

POETRY.

THE BANNER OF BRITAIN.

Flatter and flap to the winds of God,
Thou emblem of all that is proud and free;
Nowhere is a footprint of man in the bow,
When men do not tremble and bow to thee.

SELECT STORY.

COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO;

REVENGE OF EDMUND DANTÈS.

CHAPTER V.

CONTINUED.

"Good evening, Valentine," said a well-known voice.

"Good evening, Maximilian; I know I have kept you waiting, but you saw the cause of my delay."

"Yes, I recognized Mademoiselle Danglars. I was not aware that you were so intimate with her."

"Who told you we were intimate, Maximilian?"

"No one, but you appeared to be so; from the manner in which you walked and talked together, one would have thought you were two school girls telling you secrets to each other."

"We were having a confidential conversation," returned Valentine; "she was owing me her recompense to the marriage with M. de Morcerf; and I on the other hand, was confessing to her how wretched it made me to think of marrying M. d'Epinay."

"Dear Valentine. Does Mademoiselle Danglars object to this marriage with M. de Morcerf on account of loving another?"

"She told me that she loved no one," said Valentine; "that she disliked the idea of being married; that she would infinitely prefer leading an independent and unfettered life; and that she almost wished her father might lose his fortune, that she might become an artist, like her friend, Mademoiselle Louise d'Armailly."

"But I was going to tell you that I met M. de Morcerf the other day."

"Well?"

"Monsieur Franz is his friend you know."

"What then?"

"Monsieur de Morcerf has received a letter from Franz, announcing his immediate return. Valentine turned pale and leaned against the gate for support."

"Can it really be true, and is this why Madame de Villefort has sent for me? No, that cannot be the case, for the communication would not be likely to come through her instrumentality."

"Why not?"

"Because—I scarcely know why—but it has appeared as if Madame de Villefort secretly objected to the marriage, although she did not choose openly to oppose it."

"Is it so? Then I feel as if I could adore Madame de Villefort."

"Do not be in such a hurry to do that," said Valentine, with a sad smile.

"About a year ago I talked of retiring to a convent; Madame de Villefort, in spite of all the remarks which she considered it her duty to make, secretly approved of the proposition; my father consented to it at her instigation, and she was only on account of my poor grandfathers that I finally abandoned the project. You can form no idea of the expression of that old man's eyes when he looks at me, the only person in the world whom he loves, and I had almost said, by whom he is beloved in return. When he learned of my resolution, I shall never forget the reproachful look which he cast on me, and the tears of utter despair which chased each other down his lifeless cheeks. Ah, Maximilian, I experienced at that moment, such remorse for my intention, that, throwing myself at his feet, I exclaimed, 'Forgive me, pray forgive me, my dear grandfather; they may do what they will with me, I will never leave you.' When I had ceased speaking, he had already raised his eyes to heaven, but without uttering a word. Ah, Maximilian! I may have much to suffer, but I feel as if my grandfather's look at that moment would more than compensate for all."

"Dear Valentine, you are a perfect angel; and I am sure I do not know what I can have done to merit your being revealed to me. But tell me what interest Madame de Villefort can have in your remaining unmarried?"

"Did I not tell you just now that I was rich, Maximilian—too rich? I possess nearly 50,000 francs in right of my mother; my grandfather and my grandmother, the Marquis and the Marquise de St. Meran, will leave me as much more; and M. Noirtier evidently intends making me his heir. My brother Edward, who inherits nothing from his mother, will therefore be poor in comparison with me. Now, if I had taken the veil, all of this fortune would have descended to my father, and, in reversion to his son."

"Ah! how strange it seems that such a young and beautiful woman should be so avaricious!"

"It is not for herself that she is so, but for her son; and what you regard as a vice becomes almost a virtue when you look at it in the light of maternal love."

"But could you not compromise matters, and give up a portion of your fortune to her son?"

"How could I make such a proposition, especially to a woman who always professes to be so entirely disinterested?"

"Valentine, I have always regarded our love in the light of something sacred; consequently, I have covered it with the veil of respect, and hid it in the inmost recesses of my soul; no human being, not even my sister, is aware of its existence. Valentine, will you permit me to make a confident of a friend, and reveal to him the love I bear you?"

"Valentine started. 'A friend, Maximilian; and who is this friend?' I trembled to give my permission."

"Listen, Valentine. Have you never experienced for one that sudden and irresistible sympathy which made you feel as if the object of it had been your old and familiar friend, though, in reality, it was the first time you had ever met?"

"You have known him for some time then?"

"Scarcely longer than a week or two."

"And do you call a man your friend

whom you have known only for a few days? Ah, Maximilian, I had hoped you set a higher value on the title of friend."

"Your logic is most powerful, Valentine; but say what you will, I can never renounce the sentiment which has instinctively taken possession of my mind. I feel as if it were ordained that this man should be associated with all the good which the future may have in store for me; and sometimes it really seems as if his eye was able to see what was to come, and his hand endowed with the power of directing events according to his own will."

"He must be a prophet, then," said Valentine, smiling.

"Indeed!" said Maximilian. "I have been often almost tempted to attribute to him the gift of prophecy; but at all events he has a wonderful power of foretelling any future good."

"Ah!" said Valentine, in a mournful tone, "do let me see this man, Maximilian; may I tell me whether I shall ever be loved sufficiently to make amends for all I have sinned?"

"My poor girl! you know him already."

"I know him?"

"Yes; it was he who saved the life of your step-mother and her son."

"The Count of Monte-Cristo?"

"The same."

"Ah!" cried Valentine, he is too much the friend of Madame de Villefort ever to be mine."

"The friend of Madame de Villefort? It cannot be; surely, Valentine, you are mistaken?"

"No, indeed, I am not; for I assure you his power over our household is almost unlimited. Counted by my step-mother, who regards him as the epitome of human wisdom; admired by my father, who says he has never before heard such sublime ideas so eloquently expressed; idolized by Edward, who notwithstanding his fear of the Count's large black eyes, runs to meet him the moment he arrives, and opens his hand, in which he is sure to find some delightful present. M. de Monte-Cristo appears to exert a mysterious and almost unaccountable influence over all the members of our family."

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