CHAPTER III.

AN UNHOLY VOW.

The giant oaks and beeches in the woods of Furness were all aglow with the saffron and ruby tints of autumn on that disastrous evening when Oswald de Coniston fled in wrath and hate from his father's castle.

The December blast had rent the last leaf from the bough, and the fan-like fronds of the huge planes above contrasted with their dark verdure the naked black arms which the oak of a hundred years tossed in the wild winds, when, still feeble in frame and sorrowful in spirit, he bade adieu to the monks who had tended him during his illness with so much of medical skill and Christian charity.

The body of the beloved Walter, the innocent victim to the wild passions of his brother, had never been recovered. This was a cruel aggravation of Oswald's sorrow. He could imagine to himself the pale face of his darling all bruised and disfigured by the sharp rocks.

If the waves had washed the drowned corpse on shore, if he could once have folded the cold relics to his breast, and seen them laid with the rites of the Church in a hallowed grave, he would have had some miserable consolation. But dead or living, never to see his Walter more. "Never more! never more!" Sad and solemn words, ever and anon bursting with a bitter cry from Oswald's lips.

With dripping garments, bruised and senseless, Oswald had been borne to the monastery by Brother John and the poor fisherman on that disastrous night.

All the pride and pomp of his father's vanity heralded his departure. The Earl Thurston seemed not only to have consigned to oblivion the offences of Oswald, but to have taken him into greater favor than ever. He had staid the preparations for Randolf's marriage, and insisted upon Oswald's return to the castle.

To this the youth had at first seemed much averse. Ultimately, however, he acceded with alacrity to the proposition, and writing to the damsel of Egremont acknowledged that his pretentions had been presumptous with a humility strongly contrasting with his accustomed fierce pride, and which excited surprise in his father, and uneasy suspicions on the part of the Abbot and Prior who had watched his sullen broodings.

Now, however, all was ready for his departure. A litter was was waiting at the Abbey gates, for Oswald was too feeble still to sit a horse. The Earl himself, with twenty of his retainers, had deigned to come down to the Abbey gates to escort back to the castle his unhappy son: even sullen Randolf, mollified by the apparent submission of Oswald, had condescended to accompany his father, and was waiting with him in the Abbot's parlor.

And why were they waiting? where was Oswald the invalid, the penitent? Surely in a place that well befitted him in either character. Oswald de Coniston was kneeling before the high altar of the Abbey Church.

Alas! no pious purpose led him there. It was not to pray for the soul of his lost brother, to pray for mercy and consolation to his heart: though in agony of spirit he wrung his hands together till the nails pierced the flesh, though he wet the pavement with his tears. The winter winds howled with a voice like that of a lamenting spirit through the lofty aisles, and shook the consecrated banners, and the scutcheons of Oswald's own lofty race, a few pale lamps shed a feeble lustre through the long arcades, and the dull grey of the sunless sky threw dark shadows on each painted pane.

Oh, Blessed Mary, Mother of Mercy; sweet Patroness of Furness, shall the lost angel invade your own sanctuary? Shall his black wing shadow the brow of the suppliant at the altar? Oh, patroness of the afflicted, refuge of the sinner, are his sins so black who lies prostrate on those hard stones that even thy prayers shall avail him not? A heart rent even to the core, and a mind distraught!

Surely nothing less could have provoked the frenzy that could call on all holy things as witnesses of an unholy vow. A vow for wicked, earthly vengeance, made at the altar of heaven; a vow at which the white angels shuddered and the fiends rejoiced.

Pasigraphy.—The confusion of tongues is at an end! Mr Anton Bachmaier, of Munich, has worked out to a successful issue a method which places within the reach of the common-sense natives of every country in the world the opportunity of communicating with each other with ease and perfect certainty, though each person is ignorant of any language save his own. This wonderful feat is effected by Mr Bachmaier by the simple process of numbering the *ideas* necessary for carrying on correspondence. The *numbers* are symbols written, and they express identical ideas in all the linguistic keys; thus 1265 is "money" in the English key, "argent" in the French, "geld" in the German, "rupai" in the Urdu, "penge" in the Danish, &c. A sentence written in the numbers may be penned by an Englishman, and read with perfect ease by a Chinaman or Russian; an advertisement couched in these figures will be understood all over the world by people possessed of keys in their own language. Mr Bachmaier calls his system Pasigraphy, and a Pasigrahphical Society has been established in London, comprising a large number of learned and philanthropical gentlemen, having Dr Samuel Birch, of the British Museum, at their head, for the purpose of making known in this country the advantages of this new universal interpreter. As an instance of the sort of thing a pasigram is, we give the following as a specimen:—3226 2676 1635 3311 3177 315 1610 376. The meaning of which is,—"What is now the price of cotton in Bombay?" Of course it would be quicker to write the sentence in any particular language; but the advantage of the pasigram is is that it just as intelligible to a Japanese or Hottentot, provided with a key in his own language, as it is to the original writer. The number of mental conceptions indexed in this way by Mr Bachmaier is four thousand three hundred and thirty-four, and this number far exceeds the necessities of the most voluminous of letter-writers. The extreme simplicity of the process makes its universal employment possible by practical men of ordinary sense; and nothing is required beyond the common *material* of typography, the printing press may be inexpensively utilised in Pasigraphy.

FACES.

We go into a room full of strangers. Across the sea of strange faces meeting us we single out one or two that we would not know if we could, but also one or two to whom we desire ardently to be introduced. They are faces we are sure we shall like; faces that touch a chord somewhere in our hearts, and that seem to promise sympathy and affection on both sides. We look across to them as to dear friends standing waiting for us in the crowd of the unknown; and when we are formally presented we feel the introduction to be almost unnecessary, save as a herald of names; we know them already, and this is a meeting not of strangers, but only of the hitherto divided. Perhaps the fruit is not as the blossom, and a more perfect knowledge may not always answer expectation. For the most part it does, but not always. That pale, oval Madona face, with its fair smooth hair and mournful eyes, its downcast look and plaintive quietude of bearing, maybe belongs to a creature as devoid of sentiment as of sweetness; a dull, prosaic, wooden wife, with sluggish peevishness of temperament that, like a gloomy day, one longs to see either brightened by sunshine or broken into storm; a person whose quietude comes from indolence, not self-control, and who is a Madona because she has neither wit nor energy to be aught else. That is a face which takes one in time after time, till one feels ready to forswear sweetness once and for ever, and to eschew Madonas as delusions. That arch and sparkling face, with its curves of smile and glitter of glance—that face which brightens all over when it speaks like a mountain tarn rippled by the wind—that surely has no delusion about it? No! Prove it, and you will find that its vivacity is as shallow as a wayside pool; that it is all a mere facial trick, a play of muscles hung as loosely as a cardboard sailor danced by a string, but only facial, not spiritual—a trick, not the expression of a temper. At home, where there are no bystanders to applaud that marvellous nobility of feature with the quiet applause of the drawing-room, the wind never ripples the pool, and the leaden surface has no display. The swift bright eyes are dull and veiled; the curves about the mouth vanish; the smiles are laid aside with the company dress, and the creature to whom you were attracted as to one possessed of an abundant vitality, an electric of gaity, and an inexhaustible wealth of vivacity, is a creature that changes as little as a mask, and is no more interesting to the daily housemates than if it was a walking statue blessed with a good digestion, and liking to have its meals to the hour. On the other hand, that stolid-looking face which seems so heavy, so impassive, belongs to a man of rare sensibility, quick to feel and ready to give; that melancholy visage, of almost tragic length and squareness, to one who has the finest appreciation of dry, quaint humor; that round-lipped, round-eyed, rosy-gilled face, which looks as if he only thought of the day's *menu*, perhaps adding a lively liking for good pictures and pretty women, is the face of one who might be Torquemada revived, a man of fierce passions and bitter hate, a man capable of crime if the occasion offered, and incapable of mirth, of generosity, of pity. Look more narrowly and you will see it all—chiefly in the eyes. A bulbous nose and clumsy lips catch our attention at the first glance, and you judge accordingly; but look closer, watch more keenly, and you will, in the eyes, either confirm or belie that first impression; and until you have seen this confirmation or denial, doubt. Lean, long, lantern jaws presage tragedy, at the best archæology; but the bright eyes twinkle with fun, and half the good things floating about society emanate from our knight of the rueful countenance. So with our round-lipped, rosy-gilled *bon vivant*. Look at the hard and cruel eyes, set close under the slanting brow. Form of feature and color of flesh have but little weight against the revelation made by those light-grey, steely eyes; and when we hear the unobservant world speak of that face in reference only to its boyish bonhommie, we think we have read deeper and translated with more accuracy.

THE PRINCE OF WALES'S DEBTS.

A report has suddenly gained currency that the long-expected crisis has occurred in the financial affairs of the Prince of Wales, and that the Ministry have made up their minds to propose to the House of Commons next session to pay his debts. The sum is £640,000 sterling, nearly three millions and a-half of our money, and four times the sum voted in 1787 to appease the creditors of that pattern of royalty who afterwards became George IV. It greatly exceeds any estimate I ever before heard of what was likely to be wanted, and is so large as to be almost incredible. I do not vouch for the story. I can only say that it comes from several sources, and that they all agree as to the disposal and as to the amount. It is difficult to suppose that the Ministry would give any hint of such an intention, if they really entertain it. Their best chance of carrying the vote would lie in surprise. They might possibly hurry it through the House as they have just done the grant of £15,000 a-year to Prince Leopold, without notice. But if they give the country six months to talk about it, they are certain to be met with a strong opposition. And whether in the House this Ministry can carry such a thing through must depend, after all, on the state of feeling outside. Now, there are certain to be two powerful and contradictory sentiments about it; one that the honor of the nation is concerned in providing for the debts of its future king; the other that these debts are of a character which ought to be paid out of the accumulated fortune of the Queen. The latter view rests on the well-known fact that the Queen has been receiving ever since the death of Prince Albert the whole of the income calculated at her accession to support the expense of the court in its usual degree of splendour; that Her Majesty has, however, lived during this period for the most part in retirement, and that the cost of drawing-rooms, levees, and other royal pageantries has, in fact, fallen upon the Prince and Princess of Wales, whose income has been unequal to such a burden. The existing debts, or a considerable part of them, have, according to this theory, been incurred in the discharge of these duties; hence it is urged that the Queen, who has had and kept the money given her by the State for such purposes, ought to pay them. To come to the State is, in fact, to