

LITERATURE, &c.

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From Hogg's Instructor.

THE PAINTER'S MODEL.

LONG ago, that is to say about two hundred years ago, there sat in one of the large rooms of the palace of St James, a group of beautiful young women, the walls of the room were hung with rich damask, and ornamented with beautifully wrought tapestry, on which shone flowers of beauty but no perfume. As the sunbeams streamed in softened radiance through the stained windows, and danced upon the damasked walls, and kissed the cheeks of the maidens that were curtained with bright glittering curls. The saloon appeared to be a magnificent corbeille filled with blossoms of the rarest tints and fruits of the richest lustre. Each of these young women bent over a tambouring frame, and with her silken thread and needle and nimble taper little fingers, made bouquets of beautifully blended roses and tulips, and ranunculuses to grow on a her silken web. They were the maids of honour to the queen, and light of heart and full of hope were they, for merry glances and cheerful words, and jocund laughter, burst from their eyes, their lips, and hearts, until the very portraits of the grim old kings and cardinals upon the walls, seemed to be smitten with the infection of their glee, and to look upon them with sunny smiles. One alone, by her age and gravity, invested the beautiful and harmonious tableau with a touch of sombre shadow, and by her primness and dignity preserved an idea of courtly manners amidst the natural flow of fresh emotion; it was the lady St. Albans, first of the dames of honor, and mistress of the robes. Amongst those courtly flowers, however, so beautiful, and fresh, and young, there was one whose sweet and placid features whose looks so full of modesty, and whose dress, remarkable for its simplicity, could not fail to attract and interest the attention. Her robe of black velvet fitted closely to her handsome form, and, opening in front, exposed an under-dress of the richest white satin. On her neck was a plaited collar of lawn, as white and pure as drifted snow. The sleeves of her upper robe reached to her elbows, and then appeared arms and hands which were models of symmetry and beauty. Round her neck, and over her transparent collar, lay a chain of gold, from which was hung suspended at her breast a crucifix of ebony. Her hair was braided on her brow, and its rich luxuriance was restrained by a bandeau of velvet, while, attached to the bandeau behind, a scarf of Mechlin lace fell in graceful and elegant folds down her back.

Mary Ruthven was from the 'north country' where wild, rugged mountains towered up into the sky, and where great lakes lie sleeping amongst bleak wildernesses and dark forests of fir. Her father possessed a considerable tract of land, and many fierce and sturdy retainers, but his pedigree was longer than his purse, and the emblazonry on his escutcheon was more illustrious and plentiful than his gold. The maiden, in order to gratify the pride of her father, had been sent from her native country of Scotland to the English court, that she might acquire the tastes and elegancies of a courtly education, and bear herself as became the daughter of a great lord when she returned once more to her ancestral halls. She had, however, yielded to duty and the demands of her conventional station, more than to inclination; her mind, naturally of a reflective and grave character, had nursed itself into the comparative seclusion of her father's house, upon the phenomenon of nature and the work of art which adorned her home. Her heart was gentle and tender as woman's might be; and as she possessed in a high degree the poetic temperament of her nation, that heart was even more susceptible to the influences of beauty than if it had been only feminine. The subtleties of her native land had illuminated her idealities with the brightness of nature's glory, and the study of those rescripts of genius which began to grace the walls of her native home, from the pencils of the great Flemish masters, had inspired her with an ardent love and fine taste for art. In painting, she discovered an infinitude of treasure upon which to feed her fancy and her love. In her solitude, sympathies had been created for this sublime art for both her sadness and her joy. The tears and smiles beaming from the glowing canvases, and in order to multiply those silent companions of her lonely hours she had studied most successfully to imitate the models placed before her. She had created an ideal world for herself from the silent rescripts which Paul Veronese, Guido and Rubens had given her of the world of reality. The groups of mute yet eloquent figures which had grown beneath the pencils of these grand masters were her friends, and she felt warmly grateful in her heart to the men whose genius had created for her, in the midst of solitude, a life full of sympathies and placid joys. Her habits and manners contrasted strongly with those of her young companions, who had been accustomed to more independence and liberty. Timid and gentle in her disposition, she could only reply with mild looks or sparkling glances of the eye to the lively sallies and sometimes cruel jokes of those with whom she was constrained to associate.

Ten o'clock sounded from the great French clock which stood in the room, and immediately every lady suspended her employment, and turned her eyes towards the door.

'He is long in coming,' exclaimed several

voices at the same time; and just as sundry reasons were about to be hazarded regarding the delay of the subject of their attention, the door of the room was thrown open, and the painter Vandyke was announced. At that word the tinkling sound of jewels and the rustling of satin proceeded from the ladies, and then the odour of the musk and civit floated through the apartment, as if a breeze of wind had passed over a bed of flowers. Each one of them bent over her velvet tabouret, displayed her long robe, and sought by studied art to invest her form with a new and striking grace. The young pupil of Rubens, accustomed as he was to contemplate beauty, could not restrain an expression of admiration and surprise at finding himself so suddenly introduced into a circle so brilliant and so striking.

The dowager of St. Albans, attributing the downcast eyes and embarrassed looks of the youth to the majesty of the presence in which he found himself, sought to remove the weight of his trouble by courtly condescension; and turning towards him with a smile of sublime patronage, and graciously nodding her head, she exclaimed, 'They say that you are possessed of some talent, sir.'

'They do me too much honour, who condescend to say so, madam,' replied the painter, raising his eyes and looking the dowager calmly in the face. 'They judge me by my intentions, I fear. I have not yet produced anything to merit so able an encomium.'

The painter's voice and manner were confident of both firmness and pride as he responded to the impertinent language of the noble dame. Mary Ruthven, proud as a Scottish woman could be, and full of sympathy for the youth, had reddened at the insulting tone and manner of the Duchess, and she therefore smiled with secret pleasure as she listened to the response of Vandyke: and as she lifted her beaming eyes towards him, full of kind regards, he caught her glance, and comprehending its language, he thanked her in his heart.

'Well, well, we shall see,' said the dowager, tossing her head; 'the queen has sent for you to see you give some proof of your talent. Her Majesty wishes you to renew the ornaments of her chapel, so that you will have sufficient time to exemplify your skill. There are apartments selected for you in the old monastic mansion of the Greyfriars,' said the lady, with great dignity, 'in which your winter labours can be carried on. You can see it from this place,' she continued, rising and walking with a stately step to the window, which she threw open; 'you see you shall be at perfect liberty and in solitude. In summer another mansion shall be placed at your service; and besides all this, you shall receive a pension from the state. I hope this is sufficient to satisfy an artist.'

'Art is a sovereignty which money cannot purchase, madam,' said Vandyke, quietly; 'and if I might possess the talent to which I aspire, the favours of which you vaunt were not sufficient to pay my pencils.'

'All that is very well,' said the dowager, throwing back her head in such a manner, as but dowagers can do. 'You are proud and talented, and we are great; but a truce to disputes regarding the honours pertaining to condition. The queen shall proclaim you her chief painter, also, when you shall have gained the prize in the competition now open to the students of Rome for the production of the best head of the virgin.'

'Alas, madam,' said the painter modestly, 'if the protection of the queen is dependant upon this condition, I much fear I shall never obtain it.'

'And how, Mr. Painter?' inquired the Duchess.

'Because that I shall not gain the prize,' replied Vandyke, with an expression of sadness, that awakened all the gentlest sympathies in the soul of Mary, which were immediately reflected in her beaming face.

'And wherefore refuse to try to gain it?' said the dowager; 'there is a double honour awaiting your success; but perhaps you have not sufficient time for the enterprise?'

'You mistake me, madam,' replied the painter, gently. 'I have the will to make the trial, and I have enough of time, but how shall I represent the Madonna as she ought to be represented without a model?' As he spoke these words he cast his eyes towards Mary Ruthven, 'I have searched anxiously,' he continued, 'but hitherto in vain, for a celestial visage equal to my ideal of hers. I have not been able to discover one illuminated by that beautiful caudor of soul which beams in the heavenly countenance, nor possessed of that sweet and wonderful benevolence, which reveals in each of her motions the indulgent sister of women.'

All the young women at once raised their eyes towards Vandyke, and they were struck with his noble and beautiful form, and his lofty, smooth and intellectual brow, which was illuminated with the pure rays of genius.

'Indeed!' said the lady St. Albans, with an incredulous smile; 'I thought painters were never at a loss for models.'

'Yes; women fair and beautiful are easily found; but one alone have I been able to discover who approached to that ideal of the modesty and beauty which has struck my imagination. Alas! the maiden whom I have discovered, and who is even more than I could have wished, is a damsel who would not deign to sit to a poor artist.'

As he finished these words he raised his sparkling, animated eyes towards Mary Ruthven; the maiden felt the mysterious influences of that intelligence which beamed from his countenance, and she trembled and hung her head, while a blush suffused her face and neck.

All her companions had caught the stolen glance of the painter, and all, with feelings of envious spite, discovered that Mary was the woman of whom the painter spoke. The aged dowager, who had not perceived this secret intelligence, asked of him, 'and who is this great dame, Mr. Painter?'

'A virgin herself, madam,' replied Vandyke while his eyes sparkled with the force of his emotions. He then bowed to the ladies of the court, threw a last adieu to Mary, and said to the Dowager, 'I shall endeavour to gain the prize which you esteem so honorable, madam; and if I do not I shall leave England.'

Vandyke, in compliance with the arrangements that had been made, took possession of those secluded apartments in the vicinity of the castle, which had been set apart for him, and there he began to execute his picture for the competition, and at the same time to work at the frescoes of the chapel. He seized his pencils, and with his imagination teeming with recollections of Mary Ruthven's beauty, he essayed to trace her lovely features upon his canvas; but that inspiration so useful to art, when silent, subduing influences operate upon the artist, and fix his mind upon one grand object, was too strong for Vandyke. His spirit was too much moved—too much engaged and interested in the inward emotion, to give it outward expression. His soul was absorbed in the ideal which filled and peopled his fancy, and it refused to guide his hand in its attempts at delineation, so that he failed to convey to his canvas a rescript of the picture which his mind saw. He passed a day in vain and futile trials, and night surprised him, sadly and coldly, standing before his easel, and striving in vain to trace that fugitive resemblance, that haunted his imagination.

From the moment that he had quitted the palace, all the jests and mocking glances of her companions had been directed towards poor Mary, and they paid her back a surcharge of scorn and envious railery for the preference and praises bestowed upon her by the young painter. At last, on the evening of the succeeding day, the gay throng broke up, and all seemed to have banished the memory of the plebeian artist from their minds; but Mary treasured one fond recollection in her warm and gentle heart, and the name of Vandyke mingled that night in her prayers, and the last thought that haunted her waking moments was a thought of him.

It was midnight and a thousand stars sparkled in the vault of heaven. Silence brooded over the mighty city, while sleep waved his mysterious and potent sceptre over the brows of slumbering king and beggar. No voice broke the stillness of the night—the very wind seemed to whisper as it stole slowly through the long corridors of the palace, and the open arches of the old cloisters—and the few lights that were hung in the piazzas and lobbies seemed to wink sleepily, as if they but half illumined the vast and solitary building. One lamp, suspended in the outer gateway, seemed to be more lively than the red foggy cressets which accompanied it, and it threw its rays on the building where Vandyke lodged, as if it looked with interest upon the old solitary ruin, which, sad and solemn, seemed to pray amongst the loneliness of its own crumbling desolation. Suddenly a window of the palace opened, and a figure wrapt in the loose white drapery of slumber, appeared upon the balcony. Silent and swift as a shadow, the solitary and secret night wanderer glided towards the grand stair, and rapidly descending the steps, fluted across the great square, and was lost in the shade of the piazza. With the confidence of one who knew the localities, the spectre passed through a long passage, and issued from a little door into the galleries of the chapel. In a few instants she had traversed their solitary passages and found the studio of the painter, whose floor she swiftly crossed without seeming to notice anything around her, and, approaching an old carved oaken chair, set down before the easel of the painter.

The youth had stood for a long time before his canvas in a state of deep abstraction. He had striven in vain to impress upon the surface before him the thoughts that filled his fancy, around him lay models and half-finished works in all forms of artistic confusion; and from the ceiling of his apartment hung a huge iron cresset, from which a strong light and shadow were thrown upon himself and the other objects in his apartment. As the rays of the lamp irradiated his face full of disappointment, and his handsome form half bent in an attitude of weariness, he might have been taken for a model of Adonis, contemplating the paltry results of a long and toilsome chase. As the calm, composed, and beautiful vision, however seated herself before him, he started from his reverie and gazed, half in wondering admiration and half in fear, upon the unlooked for visitant. The unfortunate artist, so sad so hopeless but a few minutes ago, could scarcely believe the reality of the sight, which, modest and beautiful as an angel was before him. He looked upon the celestial form of Mary Ruthven, which, in silent and breathing beauty now sat as a model, but he had scarcely power to move as he gazed upon her. If she had come to fill the measure of his ambition, and, like his guardian angel, to minister to his success and glory, he did not seem to have at this moment the courage or ability to profit by her condescension; he looked upon her at this instant, as a devotee, and not as an artist. He fixed his eyes tenderly upon her face, but she did not seem to feel the electric ardour of his glance, and not a feature changed in her lovely countenance. At last all the vigour of his genius stirred his heart with gratitude, and he

threw himself on his knees before the maiden to thank her, when, with a dignified sign she motioned him towards his easel. Her face was illumined with an expression so pure and full of innocence, that forgetting the reality of the vision in the plenitude of its beauty, he seized his pencils, and lost in the regions of his fancy, he wrought with all the ability and success that inspiration might have been supposed to vouchsafe to his genius. The youth, who but an hour before, had, in the fullness of despair, thrown down at his feet the instruments of his art, seemed filled with a new life. The artist had again risen superior to the man; and mute, almost afraid to breathe, yet strengthened by an unknown power, he saw rise beneath his creative hand in a few hours the loveliest and purest of his Virgins. The maiden seemed to perceive that the artist had accomplished his work; for, as he stood, wrapt in silent contemplation before his easel, and smiled upon the picture, she rose, and, in silent but stately dignity, glided from the apartment and left the young painter again alone. With fixed and wondering gaze, suppressed breathing, and flushed countenance, the youth, as if fixed to the ground, saw her depart without an effort to detain her. She appeared to him to be more than mortal, and her visit, which partook so much of the mysterious, confirmed him in this idea. She had scarcely vanished from his sight, however, when overcome by his labors and excitement, he sunk upon his couch and slept.

His first thought, when he awoke in the morning, was to hasten to his canvass. Transported with joy as he beheld the face which seemed to breathe and smile upon him, he fell upon his knees, and, in glowing language, thanked either the angel or woman who had appeared to him. It was in vain that he sought to unveil the mystery which yet enshrouded the advent of his model. All his recollections were confused, and every effort of his memory and reason failed to bring him any nearer to the truth. Divided between the mystic and the real, he sometimes thought that it must be a vision of the Virgin, and at other times he imagined that it must have been Mary Ruthven. At last, in order to solve his perplexing doubts, he determined to address to the maiden the following epistle. 'Lady, forgive me if, led by the impulses of a mistaken idea, I address a few unintelligible expressions to you. If I am not mistaken you will understand me, and condescend, I hope, to get my mind at rest. Tell the poor artist whom you have blessed with inspiration, if it was thee or an angel that sat as a model of the Virgin during the night.'

Unfortunately for young men in a certain condition of mind, they are not generally blessed with too much judgment. If this epistle had fallen into the hands of Mary Ruthven only, there would have been little more about it, but as the Dowager Lady St. Albans, as superior duenna, had the privilege of supervising the correspondence of her young charges, dire was the scorn, and wrath, and indignation that illumined the visage of that great dame when she broke the seal of the painter's audacious but incoherent note.

'Horrer!' cried she in a shrill tone, and all the young ladies suspended their labors to listen to the sequel; 'a lady of a lofty house so far degrades herself, and forgets what she owes to her station, as to go alone at night to seek the studio of a painter.' As she spoke she looked scornfully on the culprit, as if she would have slain her. But her wrath redoubled as she beheld Mary, gentle and undisturbed as ever she was, listen to her reproaches as if she did not understand them. The dowager, who had expected a scene, who had anticipated a deep and sudden confusion, and hoped to receive a sincere avowal as the price of pardon, saw that she was not likely, from the maiden's so thoroughly composed manner, to obtain either. The alarm was accordingly sounded in the palace; and it was decided by a parliament of ladies, that the poor, lost, and degraded Mary Ruthven, should return to her father's house on the morrow. Neither tears nor prayers, nor protestations, would be listened to; and on the following day the sad and weeping maiden must leave her courtly school and return with a dishonored name to her own native land; and, in order that she might be strictly under due surveillance until her departure, the dowager placed her couch in her own department.

Midnight sounded, and Mary Ruthven as on the preceding night, arose. Awakened by the movement, from her unquiet slumbers, the Dowager, also rejoicing in an opportunity of convincing those who yet clung to a belief in the maiden's innocence, called several ladies of the palace to behold the nocturnal wanderer go forth again to the painter's rooms. Lighting their flambeaux, the dowager and a train of ladies followed the footsteps of the shadow-like maiden. She traversed the great square and the corridors as on the previous night, and moved towards the galleries of the chapel. The dowager turned towards the ladies, and she saw in their haughty, scornful visages, sufficient proof of their belief in Mary's culpability. They followed her into the studio of the artist, and found her quietly and composedly seated before the easel. The sound of many feet, the exclamations of surprise, and the flambeaux, which threw their sudden light upon her beautiful face, all combined to astonish and move the maiden, and, with a sudden start, she spread out her hands, rose to her feet, and looked around her as she uttered a scream.

She had been asleep. It was as a somnambulist that she had gone to the studio of the painter and had served as a model. She had rendered to him unconsciously, the means of