

## Literature, &amp;c.

## The American Magazines.

From the *Columbian Magazine*.

## THE PICTURE FRAME.

A TRADITIONAL SKETCH.

By Mrs. E. F. Ellett.

[Continued from our last.]

"At the appointed hour I was at the place of rendezvous. But for his voice as he spoke I should not have recognized the person who advanced to meet me, so completely had he disguised himself by a false shevelure, a brown stain on his complexion and a change of attire. Before I could express my surprise at this transformation, however, he interrupted me, and I saw that he was fearfully agitated. In a low and trembling voice he communicated still more alarming matters that had come to his knowledge since we parted.

"The queen must fly," he concluded; "not an hour of time is to be lost."

"But whither?"

"A vessel is in waiting; I have all in readiness, even horses for her use, and a few trusty men, adherents of my own, who have sworn to venture life for her sake. You, my lord, must instantly apprise her grace of the pressing danger and arrange all on her part."

"This very night I will see her," I exclaimed, and having briefly arranged our plans I bade adieu to the partisan of my mistress, forcing into her reluctant hands my purse and some jewels to be in safe keeping in case of need. All was silent as I returned to the palace. The sentinels of course permitted me to pass without question, and I was soon within the guarded and sacred precincts of the royal apartments. The king had already retired. A profound stillness reigned every where.

Well acquainted with all the galleries and corridors it was not difficult for me to find my way to the apartment occupied by the lady Alice, one of the queen's chamberers, who I knew stood high in her Grace's confidence.

I knocked at the door and in a few moments the lady Alice appeared. I told her briefly that I must see the queen immediately upon urgent business. Supposing me to be charged with some important message from my royal master, she hesitated not to grant my request, and, taking up the light, led the way to her grace's chamber.

"How did my heart beat while waiting admission to that regal presence. How should I tell her my sad, strange errand? How crush the lightness of that young, noble heart, perhaps by the first tidings of the awful danger in which she stood? How tell her that she must resign her exalted dignity and flee like one conscious of guilt to some foreign land, where shelter might be vouchsafed to her persecuted head?"

"At length the door was opened and Alice beckoned me to enter. The queen was seated at the upper end of the apartment beside a table surmounted by a crucifix, on which lay a prayer book open; she had evidently been engaged in her devotions. She wore a simple dressing robe of white; her ornaments had been laid aside; her hair was unbound and floated over her shoulders, her hands were clasped and she held something which I afterward saw was a small reliquary set in gold. Never had I beheld such loveliness; with her uplifted face of child-like innocence she seemed in that moment an angel. Yet how pale she was! How expressive of suffering and terror were her looks! It was plain that she knew all.

"Come hither, P——," she said, seeing that I stood still; "and tell me the commands of my lord."

"I saw that she supposed me the king's messenger and glanced irresolutely at the lady in waiting.

"Thou mayst speak freely," said the queen, understanding my hesitation.

"I come not by command of his majesty," I replied. "But the duty I owe your royal person—"

"Katherine started up in sudden terror. She was evidently unprepared for alarming news.

With a burst of feeling I could not control I rushed forward and threw myself at her feet.

"Call Rochford!" she exclaimed, in a feeble voice, and sank, almost fainting, upon the seat.

"The lady Alice, not heeding her commands for the presence of the countess, who was the principal lady in waiting, hastened to chafe her hands and administer some drops of a restorative cordial. The queen presently revived and the lady bade me to say quickly what I had to say.

"Without farther hesitation I poured out my fatal tidings, concealing, not even the fact that the secretary, who had been taken into custody on pretence of piracy in Ireland, had been condemned to death by the privy council on the charge of high treason, in which her majesty was incriminated. When she heard this I thought verily that grief and horror had killed her grace, so rigid grew her features, her eyes fixed in a terrified stare, her lips white as marble. Yet she motioned me to proceed. I showed then the king's warrant for the arrest of her unknown partisan, and repeated the conversations I had held with B.

"Then all is lost!" said Katherine, and, as she spoke, her self-possession returned.

"Your majesty must fly," I repeated. "Friends are in waiting. France offers a shelter."

"Never!" she cried, scornfully, while a

flush rose to her brow. "So hath my lord of Canterbury moved me ere now to confess myself under contract to another before I married with the king. Belike it is better to be sent away in disgrace than to abide the malice of mine enemies and the anger of Henry. But I will die, as I truly am, the lawful queen of England."

"The prison—the block," I murmured. "The prison—the block—will be welcome to Katherine Howard ere she will deny her true and queenly estate, or confess guilt by cowardly flight."

"It was glorious in truth to see the spirit of that lofty girl. Her face was of marble paleness but determined; her beautiful eyes were raised to heaven; her hands were clasped and her lips moved as if in prayer. A moment passed she again drooped her head; a softness stole over her face and she murmured, 'But he cannot—Henry will not—thus deal with his chosen one. Surely the bitterness of death is past!'"

"Believe it not," I cried, weeping, as I knelt at her feet. "Trust not the king's mercy!" and Alice joined her frantic entreaty: "Trust him not! Remember Anne Boleyn!"

"Anne Boleyn!" repeated the queen, wildly; "have I not cause to remember her?" Hath she not stood, night after night, at the foot of my couch, holding her bleeding head, and pointing to it and saying, 'These are Henry's love-gifts?' Aye, I remember her!"

"Flee from her doom, while there is yet time!" was our agonized exclamation. Our entreaties at last seemed to have some effect. Life was dear to the destined victim; death had unspeakable terrors; the darkness gathering round her was impenetrable. She shrank before apparition of the scaffold and the headsmen. Almost with the passive obedience of a child—in truth she was but little more—she resigned her fate into our hands. It was settled by Alice and me that she should deny access to all visitors during the following day under the plea of indisposition; that those of her attendants whom she permitted to share her flight should make the necessary preparations; and that at midnight on the morrow B. and myself should await her with a covered carriage just beyond the gate of the private-entrance. Having obtained her grace's passive consent to the flight, I left the apartment, glancing back only once, when I saw that the queen had sunk upon her knees before her crucifix. I never beheld her more!

"It was my task next day to endeavour to divert the suspicions of the king. I told him, to save the innocent—a P———condemned to falsehood! that all my efforts to discover the unknown had proved unavailing; but that I was informed a person answering his description had been seen, had departed none knew whither, and would return in a few days. I promised to be unerring in the watch, not doubting my ultimate success.

"I will have him forth," said his majesty, "an he were hid in the centre of the earth. One link and the chain is complete."

"I shuddered as these boding words fell on my ear; for I knew well their meaning. I observed also, that the king seemed to cherish some suspicion of me. For several times his penetrating looks were fastened on me; he detained me in his presence, or on matters of his service, a great part of the day, and more than once I heard him utter words that filled me with dismay. Apparently, my calm endurance of his scrutiny satisfied him. He spoke to me more kindly, and ere he retired bade me entertain him with a game of chess.

"When the game was partly finished, I said to him by way of warning, 'the queen, sire, is in peril.' He cast upon me one of his fierce looks, and exclaimed angrily: 'what an if she be? What business is that of thine? Tush, it wearis me!' With a displeased brow, Henry pushed aside the chessboard and bade me depart.

"I have good hope, I ventured to say before I departed, 'that I have not in any wise angered your highness.'

"Go to; I am but ill at ease," he muttered the king and I saw his features work convulsively.

"Ill at ease!" I repeated in alarm, "I must summon your majesty's physician!"

"Ere I could hasten to call assistance, the paroxysm passed away, and my master's stern voice recalled me. He forbade me to speak to any of his momentary indisposition, which he said was but occasion for mirth, and caused by wakefulness the preceding night, when he had been much harassed in mind concerning matters involving the welfare of the realm. He then dismissed me, and I departed after wishing his majesty a sounder sleep the coming night.

"Was it true then, that the relentless Nemesis, remorse, stood by the monarch's couch? The thought was a gleam of light on the darkness of Catharine's destiny. With a heart relieved of half the weight I quitted the palace, to seek out my brother in the enterprise of saving the queen.

"Before midnight we were on the spot. There were also two gentlemen of B.'s masked, who had received his instructions. I had with me only my son, then of tender age. All was in readiness. Our anxiety cannot be described as we waited there, listening in vain for those who were to join us.

"The windows of the apartments allotted to the queen and her ladies could be seen from the place where we stood. A light was burning in that of her majesty, and my heart throbbled wildly as I saw a well known figure several times pass the casement. Other shadows passed also; it was plain that some of her attendants were with her. My anxiety

amounted to frenzy. I gave my son into B.'s care, insisting on his promise that if caught he would conduct him in safety to the continent. Funds had already been provided, to be available in anticipation of our flight.

"After waiting till half an hour after midnight, it was proposed that I should go to the palace, as delay involved great risk to our enterprise. Just then a light step was heard; a female figure, closely wrapped in a mantle, yet which I instantly recognised as that of the confidential attendant of lady Rochford, came up, placed a letter in my hand, and the next moment disappeared. The letter was from the lady Alice, and was to the purport that the queen commanded us to proceed no farther touching the business that we had in hand, and gave us her blessing—with her prayer to God to reward our fidelity to her, even should she never be able to profit thereby.

"The die, then, was cast. She refused escape, determined to abide, young, beautiful, defenceless as she was, the issue of the proceedings against her. There was a sublimity in her decision, and we dared not withstand it. Silently, with heavy hearts, we dismissed the carriage and returned to our separate lodgings. Prepared as we were for the catastrophe, the news came upon me like a thundercrash the following morning that, under the direction of Cranmer and the council, the queen had been arrested, her keys being taken from her, and removed, in the state of a prisoner, to St. Sion Convent.

"Immediately after the dreadful event that followed the last occurrences, I hastened with my son to quit a country where I had suffered so much; I saw no more of B——. Perhaps time has yet in store a meeting for us. I remained two years abroad; then the restless spirit that ever haunted me brought me to England, and to London once more I came under a feigned name; for I would not involve my former friends in peril by a renewal of intercourse. Some, alas! had fallen on the scaffold!

"I could not refrain from a visit to Holbein, for I yearned to look once more on the picture of my royal and murdered mistress. The pestilence was then raging, Holbein was its victim. Shortly before his death he sent for me and presented me with the portrait, which he esteemed his best work. I returned with my treasure to France. I enjoin it upon my children to keep it in remembrance of her whose brow, in assuming a crown, was pierced by the thorn it covers."

The baron ceased reading; the company was silent, till Anselmo observed after a pause "Then it is a Holbein!" Wahlen rolled up the sheets of the manuscript, and invited the circle to meet again at the house the next evening.

"It may be conjectured that the invitation was accepted. All were curious to know more of the disclosures of the picture frame. But Wahlen had determined not to gratify this curiosity. "I can hardly justify myself," he said, "in making public the contents of these papers, they belong to the P—— family, and no one else; and perhaps sooner or later I may meet with some branch of the house to whom their restoration will be a source of joy." All the guests except the painter, withstood this resolution of the baron's to respect the secrets of the concealed drawer. The ladies in particular were pressingly urgent. The conversation fell upon the value given to insignificant articles by association. Wahlen mentioned a silver cup which he never lifted to his lips without emotion, because it had been used by his late mother. Court Burgheim spoke of a banquet penetrated with bullet holes which had been the repository of his grandfather's papers and was honoured in the family as a relic of antiquity. Anselmo told us of a picture which had been the object of his childish admiration, connected with an interesting story, and related how in attempting to take it from the wall one day he had fallen and wounded his head severely with the frame. The long illness consequent on this accident had given him patience and a taste for study, which had obtained for him, all the distinction he enjoyed in his favourite pursuit.

"I warrant me," said the baroness Blandine, "that the picture of Queen Katharine was not without its influence also upon the fortunes of its possessors."

"You are right," said her brother, in answer to her appealing look; "and I shall do no wrong by mentioning some instances of this. The manuscript records the fact that the son of lord P—— was first introduced by means of the picture to a celebrated connoisseur and enthusiast in Paris, whose daughter, a beauty and an heiress, he afterwards married. The picture was for some time in possession of the father-in-law, but after his death returned to its former owners, and occupied the most prominent place in their library.

"Thirty years after their grandson conceived a romantic passion for the portrait. He vowed never to marry unless he could find a woman who resembled it, and it was thought this morbid fancy had some effect in hastening his death, which took place when he had as yet scarcely attained the years of manhood. The grief of his family caused the picture to be regarded with painful feelings; it was carried to a remote chamber where it remained for years, nor was it brought forth again till it came into the possession of another branch of the P—— family.

"The P——s had resided so long in France, that they had no desire to return to the country of their ancestors. They retained

nothing of England except the family name. The picture of queen Katharine, known to have been so highly valued by the first possessor, had its honoured place among the ancestral portraits. Years passed without any thing of note being added to its records. In the reign of terror—the French Revolution—it served for a long time to conceal a secret door by which the household might escape if in danger of arrest.

"The P——s were at length compelled to fly; the picture was left with the rest in the hands of a faithful servant. Some years after it was brought by its then owner to Germany.

"The last record in the manuscript," concluded the baron, "is written in the German language, about twenty years ago apparently, and contains a petition to the writer's heirs never—even in the greatest necessity—to part with so interesting a family memorial as the picture. In all probability the possessor died without heirs, and thus the painting fell into strange hands till it found at last a revered guardian in me."

It was several weeks after the above mentioned incident that Baron Wahlen was seated early one evening in the room where we had met. The moonlight that poured in from the arched windows, fell upon the face of the picture, and gave it an appearance startlingly life like. Wahlen gazed upon it in melancholy mood, while fancy painted the various scenes in the life of that unhappy girl, who had thus been called from the state of a neglected orphan to a throne, which to her had proved the ascent to a scaffold.

The door was softly opened, and one of the servants announced that a young woman was without who had asked to see the baroness. The baron rose, invited her to enter and be seated, and ordered his sister to be called. The attendant presently returned with the information that she was not at home.

The baron turned to his visitor to express his regret and to enquire if she would leave any message for his sister. Not a little surprised was he to see, by the light just then played on the table, that the stranger was young and though simply dressed surpassingly beautiful.

She rose, and saying she would call again on the morrow, was leaving the room when her eyes fell on the portrait of Katharine. She stopped suddenly and a slight cry of joy escaped her lips, while her hands were for an instant stretched towards it, as if in recognition.

"Ha, you know this portrait, then?" asked the baron.

The fair stranger answered in the most musical voice in the world, "Ah, yes, yes, I know it indeed. It was the dearest treasure of our family, and now I see it again all will be well."

Struck by these mysterious words the baron prevailed on the young lady to explain them. She did so briefly and with an artless frankness that left no doubt of her truth.

"I sought the lady baroness," she said, "solely to entreat that she would if possible restore the picture to us. Our family was impoverished in the late revolution; my father left us nothing save an honourable name. My brother, who is in the Austrian service, divides his lieutenant's pay with our mother, and it barely sufficed, with what we could earn by incessant toil and with the most careful frugality, to supply our wants. When we came to this city my mother was seized with illness; I could not do so much as before and was obliged to sell one after another all the dearly prized relics of the family. That portrait was the last. At the time when it was sold my parent was lying in the delirium of fever and I forgot she blushed deeply as she spoke, "certain papers within the frame which are of value to none but ourselves."

"It is only within a short time," continued the fair narrator, "that my mother has recovered sufficiently to miss the picture. When I was forced to confess the truth her grief was frightful to me. She has since fallen into a deep melancholy, being persuaded that we are to be destroyed—now that we have lost that precious heirloom by some calamity—and that my brother will be the first victim."

The young girl's words were interrupted by tears, but she struggled to compose herself and proceeded, "I could no longer bear to see the anguish of my unhappy parent. I made diligent enquiries after the purchaser of the picture, heard your name and hastened hither. My request may seem too bold, but the lady baroness will understand—"

"The baron does also," cried Wahlen, deeply moved. "How could I wish to detain what you so justly prize? The picture is yours; permit me only the privilege of seeing it sometimes at your house, for I have really a great admiration for it."

The young girl thanked him with one of those looks which reward any sacrifice. "My brother," she said casting down her eyes, "will repay by your permission the sum paid for the portrait. I know not how to thank you, sir, for the favour and kindness you have shown, unless by inviting you to come and behold my mother's joy at the restoration of her treasure."

This was just what the baron wished. He summoned the servants and ordered them to remove the picture, while he offered the young lady his arm to escort her home.

The painting was placed in the apartment of the invalid lady P——, while she was yet in the slumber in which Katharine, so was her daughter named, had left her. It was not long however before she awoke. Her eyes fell on the recovered prize and in rapture