

Poets' Queen.

THE OLD MAN'S DREAM.

(BY OLIVER W. HOLMES.)

Oh, for one hour of youthful joy!
Give back my twentieth Spring!
I'd rather laugh a bright-haired boy
Than reign a greybeard king.

Off with the wrinkled spoils of age,
Away with learning's crown;
Tear out life's wisdom-written page
And dash its trophies down.

One moment let my life-blood stream
From boyhood's fount of flame;
Give me one giddy, reeling dream
Of life, all love and flame.

My listening angel heard the prayer,
And, calmly smiling, said:
"If I but touch thy silvered hair
Thy hasty wish hath sped.

But is there nothing in thy track
To bid thee fondly stay,
While the swift seasons hurry back
'To find the wished-for day?'"

Ah, truest, best of womankind,
Without thee what were life?
One bliss I cannot leave behind—
I'll take—my—pre—cious—wife.

The angel took a sapphire pen
And wrote with morning's dew:
"The man would be a boy again
And be a husband, too!"

And is there nothing yet unsaid,
Before the change appears?
Remember all those gifts have fled
With the revolving years."

Why, yes; for memory wou'd recall
My fond, paternal joys;
I could not bear to leave them all—
I'll take—my—girls—and boys!

The smiling angel dropped his pen—
"Why, this will never do:
The man would be a boy again
And be a father, too!"

And so I laughed—my laugh awoke
The household with its noise—
And wrote my dream, when morning broke,
To please the grey-haired boys.

FLORENCE O'NEILL;

CHAPTER IX.

PLAYING WITH EDGE TOOLS.

WITH an appearance of calmness and composure, which she was, however, far from feeling, Florence prepared to accompany her uncle to the palace: on arriving at which she was at once shown into the boudoir of the queen.

This favorite sitting-room of Mary was hung with pale blue silk, the draperies and curtains festooned and looped with silver, the ottomans and couches being also covered with the same material. Tables of curiously inlaid wood supported vases of precious metals; some were filled with the choicest exotics, others exhaled an almost oppressive odour from the perfumes burning within them, so that as Florence entered the apartment a sense of faintness stole over her, but she remembered the necessity there was for calmness and composure in the presence of the queen; and, leaning on the arm of Lord Clarendon, with a cheek only a shade paler, perhaps, than usual, the heiress of the O'Neill's approached Mary with a firm step, and gracefully kneeling, pressed to her lips the small white hand so graciously extended.

The features of the unfortunate line of the Stuarts were strongly delineated in Mary's oval countenance, and as the eyes of Florence fell on her tall and still graceful form, her pleasing and regular features and air of quiet dignity, they encountered the scrutiny of those dark, sparkling eyes bent so curiously upon herself.

Graciously, too, did the queen welcome the baronet. Then, after a few common-place observations, she hazarded the remark: "You have been some time at St. Germain's; how fared it with my father when you left France?" Then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, conscious that her words might seem to bear a different meaning than that which she wished to express, she added, whilst the slightest perceptible colour mantled her cheek, "I mean is his health good, as also that of his consort?"

"His Majesty was well, as also my gracious mistress," said Florence; "and pleased, indeed, will they be to hear that I, already so favored by their notice, should also have been honored by your majesty's gracious reception of my poor self."

"And you do not meditate a return to St. Germain's?" said Mary, fixing her eyes with a penetrating glance on the features

of Florence. "No, that cannot be, if rumour speaks correctly, for it is said that you are betrothed to Sir Reginald St. John, one of the most favored of our beloved lord and consort; nay, our own royal favor has been sought in this matter; but of that later. We know that Sir Reginald is of himself deserving, and we see that the lady he has chosen has even more than her fair share of woman's charms; but, as we have already said, we will speak of this later, at a more fitting time, and then devise measures for your nuptials, and make arrangements it may be, for your future well-being near our person."

Then, turning to her uncle, Lord Clarendon, Mary entered into a long and animated discussion respecting the contemplated departure of the king, leaving Florence a prey to any but pleasurable emotions. Had she dared to express the feelings of her heart she could not have done so, for Mary had purposely contrived her speech cunningly enough, leaving her no room to expostulate, assuming for granted that she was graciously furthering the most ardent desires of the girl's heart, and so closing her speech as to afford Florence no chance of escape, without being guilty of the flagrant breach of etiquette by interrupting the queen whilst speaking, or rudely breaking in when she was addressing the earl.

But Mary was far too penetrating in her judgment, and too clear-headed to be at all deceived. Her speech had been artfully contrived. She knew well that Florence was one of the most ardent admirers of the unfortunate Mary of Modena, that she had broken off her proposed union with Sir Reginald solely because the latter was attached to her court, that the girl's whole heart was centred in the woe of the exiled James, and that she was anxiously looking forward to the time of her return to St. Germain's.

But the queen had resolved she should not see St. Germain's again if she could help it, that she should marry Sir Reginald, and moreover, little by little, she would manage to extort, having first gained access to her heart by the exercise of all those blandishments of which she was mistress, a full account of all that was passing in France.

It remained, however, for time to show whether the queen could so easily manage her new prey as she supposed; but be that as it may, the latter felt, when too late, that she had played a rather dangerous game in coming to London, or being there, by failing to preserve the strictest *incognito*; and still more embarrassed was she when, at the moment of parting, Mary, with the same gracious tone and manner, addressing herself to the baronet, said:

"You will not forget, Sir Charles, that we shall use all our influence to promote this affair of the nuptials of your niece. We have felt much interested in the Lady Florence, in consequence of the reports which have reached our ears of her beauty and worth; and ascertaining from the king that Sir Reginald has but recently left the metropolis for Ireland, I have obtained his promise that he shall be at once summoned back to England."

Much as Florence wished to speak she dared not, but merely bowed her acknowledgments, whilst the baronet was profuse in his thanks for the interest the queen evinced in her welfare; and with a heart full of gloomy apprehensions for the future, Florence accompanied her uncle back to his residence.

Alone in her boudoir, the queen moodily watched their departure, accompanied by her uncle, the Earl of Clarendon, and with compressed lips, and fingers nervously clutched together, she exclaimed, aloud:

"Well met, a pretty trio I faith. In the girl I take some little interest, and will mould her to my will; but if she prove rebellious—well, aye, what then? Suppose she is of a stubborn nature. Yet, no; with this St. John daily, hourly beside her, she will become all I wish to see her, a willing tool in my hands. She does not like my proposal, however, for I saw the colour in her cheeks come and go when I spoke of her staying here, and of my hastening her nuptials. And as to you, my beautiful uncle," continued the queen, with increased irritation, as she beheld Lord Clarendon passing through the court-yard beneath her window, "I have you fast, and will take care you are safely caged in the Tower, if in the slightest way you are found to have any share in this new conspiracy, a rumour of which has reached us, and in which your name is coupled with that of fair mistress Florence, and others we had thought affected to our persons, and if—"

"Aye, indeed, if they are guilty let them have such mercy as they deserve," said the voice of William of Orange, who, unobserved, had entered the boudoir and overheard the soliloquy of the queen. "I tell you, Mary," said William, "to watch Clarendon well, and do not suffer his relationship to yourself to mar the ends of justice. Trust me, he is not faithful to our interests."

"I know it," said Mary, fixing her eyes reproachfully on her husband, "but do not speak to a wife devoted and tender as myself of any thought of family connections being suffered to clash with the duty I owe to you. Ah my beloved one," she continued, clasping her husband's hand tenderly within her own, "cared I ever for my kindred when you were concerned; cared I even for the father of whom I was the most indulged and favored child; have I not ever been the most dutiful and submissive wife, and when I had left home and kindred for you, did I not soon tear from my heart, whether at your bidding or not, every emotion of old home affection, so that I might be the more truly and entirely yours?"

"Well, yes; I must give to you the praise you have deserved, and own you have done your duty in my regard," said William. "I have found you generally faithful in these points, and when remiss a few words of admonition have set you in the right path again, though remember, for your caution, if ever tempted to err again in this regard, that I encountered difficulty with you in days gone by."

The fine eyes of Mary filled with tears as again she gazed reproachfully on her husband.

"Ah, my best beloved," she said, "remind me not of my former shortcomings, which, God knoweth, I have long since