

## Literature, &amp;c.

## THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Sharpe's Magazine.

## THE DARK LADY.

THICK, heavy clouds hung low in the sky, pouring out an unceasing deluge of rain. The wind was high and keen, tearing up the flowers, and scattering their dainty petals all over the garden. Gray mists hid the opposite shore, and the deep leaden colour of the sea reflected that of the gloomy sky, except where the foam of the rising waves marked it with undulating lines of white. 'What a day for July!' was the universal cry of the party assembled in the breakfast-room, and very long were the faces which greeted each other that morning. 'No yachting to-day,' said one. 'No bathing,' echoed another. 'The fruit will be spoiled.' The flowers are finished. There we were; the second day of our visit was the first break in the long course of bright summer weather, which had promised us so much enjoyment, and instead of the calm sea and glorious sun-shine of the preceding day, we were storm-staid by a promising flood, in an old country-house, for the whole day.

'Where are the newspapers?' was the inquiry of the host; and it seemed to promise a sort of ray of amusement to the general dullness.

'They have not come, sir,' was the answer.

'Not come! it is long past the post hour.' 'Yes, sir, but it has rained heavily all night among the hills, and the river has carried away the foot-bridge, and he has gone round to the bridge of Ardentyre.'

'Eleven miles round!' said Mr Grahame, with a look of resignation.

There was no help for it: the gentlemen took refuge in cigars and billiards; and we ladies, after an attempt at work, set off on a tour over the house, under the conduct of Miss Grahame, our host's daughter. The house was large and very old. It had belonged to the family of the Lords of Geraldyn, and their grim portraits, and old armor, were hung round the entrance hall for Mr Grahame was their descendant, and had preserved all their relics with the most scrupulous care. Up and down many stairs, and along many passages we went until we came to the library. It was a very large room; the roof was of carved oak, the points of which still retained traces of antique gilding. Large book-cases of carved oak rose all round the room, and above the wide, high mantle-piece hung a painting covered with a curtain of dark red silk. My attention was caught by a curious instrument on a stand. It was something like an antique lyre, but larger; the frame was of ebony, richly inlaid with Arabic characters in gold. The instrument seemed very old, but the strings were new, and in perfectly good order.

'What is this, Miss Grahame?' said I. 'It is a lyre,' she answered, 'and once belonged to this lady,' and she drew back the curtain from the picture.

It was an oval painting, a half length, representing a lady dressed in black, and having a black veil over her head and shoulders. The only spot of color in her costume, was a cluster of brilliant pomegranate blossoms in her hair, and even this was partly covered by the veil.—The face was eastern, dark, melancholy, and beautiful, and the rich, soft eyes, with their shady lashes, seemed yet living things. The expression of the lovely face was tender and sorrowful, and the small, delicate head, round which masses of silken hair were braided and twined, seemed bending heavily on the slender throat. The picture was evidently the work of a master hand; and we all gazed on it in delight and admiration.

'What do you think of it?' asked Miss Grahame.

'Except the Cenci, I never saw a face to approach that in beauty. What was that lady's name?'

'She was a lady Geraldyn, but in the family legends she is always called the Dark Lady.—We do not know the history of the portrait, which is evidently not so old as her own time, but that really was her lyre. Look at those Arabic characters, Mrs Morton; she was Moorish origin, and these words are a spell, binding the spirit of harmony to the lyre.'

Miss Grahame offered the lyre to me, but as I took it, a shudder came over me, as I thought how long the fingers had mouldered into dust, which had once drawn music from that lyre.

'I wish I could have heard its notes,' I said.

'Do you?' said Miss Grahame. 'Well, as it might be difficult to bring the original performer here, I will fill her place.'

'You! can you play it?'

'Yes. My Italian uncle had a mania for curious musical instruments; and a lyre, not unlike this, was one of them. He taught me to play it, and when I came here, I remembered hearing that the Dark Lady's lyre was still in existence. I had a search made for it, and it was discovered along with some very ancient

music, which my uncle succeeded in deciphering. The lyre was put in order, but it is still an enchanted lyre, and few like to hear its sounds.'

With these words, Miss Grahame began to play. At first, low, fitful murmurs, sounding faintly, and then dying away, were heard; but the sound gradually became more continued, and a single voice, sad and unearthly as the wail of a captive spirit, seemed to rise from the lyre. Then strengthening, it rose in despairing energy, shooting up to heaven like a loud cry of agony. When this passion was at the strongest, there came, mingling with it, yet never uniting, a low, sweet strain of melody. Like a whisper from the past, it stole into all that fierce pain, heard through its wildness, strengthening and soothing its agony, as prayer does the struggling soul. Beneath it, the passionate storm sunk into a calm, and the harmony becoming more strong, more heavenly, was heard alone. It was a song such as a compassionate angel might sing above the dying, bringing them faint echoes of the music of the wonderful world where they were soon to rest. Wailing chords of sorrow and regret sometimes sounded through all its marvellous sweetness—sad thoughts and haunting memories of earth's passions and sufferings; but at length even sorrow was forgotten, and in grand waves of sound the music rose in one last triumphant burst, even when it was at its height, becoming softer and more distant, and dying in long-continued murmurs, each fainter and more sweet, till the lyre was hushed.

None of Miss Grahame's audience felt much inclined to break the silence; at length one said;

'What is the name of that wonderful piece of music?'

'It was found with the lyre,' answered the young lady; 'and, perhaps, may have been composed by the Dark Lady herself, for it always appears to me to breathe her history.'

There was an immediate demand for the legend; and Miss Grahame, laying down the lyre on its stand, began the following Legend.

In the time of James III. of Scotland, when the power of the Moors was yet at its height in Spain, the only son of William, Lord Geraldyn, left his fatherland, to travel in distant regions. Few missed Amyer de Geraldyn, for he had ever been a silent and haughty youth. Men spoke of long-continued quarrels between the father and son, and no voice of wife or mother was there to come softly between them, for Sybilla de Geraldyn gave life for life, and from the day of his birth, Amyer was motherless. Years passed, and he returned not. No whisper of him came back to his native country! No minstrel, in his wanderings, sung of his chivalrous deeds in distant lands; all was silence and almost forgetfulness over his name. Men spoke of how the race of Geraldyn—old even then—was dying away, and pitied the gray-haired lord, the last of his line. Ten silent years rolled on, and God smote the lord of Geraldyn with a lingering sickness, and he knew that it was to be his death. One summer night he said to those at his side: 'Carry me out to the battlements, and place me with my face to the East, whither my son has gone.' And it was done. The sun was setting over the old lord's lands and reddening the sea, when the group on the battlements saw a cloud of dust rising at a distance, and the note of a bugle was borne on the evening wind. A long train wound up the steep road, and stopped at the castle gate, whence ten years before, Amyer, a youth of nineteen, had departed. It was a stately knight, on whose brow the skies of warmer lands had showered their influences, who sprang from his steed at the gate, and lifted from her embroidered saddle a young and dark-browed lady. They knelt before the old lord, but his brow grew dark, and his first greeting to his restored son was: 'It was ill of thee, Amyer, to bring a Moorish witch as a bride to thy mother's home.'

A red flush rose to Sir Amyer's brow, and the frown of old darkened it, but a low, soft voice spoke at Sir William's knee: 'Scorn me not, O father of my lord!' it said 'for I am a christain, and, in mine own land, noble even as thou.' And so fair was she and so sweetly fell her words, that the old man smiled and said: 'Truly, there is no defence against beauty; and he blessed his son and the Dark Lady.—But he did not long survive his son's return; and Amyer and the Dark Lady dwelt in the castle.

Now it was an ill reception that the old lord had given the foreign lady, nor soon was it forgotten by the people. They knew that her robes and ornaments were adorned with strange characters, and she had parchments covered with them. But her greatest magic lay in her lyre, on whose frame the same weird signs appeared, and whose music, added to that of her voice, none could hear unmoved. 'It was that voice,' said many, 'whose unearthly sweetness beguiled the old lord to bless her; yet his first words were the true.' And they feared the Dark Lady.

But a son was born in the Geraldyn halls, and the lady feared not to kneel at altar and shrine, nor had holy water any terrors for her. And the peasants began to find that it was a

good thing to have a lady who had ever a smile and a gentle word for all, and ear ever ready to listen to their complaints, and a hand, as far as her power extended, to redress their grievances. The wonderful knowledge of healing arts, and the skill she had brought from a far country, saved many from the very grasp of Death; and ere three years were passed, the peasants, instead of fearing, had learned to bless 'The Dark Lady of Geraldyn.'

Sweet might have been the change to her once, and in some measure it was so still; but a cloud had come over her home, which darkened her life. Amyer was an altered man; he, to whom her smile had once been daylight now looked on her with frowns; he spent long days hunting with the rude chiefs of the North, and had more than once returned in a state which shocked the young Moorish wife, still mindful of the law which had been that of her fathers, beyond expression. She shrank from him; but he was still her Amyer, whose love had won her from her own sunny land; and all her arts she tried to gain him, wishing perhaps, that she indeed possessed spells of power to charm him, whom love, and youth, and beauty had not sufficed to bind. Her child was becoming a noble boy, but there was an icy hand on his young mother's heart: Amyer's love for her was gone, and she could not live without it.

The peasants now loved their gentle lady, and resented her injuries as their own; and many a spy watched the wandering path of Amyer. His wife was deaf to all rumours from without against him, yet she knew too well that he often murmured the name 'Matilda' in his sleep, and that a neighbouring baron had a blue-eyed daughter of that name. Others could have told her how her lord spent days and weeks in that baron's castle, that he had been heard to speak loving words to the Lady Maud, and she did not answer him with disdain. But to all these rumours the Dark Lady's ears were closed. She lived in silence, and none knew her grief save by her fading cheek.

Time passed on. Amyer de Geraldyn gave himself up to his new passion, and did not even strive to conceal how weary he was of his unfortunate wife. She could no longer effect to be ignorant of his dislike, yet she never complained, nor was seen to weep; her heart was crushed.

Talk ran very high in the country upon the subject of Lord Geraldyn's altered life. He and Lady Maud were universally blamed and disliked, while the Dark Lady was loved and pitied.

'I almost wished our lady was a witch,' said a fisherman one night to his companion, as, resting on his oars, he heard the sound of her lyre borne on the breeze; 'for it's well known that Lady Maud is one.'

'Yes,' returned his companion, 'it's said she has made a waxen figure of my lord, and melts it before the fire every Friday, at midnight; and as it melts away, all his old love for his wife dies, and turns to Lady Maud. It's a pity our lady could not reverse the charm.'

'Breaking the figure might do it, without witchcraft,' rejoined the first speaker.

'No,' said his neighbor, 'not till my lady is dead can that charm be broken.'

'Blessed Saint Anthony! then is she bewitching our lady to death?'

'More think so than I,' returned his companion.

'She saved many of us,' muttered the other, and that was all.

A wilder scene was passing at the castle. That evening Amyer entered his wife's chamber, for the first time for many weeks, and in cold and haughty words informed her, that he had resolved to break a marriage he now detested, and to divorce her.

Perhaps the Dark Lady had long expected this cruel announcement, for it is said that she was calm while he spoke, and not till he had concluded his speech did she utter a word. She then rose and said:

'My lord, were I childless in the land, I should not resist your desire, but should willingly go to my people: for when I no longer filled the place you long to give to another, you might think of me more kindly, and remember the days when you were to be instead of home, kindred, and friends to her who left them all for you. But my son shall not be called the child of a divorced mother. I am a friendless stranger, and you a powerful lord, but I will do all that woman can to protect my good name for my child.'

Amyer entreated, threatened, argued; but all in vain; and, at length, enraged at her firm resistance, raised his hand to strike her. She avoided the blow, and turning to him a look of sorrow and pity, said: 'Have you indeed fallen so deeply?' and tears for the first time streamed from her eyes.

Somewhat ashamed, Amyer left the room, and wandered out into the woods, where, in the afternoon, he was met by the Lady Maud, to whom he gave an account of his proceedings.

'I am glad it is over, sweetest Matilda,' he said, as he concluded; 'for were it now to do, I should scarce find the heart for it.' 'O my Amyer,' returned the lady, 'how weak is your love for me! I would neither fear nor tremble, though a sea of guilt, nay, even the eternal abyss, separated me from you. For you I would plunge into its depths with gladness;

For you I have already lost my good name, and the honor of my father's house has become tainted in me, and you fear and hesitate to put away this foreign woman! Is this your love for me?' And she wept passionately.

'Matilda! Matilda! you do me wrong,' he answered. 'You know—oh! you know too well—that I will never rest till you are the lady of Geraldyn.'

So they spoke, unconscious of dark, flashing eyes, which watched them from a neighbouring thicket. It was a Moorish youth, who had come with Lord Geraldyn and the Dark Lady to Scotland, and resented the wrongs of the daughter of his people as those of his race—a race whose anger can only be quenched in blood—alone can do. And as he watched that evil-pair, Amyer de Geraldyn, bold man as he was, might have shuddered to see what a storm gathered on the young man's face, and how fiercely his hand clasped a glittering dagger. 'They shall die,' muttered the youth—both die in their guilt; and my lady will return to her people and her own bright land.'

And as Lord Geraldyn uttered the words, 'I will never rest till you are lady of Geraldyn,' the Moor sprang at him; and in a moment the dagger would have been buried in Amyer's heart, had not a fourth person sprung forward, too late to avert the blow, but in time to receive it!

Lady Maud shrieked aloud, and fled away through the trees, unheeded by the Moor, who stood still clutching his long poniard, and gazing wildly at the unwounded Amyer, who knelt on the grass, vainly trying to staunch the swift flowing blood, which was carrying life away on its warm current from the faithful bosom of the Dark Lady.

And vain was Amyer's grief—vain his returning love; he was not to be permitted to retain the sweet life he had rendered so sorrowful. There was a smile upon her lips, such as had not rested there for many a day, her soft eyes looked tenderly on him still, her lips moved, he bent over her to listen.

'Amyer,' she murmured, 'you need not divorce me now!' And light went out from her eyes, though there was a smile on the dead face still.

When the Moor saw that she was gone, he gave a wild cry, sprang into the woods, and was seen no more of men. And Amyer was left alone with the dead.

And dead, at Lady Maud's feet, the Dark lady overcame her, even in death; Amyer never looked on her face from that day: all his old love for his dead wife seemed to have revived; he lived a sorrowful man, and died an unloved and unmourned one.

But at his hour of death, it seemed that one in the land of spirits loved and mourned him yet, for a smile came to his face, he stretched out his arms to some invisible presence, and, murmuring words which none understood, expired. Then a low and bitter wail was heard, and a sound as of a breaking chord. They looked at the enchanted lyre, which lay near; all its chords were broken!

And faithful to the race of her ungrateful Amyer has been the Dark Lady's love; for when death, or misfortune, threatens them, her voice is heard to wail round the towers of her old home.

Miss Grahame's legend terminated with these words; the sun burst brightly into the room. It fell across the face of the lovely picture of the Dark Lady, lighting it up with a golden glory, till she, also, seemed to smile through the storms of the past.

'Our imprisonment has not been so long as we expected,' said I; 'for us, as for her, the storm has passed away.'

'The storm will return for us,' answered Miss Grahame, drawing the veil over the picture; 'for her, all storms have passed away; but who shall tell us when we also shall rest from storm and sorrow?'

Long since has that question been answered for fair Mary Grahame. The hand which awakened the enchanted lyre is cold in the grave, and the race of the Dark Lady is extinct for ever.

## WHAT IS NOT CHARITY.

It is not charity to give a penny to a street mendicant of whom nothing is known, while we haggle with a poor man out of employment for a miserable dime. It is not charity to beat down a seamstress to starvation prices; to let her sit chilled in wet clothes sewing all day; to deduct from pitiful remuneration if the storm delay her prompt arrival. It is not charity to take a poor relation into the family, make her a slave to all your whims, and taunt her continually with her dependent situation. It is not charity to turn a poor man who is out of work into the streets with his family, because he cannot pay his rent. It is not charity to extract the uttermost farthing from the widow and orphan. It is not charity to give with a supercilious air and patronage, as if God had made you the rich man, of different blood from the shivering recipient, whose only crime is that he is poor. It is not charity to be an extortioner—no! though you bestow alms by thousands.

He that defers his charity until he is dead, is, if a man weighs rightly, rather liberal of another man's than of his own.