her first lesson of love, she felt it to be indelible, and was overpowered with anguish at finding the obstacles that impeded her happiness. She waited with impatience the return of her brother,—he who alone could sympathize with her, could counsel, or intercede for her. The feelings of this gentle and high minded girl, which had hitherto preserved their even tenor, like some gliding stream flowing smoothly along, and reflecting only the fairest images on its glassy surface, were now like the mountain torrent, swollen by rains, and rocked by the tempest.

When Matilde, unconscious of passing events, approached her loved guide and protectress to pursue the appointed studies of the day, it was only by a violent effort that Louise could assume an appearance of calmness. The force of her emotions struck her with alarm; and as Matilde displayed her drawings, or played some favorite air, to which she had endeavored to give more than usual expression, in order to win the commendation of her friend, Louise shrank abashed from the innocent and happy girl, self reproved by the thought, that while she thus abandoned herself to the engrossing emotions that filled her heart, she was unhallowed for the part of mistress to one whose purity had never been sullied by passion.

Two gloomy days had tediousy drawn to a conclusion, when Gustave returned, and the unhappy Louise poured into his sympathizing ear the disappointment with which her hopes had been crushed. He found a long letter from De Villeneuve, written under all the excitement of feelings which the interview with the Comte de Breteul was calculated to produce; and urging Gustave not only to give him a speedy meeting, but immediately to arrange for him an interview with Louise in his presence; declaring that to endure existence any longer without seeing her he felt to be impossible. He implored Gustave by the love he bore to Elise, by their long friendship, and by his affection for Louise, to grant this request. He proposed that they should meet in the garden of the Hotel de Breteul, which could be arranged by their admitting him by the private door that opened into the Rue de Babylon. Gustave consented to this plan, and while they are concerting measures to carry it into effect, we must take a retrospective view of the circumstances that had led the Comte de Breteul to offer such an unaccountable opposition to the happiness of his children.

In early youth he had made a love-

match, and during his wedded life had possessed a happiness that rarely accompanies marriages in the formation of which passion has had more influence than reason. The Countess de Breteul, on her death bed, to which in a few fleeting hours a violent malady had conducted her, with the short-sighted selfishness of an ill-regulated affection, had extorted from her agonized husband a solemn promise that he would never give her a successor in his heart, or place over his children an alien mother. This request, framed by love, led to the most fatal results, and drove from the pale of domestic bliss, a man who might have dispensed and partaken that blessing. The first violent grief of the bereaved husband having subsided into the stagnant calm of morbid melancholy he sought in vain to find relief in his former avocations. Books failed to give him their wonted solace, because every page of his favorite authors teemed with passages marked by the pencil of her he sought to forget; and the sympathy of their tastes, brought thus before him, renewed the overwhelming grief her loss had occasioned. His home had now become unbearable to him, for it was fraught with images of the past. Her vacant chair opposite to his own; the vacant chair on which her delicate feet used to repose; the vase, now empty, in which the flowers she loved were wont to adorn her table; the unfinished sketches from her pencil, still resting on the easel; and her harp standing where she had last awakened its tones, all—spoke to him of the happy past, and rendered the present insupportable. It was to fly from this state of gloomy grief that he sought forgetfulness in play; that fearful remedy which, like the poisons introduced in medicine, is so much more destructive than the malady it may banish. The excitement at first produced was such a relief to his harassed feelings, that he had recourse to it as the victim of acute pain flies to opiates, when suffering has conquered fortitude, and forgetfulness for a few brief hours to all he hopes to obtain. The fatal habit of play grew on him,—nay soon became the engrossing passion of his life, until fortune, fame and peace, all were sacrificed to its destructive indulgence. His large funded property, touched by the burning finger of the reckless gamester, had melted like snow before the sun; and when Madame de Tournville placed in his power the ample fortune of her orphan daughter, he stood on the verge of ruin, into which, without this timely aid, in a few months he must have inevitably been plunged. The gradations of vice are only imperceptible in the wretched dupe who passes through them. A few months before, and the Comte de Breteul would have spurned the idea, that he could be even suspected of risking the property of his own children, a property which he considered as a sacred deposit confided to his care; but now he blushed not to risk that of his youthful ward, and saw thousands after thousands of it disappear in the same fatal gulf which had swallowed up his own.

The Comte de Breteul had not lost the vast sums that had led to his ruin without having made acquaintances as disreputable to his fame, as the pursuit by which he formed them was destructive to his fortune. Men of all countries, as ruined in reputation as in purse, had now become his associates; sums of money lost to them, which he had not always the power to pay, had placed him in their disgraceful dependence, and they no longer felt under their former restraint in his presence. The Comte de Breteul, a naturally proud man, had not reached this humiliating state of degradation without frequent self-reproach, and sickening feelings of disgust; but the hope, the deceptive hope of regaining his losses, that hope which lures the gamester to destruction, still led him on. He had been living on credit for some months, and retained but a few thousand francs of the once large fortune of Matilde de Tournville in his possession, when by the death of a relation, a large sum of money was bequeathed to her, which was to descend to him and his children in case of her dying childless. This had occurred only a few days before the arrival of Gustave de Breteul at Paris, and the guilty and ruined father determined on forming a marriage between Matilde and his son, which would give him the power of appropriating at least a portion of this money to his own pressing exigencies, and prevent the discovery of his dishonest waste of her paternal fortune, as he knew that both Matilde and Gustave would leave the whole of their pecuniary affairs to his management.

With this plan in view, the only one