

## Literature, &amp; c.

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## THE NUN OF LEICESTER.

BY MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

AMONG the rich pasture-lands, forest, and oopswood that lay—in the fifteenth century—is that portion of Middlesex which now constitutes the suburbs of London, stood a large stone mansion, unpretending in its architecture, but massive and sheltered. It stood upon low ground, and was so completely embowered in stately trees, that nothing but the tall chimneys, with a glimpse of the portal, and a row of upper windows could be seen from the highway; though a narrow belt of green sward was all that separated it from one of the principal thoroughfares which led into the heart of the city.

It was a pleasant autumnal afternoon, and the yellow sunshine which lay warm and richly on the surrounding landscape might well excite the young creature who occupied a chamber in the upper story of this dwelling, for flinging wide the casement and leaning forth to enjoy the fresh air which swept by, luscious with the odor of ripe fruit and dying wild flowers.

But it was neither the balmy air, nor the flashes of sunshine, that came and went like the golden arrows through the fields below, that attracted that fair girl from the solitude of her chamber. There was light in her violet eyes as she bent forward and leaned eagerly over the low window-sill, but it was such light as joy that is mingled with doubt and passion can give. The excitement of contending feelings, sweet, bitter, and tumultuous, burned in her cheek and swelled in the bosom that rose and throbbled against the rude stonework on which she leaned. But there was no contentment, nothing of the sweet delight brooding there, which a mind satisfied with the present and at rest regarding the future, imparts to the countenance while dwelling on the beautiful in nature.

Not on those fields of ripe grain, given a golden tinge to the far-off plain—not on the dusky groves darkening the distance with a rich tinge of autumn—not on the far-off hills, shrouding their rugged heads in a veil of misty purple, were the eyes of that young creature bent. But along the highway where it wound up a neighboring hill, her eager gaze was fixed and if the wind threw up a cloud of dust, or the faintest sound was heard, the unequal breath came still more heavily through her parted lips—with her unsteady fingers she would put back the chestnut tresses from her ear and listen intently, as if life or death depended on the next sound. At length, from the far distance came the faint braying of a trumpet followed by indistinct sounds of trampling hoofs.

"He is coming! Listen, good Marguerite, for thyself. Is not that the braying of his trumpeters?"

"In sooth I cannot tell," replied the dame to whom these eager questions were addressed. "If there is a trumpet sounding boldly in England, it must be for Edward of York. The Red Rose, alas! is trampled in the dust forever!"

"Nay, Marguerite, this is churlish in thee!" cried the girl, half angrily, turning her face indoors for a moment. "It is not with repinings over the fall of a conquered house that we should greet the princely Gloucester, by whose prowess it has been overcome; but bark! the trumpeters draw near. Already I see a banner lift its blood-red folds behind the hill!"

Once more Cicely Wayne bent over the window sill, and watched with breathless interest, the vanguard of King Edward's army as it came heaving in glittering waves over the hill on its triumphal march from the battle of Tewksbury up to London.

"See, see, is not that his banner?" she exclaimed, as another of the rich war pennants was lifted, like the wing of a great bird, over the edge of the hill. "No, no, a sun burning on the azure field, that is the king's! and behind it what a sea of dancing plumes! how the sunlight fires and flashes over the stream of mailed forms, the horses and—ha, that is his! I know it by the flash of light which strikes the crest, and falls off like a shivered arrow. Yes it is his—it is the princely Gloucester! Marguerite, Marguerite, bid them bring the boy hither—let those young eyes greet his father when the glory of his first battle field is shining around him! Bring forth the boy, I say! Mark you not how swiftly the torrent of mailed warriors comes sweeping hitherward? Ha, a litter—have they women so near the king?"

Cicely Wayne drew back as the last words escaped her lips; the rich color wavered on her cheek, and, though her eyes were still turned toward the hill, the mass of human beings that came heaving wave after wave over it flowed downward in confused and glittering tumult beneath her gaze almost unseen; her interest was all concentrated on one single group.

"Oh, now I bethink me!—fool, fool that I was, to suffer this sharp pang to strike at my heart so! The rumor went that Margaret of Anjou was a prisoner! Alas, poor lady, the litter is hers. Ha, my boy—my own sweet beautiful boy! Marguerite, Marguerite, is it not a brave child?—may not even a prince be proud of him?" and, throwing back the crimson mantle that enveloped the child, the young mother bent down and half-emothered it with kisses; then, gathering infant, drapery and all in her arms, she ran to the casement again and looked forth, trembling with joyous excite-

ment, and with that sweet infant face pillowed upon her heaving bosom.

The highway in front of her dwelling was by this time choked up with a mailed throng, moving eagerly city-ward—behind a copse, at her right, which concealed the foot of the hill, she could see the "sun of York" flashing through the thinned foliage, and still, as far as her eye could reach, came the mailed multitude thundering up from its terrible victory.

There was a break in the procession—clarions poured their martial breath upon the air. Pennant after pennant flashed out from behind the copse, and Edward of York, surrounded by the bright chivalry of England, continued his march onward toward the metropolis.

Cicely could only see a mass of glittering life heaving and rustling beneath her feet—she saw not that the bright bold eyes of the young king were turned admiringly on her beauty as he passed—the regal crown circled his helmet—his snow-white plumes danced in the air, and the housings of his war horse flamed with gold. Amid all this sumptuous array, the majestic beauty of his countenance was lighted up by a smile of passing admiration. But still Cicely saw him not. Her eyes were turned upon the copse.

Her breath came heavily—her cheek was red and feverish. Still the martial stream swept on. Another banner gleamed through the copse, and, almost beneath the shadow of its folds, rode a slight form, clad in mail from head to foot. The blue steel of his hauberk was divided across the bosom with a broad chain of gold, thus forming the baidiken stripes of royalty, a broad collar of jewels blazed over them and a crimson cloak swept back from one shoulder, falling in rich folds over the other, thus, with careless taste, concealing what, if entirely uncovered, would have been a personal defect. The visor of his helmet was lifted, and its plume, of blood-red feathers, swept back on the wind, exposing a set of features which were without bloom, and, though wanting a single line of age, were impressed with all the stern repose of mature thought, of a will that could wait but never yield. The lips were thin and firm. The eyes bright and long-cut, with a deep perpetual glitter upon them, and overhung with brows that were scarcely curved into the sign of an arch. The forehead, which was girded in and half concealed by the helmet, betrayed enough of its broad and massive outline to make the thoughts of his frown terrible, and to wonder that a smile could ever light such features into absolute beauty.

But the face of King Edward, in all the pomp of physical symmetry and bloom, lacked the spell of intellect which lighted up the irregular features of Duke Richard. When he spoke, or smiled, the winning softness that awoke in lip and eye, seemed almost superhuman.

This beautiful expression was on his face as the eyes of Cicely Wayne singled him out from the warriors of his band. Her heart leaped to the light of that smile, and, bending her head, she pressed the babe with a gush of eager fondness to her bosom, kissed it, and left the warm tears of her joy trembling on its cheek, like dew upon a rose leaf, as she lifted her head again.

The happy young mother had scarcely lifted her eyes again when the color fled from her cheeks, and her breath was drawn in with a shap-sob—Richard of Gloucester was almost opposite the house. She, the chosen of his love—she and the babe, his first-born, were standing at the casement, and yet his eyes never once turned toward them. On he rode, reining in his impetuous war steed with one hand, while the other, from which the gauntlet had been withdrawn, rested, soft, white and glittering with jewels, on the edge of the litter which had frightened the blood from poor Cicely's cheek as it came over the hill.

The azure curtains of this litter were partially lifted, and upon its cushions lay half reclined the slender form of a young girl, so beautiful that Cicely Wayne turned faint as she gazed. Even from the distance traces of sadness and suffering could be detected on the sweet face of the prisoner. The rich garments which lay around her person were soiled and disordered, and her loosened tresses flowed over the cushions of her litter, bright almost as the flowered gold cloth on which they fell. Still Cicely kept her feverish gaze on the litter. She saw its inmate lift her eyes—beautiful eyes they were, but flushed and heavy with tears—she saw them sink again, then turn with a sad, broken-hearted expression, on the duke, as he uttered, it would seem, words of tender consolation. She saw those soft eyes riveted, fixed, chained, as it were, in their own tears, by the sympathy, the eloquence, that flowed from his lips—then, all at once, she saw the lady shrink down in the litter, bury her face among the glittering cushions, and clasp her hands as if she were weeping. Richard reverently closed the silken curtains over the lady's grief, and drew the gauntlet over his hand. As he was tightening the glove, his eye fell upon Cicely where she stood with his child upon her bosom. A black frown changed the whole character of his face, and without sign of more gentle recognition, he tightened the embossed reins of his bride and rode on.

"Marguerite, Marguerite, take the child," gasped poor Cicely, staggering back into the chamber, where the good dame was standing in deep melancholy, for she had loved the fallen house of Lancaster.

Marguerite took the infant, gazed mournfully on its face an instant, and gave an attendant charge to bear it from the room.

Meanwhile, Cicely had returned to the casement. Though heart smitten and faint with jealous grief, she could not keep away. Duke Richard of Gloucester had passed on, but his pennant still swept back on the wind, and the gorgeous litter was at his side beneath whose silken screen the beautiful Anna Neville, young

Edward of Lancaster's betrothed and great Warwick's daughter, concealed her grief.

But sounds of agony, sharp almost as those which wrung the heart of Cicely Wayne, broke from the lips of Marguerite, who had stolen to the side of her mistress with an affectionate wish to console and support her. For the first time her eyes had fallen on the world of mailed life swelling the highway. With a cry that rang sharply above the now distant clarions, she fell to her knees, locked her withered fingers, and remained thus, crouching down in bitter grief, gazing wildly on an object in the glittering mass which seemed to have struck her aged limbs strengthless to the earth.

"Oh God, our queen, our queen," cried the old woman, stretching her locked hands through the casement while great tears rolled down her cheeks.

Her eyes had fallen on the Lancastrian Queen, the thrice royal captive, Margaret of Anjou. It was, in truth, a sight to wring the heart of one who loved the heart of the Red Rose family—that haughty and unfortunate lady in her majestic grief swelling the triumphal procession of her conqueror and foe.

The indomitable pride, the untiring energy of this more than regal woman had given way at last. A kingdom had passed away from her and hers forever. Her son lay shrouded in his young blood on the battle field of Tewksbury—she had seen his dead body as they dragged her forth from the church where she had taken shelter after his defeat. By chance or in bitter mockery, they had lifted her to the very war steed which had borne that brave son to his first and last battle, and thus cruelly mounted they were conducting her, surrounded by victorious troops, amid many a mocking gibe, up to the prison where her unhappy husband still languished. Alas! it was a grievous picture of fallen greatness. The rich housings that swept from the war saddle, which her son had pressed in courage and health but two days before, were rent in tatters and soiled with mire, and the red rose braided over them in so many quaint devices was spotted with his blood. The bridle rein, spite of its golden embossments, was knotted rudely together where it had been rent apart in the battle field, and down the snow-white flanks of that noble steed trickled a stream of blood, though he disdained to halt, and seemed not to feel the sword-cut from which it sprang. Behind her was a common soldier training "the Antelope" flag through the dust, and around were the captive knights and soldiers who had clung to her house in misfortune and now shared its overthrow—a pale, dejected, and heart-stricken band.

But more touching than all these outward signs of defeat was the appearance of Margaret, the once haughty queen and lady of Anjou. The regal purple hung in damp and crushed masses around her person. Half the jewels were torn from her gorget, and the pearls which frosted the sleeves of her robe had changed from their snowy hue by rough contact with the elements, and were dropping away from the tarnished velvet, like those summer friends who now swelled the ranks of her conqueror.

Though misery and defeat had crushed the lofty spirit in Margaret of Anjou, the more than regal grandeur of her presence still shone forth amid the crush and tatters of her greatness. That stately form stooped not for a moment in its saddle. The hand which held the knotted bridle-rein seemed stiffened into marble, and that majestic face neither drooped nor turned away from the coarse eyes of the soldier mob. The features were locked and frozen in their impassable beauty. Death itself could not have appeared more rigid and passionless.

As the cry of anguish which broke from dame Marguerite fell on the captive's ear, she turned her dark and stony eyes towards the casement, and tried to lift her hand to check the expression of sympathy which might bring harm on the old woman, but she had no power to make the desired motion; a faint, ghastly smile flitting across her lips was all the sign she gave.

Slowly, heavily, and with an iron tramp that seemed to shake the earth, the army of King Edward swept on toward the metropolis, bearing with it the conqueror and his generals, the captive and her soul-stricken adherents. Long before the last file of pikemen disappeared in the distance, Cicely Wayne was weeping over the couch of her child, while old Marguerite, whose whole family had been swept away under the red rose banner, sat down in a darkened corner of the chamber, and bemoaned the downfall of a race for whom so many that she loved had been sacrificed.

Far down, across the plain, which swept eastward from Cicely Wayne's dwelling, the grey walls of a monastery appeared, the leafy and quiet solitude of nature. The house was richly endowed, and its lands swelled, in many a fertile meadow, grain field and orchard, up to the less cultivated estate which had been left to the young heiress of Sir Thomas Wayne, by some strange act of leniency in the crown, though the brave knight had, on the battle-field, sealed his devotion to the House of Lancaster with his life.

It was nightfall, some ten days after the entrance of King Edward into London, when the abbot of this monastery sat in a private room, which opened from his oratory, and to which few of the brethren were ever admitted. A fire was burning brightly on the hearth, and before it stood a table, bearing a silver dish filled with rich confectionery, another of such fruits as the orchards of England yielded at that season, with wines and golden drinking-cups for two.

"I pray your highness, taste the confection, it hath a delicious flavor, and is much affected by those who have learned some delicacy of taste in foreign parts," said the sleek churchman folding his robe over one of the rounded

limbs, which received rather more heat from the fire than was quite comfortable.

"Nay," said his guest, taking a frosted seed-cake between his white and jeweled fingers, as if to please his host, rather than from any desire of the luxury—"Our brother Edward hath a subtle taste in these matters and could do this dainty fare better justice."

"His grace the king hath a fair judgement in all that makes the strength and armament of life," replied the abbot, "but those who speak of the Duke Richard, give him credit for no true courage, as much taste in the arts, with deep reading in the Italian schools, which we churchmen hold the most noble accomplishment which can grace noble, bishop or knight."

"They flatter who say this," replied Gloucester with one of those sweet smiles which few could resist passing over his face. "I am but a youth yet, fresh from my first battle. As for book lore, you of the church, to whose life is but a season of study, might deem me but a braggart were I to claim any merit for the little that I have picked up, between attendance at court and the more striking lessons of the tiltyard. There may come a season, when this poor realm is ever at peace, when I may even claim your tutelage, good father. These shelves seem richly laden, and this is a quiet room—now, I warrant, there might be found many a page of sweet Italian verse blazoned among those churchly tomes yonder."

The young duke looked smilingly around on a massive oaken book-case, that covered one end of the room, filed with manuscripts richly bound in vellum, and a few volumes whose pages were blackened with the clumsy print just introduced into England.

"I need not say," he added blandly, lifting a cup of wine to his lips, "I need not say, good father abbot, that the monastery where Richard of Gloucester hereafter dwelt in the sweet lessons of poetry shall be bravely endowed."

The abbot rose from his chair, and going eagerly to the book-case, selected a volume from its shelves and brought it to the table, turning over the richly emblazoned leaves as he came.

"Here is a volume," he said, "whose every verse might have flowed from the heart of a nightingale. Your Grace would scarcely find our poor house gloomy with this for a companion," and placing the open book before Duke Richard, the abbot shook up the cushions of Spanish leather which garnished his chair, and sinking upon them, watched with eager interest the countenance of Duke Richard as he turned over the leaves, admiring the quaint emblazonry, and reading here and there a sentence of the sweet verse with which they abounded.

"It is indeed a work of rare merit, and richly bravely embellished," said Richard, at length, quietly locking the jeweled clasp, and lifting the wine cup to his lips again. "This wine has a frisky flavor, too—the king's table seldom boasts so pure a vintage—now I bethink me, good father abbot, was it not the holy brethren of this house that petitioned our brother, some two years back, for that portion of Sir Thomas Wayne's estate which joins up to the abbey lands?"

The abbot looked surprised, and in truth somewhat startled; he answered with considerable trepidation—

"Certainly, my lord duke, such petition was sent up from our poor house to the king, but that was before your highness received the gift—before the Lady Cicely became—"

"Hush!" said the duke, sharply, and setting down his wine cup with a violence that made the precious metal ring against the table—"I thought that strict silence had been enjoined regarding the transactions of that night! The secret ever passed your lips, sir abbot, in a stern manner and the darkening brow of the duke. "Heaven and our good Lady forbid! I trifle not with the secrets of kings!"

"Wisely resolved," said Richard, fixing a keen and subtle glance on the churchman. "And this secret, good father, Gloucester would now drive from his own memory, would he might persuade the lady to forget also—reasons of state, perhaps my own wish urge me to a union with the daughter of Warwick, sweet Anna Neville. There is but one obstacle, this Cicely Wayne—but if you remain faithful you shall know that a marriage rite has never been pronounced? The lady has no news, and her word—tush! who would take the simple word of a damsel in a case which involved the honor of a prince?"

"But a divorce might be had—a dispensation from Rome," said the abbot timidly.

"Aye, that men might cavil over it when I am king, nay, when I am favored of the king, I would have said, as they do over a like thing in our brother Edward. No, holy father, you, and you alone, will Gloucester trust; my marriage never must be known! Be you faithful, and the secret in your breast shall be better than revenue or lands to your house—not only the covered estate yonder, but good enough to pave the steps of your largest abbey shall be a yearly gerdon to your fatherly."

"I was bound to secrecy before," replied the abbot, evidently confirmed in his fidelity by the rich reward offered by the duke. "But the poor lady, methinks she will take the matter sorely to heart. They are a proud family, knight and dame—that Sir Thomas Wayne."

"But prouder dames than sweet Cicely Wayne, not deemed the love of royalty dishonour, without wedlock," said Richard. "The Beauforts sprung from a right haughty mother, and claim place with the royalty of England, spite of her known dishonor. But that matter, not, be thou discreet and faithful, holy father, as for the lady, though she urge her claim