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The Pilgrims of the Rhine

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Chapter XXVI.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL LEARN HOW THE FAIRIES WERE RECEIVED BY THE SOVEREIGNS OF THE MINES.—THE COMPLAINT OF THE LAST OF THE FAUNS.—THE RED HUNTSMAN.—THE STORM.—DEATH.

IN the deep valley of Ehrental, the metal kings—the Prince of the Silver Palaces, the Gnome Monarch of the dull Lead Mine, the President of the Copper United States,

held a court to receive the fairy wanderers from the island of Nonnewërth.

The Prince was there, in a gallant hunting suit of oak leaves, in honour to England; and wore a profusion of fairy orders, which had been instituted from time to time, in honour of the human poets that had celebrated the spiritual and etherial tribes. Chief of these, sweet Dreamer of the Midsummer Night's Dream, was the badge chrystallised from the dews that rose above the whispering reeds of Avon, on the night of thy birth—the great epoch of the intellectual world! Nor wert thou, oh beloved Musæus, nor thou, dim—dreaming Tieck; nor were ye, the wild imaginer of the bright-haired Undine, and the wayward spirit that invoked for the gloomy Manfred the witch of the breathless Alps, and the spirits of earth and air;—nor were ye without the honours of fairy homage! Your memory may fade from the heart of man, and the spells of newer enchanters may succeed to the charm you once wove over the face of the common world; but still in the green knolls of the haunted valley and the deep shade of forests, and the starred palaces of air, ye are honoured by the beings of your dreams, as demigods and kings! Your graves are tended by invisible hands, and the places of your birth are hal-
lowed by no perishable worship.

Even as I write *; far away amidst the hills of Caledon,

* It was just at the time the author was finishing this work, that the Great Master of his art was drawing to the close of his career.

and by the forest thou hast clothed with immortal verdure ; thou, the waker of " the Harp by lone Glenfillan's spring," art passing from the earth which thou hast " painted with delight." And such are the chances of mortal fame ! Our children's children may raise new idols on the site of thy holy altar, and cavil where their sires adored ; but for thee the mermaid of the ocean shall wail in her coral caves ; and the sprite that lives in the waterfalls shall mourn ! Strange shapes shall hew thy monument in the recesses of the lonely rocks ; ever by moonlight shall the fairies pause from their roundel when some wild note of their minstrelsy reminds them of thine own ;—ceasing from their revelries, to weep for the silence of that mighty lyre, which breathed alike a revelation of the mysteries of spirits and of men !

The King of the Silver Mines sate in a cavern in the valley, through which the moon just pierced and slept in shadow on the soil shining with metals wrought into unnumbered shapes ; and below him, on a humbler throne, with a grey beard and downcast eye, sate the aged King of the Dwarfs that preside over the dull realms of lead, and inspire the verse of ——, and the prose of —— ! And there too, a fantastic household elf, was the President of the Copper Republic—a spirit that loves economy and the Uses, and smiles sparely on the Beautiful. But, in the centre of the cave, upon beds of the softest mosses, the untrodden growth of ages, reclined the fairy visitors—Nymphalin seated by her betrothed. And round the walls of the cave were dwarf attendants on the sovereigns of

the metals, of a thousand odd shapes, and fantastic garments. On the abrupt ledges of the rocks the bats, charmed to stillness but not sleep, clustered thickly, watching the scene with fixed and amazed eyes: and one old grey owl, the favourite of the witch of the valley, sat blinking in a corner, listening with all her might that she might bring home the scandal to her mistress.

“And tell me, Prince of the Rhine-Island Fays,” said the King of the Silver Mines, “for thou art a traveller, and a fairy that hath seen much, how go men’s affairs in the upper world? As to ourself, we live here in a stupid splendour, and only hear the news of the day when our brother of lead pays a visit to the English printing press, or the President of Copper goes to look at his improvements in steam engines.

“Indeed,” replied Fayzenheim, preparing to speak, like Æneas in the Carthaginian court; “indeed, your majesty, I know not much that will interest you in the present aspect of mortal affairs, except that you are quite as much honoured at this day as when the Roman conqueror bent his knee to you among the mountains of Taunus; and a vast number of little round subjects of yours are constantly carried about by the rich, and pined after with hopeless adoration by the poor. But, begging your majesty’s pardon, may I ask what has become of your cousin, the King of the Golden Mines? I know very well that he has no dominion in these valleys, and do not therefore wonder at his absence from your court this night, but I see so little of

his subjects on earth that I should fear his empire was well nigh at an end, if I did not recognise everywhere the most servile homage paid to a power now become almost invisible."

The King of the Silver Mines fetched a deep sigh. "Alas, prince," said he, "too well do you divine the expiration of my cousin's empire. So many of his subjects have from time to time gone forth to the world, pressed into military service and never returning, that his kingdom is nearly depopulated. And he lives far off in the distant parts of the earth in a state of melancholy seclusion; the age of gold has passed, the age of paper has commenced."

"Paper," said Nymphalin, who was still somewhat of a *precièuse*; "paper is a wonderful thing. What pretty books the human people write upon it."

"Ah! that's what I design to convey," said the Silver King. "It is the age less of paper money than paper government, the press is the true bank." The lord treasurer of the English fairies pricked up his ears at the word "bank." For he was the Attwood of the fairies: he had a favourite plan of making money out of bulrushes, and had written four large bees'-wings-full upon the true nature of capital.

While they were thus conversing, a sudden sound as of some rustic and rude music broke along the air, and closing its wild burthen, they heard the following song:—

THE COMPLAINT OF THE LAST FAUN.

I.

THE moon on the Latmos mountain
 Her pining vigil keeps;
 And ever the silver fountain
 In the Dorian valley weeps.
 But gone are Endymion's dreams;—
 And the crystalymph
 Bewails the nymph
 Whose beauty sleeked the streams!

II.

Round Arcady's oak, its green
 The Bromian ivy weaves;
 But no more is the satyr seen
 Laughing out from the glossy leaves.
 Hushed is the Lycian lute,
 Still grows the seed
 Of the Mœnale reed,
 But the pipe of Pan is mute!

III.

The leaves in the noon-day quiver;—
 The vines on the mountains wave;—
 And Tiber rolls his river
 As fresh by the Sylvan's cave;
 But my brothers are dead and gone;—
 And far away
 From their graves I stray,
 And dream of the Past alone!

IV.

And the sun of the north is chill;—
 And keen is the northern gale;—
 Alas for the song on the Argive hill;
 And the dance in the Cretan vale!—
 The youth of the earth is o'er,
 And its breast is rife
 With the teeming life
 Of the golden Tribes no more!

V.

My race are more blest than I,
 Asleep in their distant bed;
 'Twere better, be sure, to die
 Than to mourn for the buried Dead;—
 To rove by the stranger streams,
 At dusk and dawn
 A lonely faun,
 The last of the Grecian's dreams.

As the song ended a shadow crossed the moonlight, that lay white and lustrous before the aperture of the cavern; and Nymphalin, looking up, beheld a graceful, yet grotesque figure standing on the sward without, and gazing on the group in the cave. It was a shaggy form, with a goat's legs and ears; but the rest of its body, and the height of the stature, like a man's. An arch, pleasant, yet malicious smile, played about its lips; and in its hand it held the pastoral pipe of which poets have sung;—they would find it difficult to sing to it!

“And who art thou?” said Fayzenheim, with the air of a hero.

“ I am the last lingering wanderer of the race which the Romans worshipped : hither I followed their victorious steps, and in these green hollows have I remained. Sometimes in the still noon, when the leaves of spring bud upon the whispering woods, I peer forth from my rocky lair, and startle the peasant with my strange voice and stranger shape. Then goes he home, and puzzles his thick brain with mopes and fancies, till at length he imagines me, the creature of the south, one of his northern demons, and his poets adapt the apparition to their barbarous lines.”

“ Ho ! ” quoth the Silver King, “ surely thou art the origin of the fabled Satan of the cowed men living whilome in yonder ruins, with its horns and goatish limbs : and the harmless Faun has been made the figuration of the most implacable of fiends. But why, O wanderer of the south, lingerest thou in these foreign dells ? Why returnest thou not to the mountains of Achaia, or the wastes around the yellow course of the Tiber ? ”

“ My brethren are no more,” said the poor Faun ; “ and the very faith that left us sacred and unharmed is departed. But here all the spirits not of mortality are still honoured ; and I wander, mourning for Silenus ; though amidst the vines that should console me for his loss.”

“ Thou hast known great beings in thy day,” said the Leaden King, who loved the philosophy of a truism (and the history of whose inspirations I shall one day write).

“ Ah, yes,” said the Faun, “ my birth was amidst the freshness of the world, when the flush of the universal

moonlight, that
of the cavern ;
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and gazing on
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they would find
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life coloured all things with divinity; when not a tree but had its Dryad—not a fountain that was without its Nymph. I sate by the grey throne of Saturn, in his old age, ere yet he was discrowned; (for he was no visionary ideal, but the arch monarch of the pastoral age;) and heard from his lips the history of the world's birth. But those times are gone for ever—they have left harsh successors.”

“It is the age of paper,” muttered the Lord Treasurer, shaking his head.

“What ho, for a dance!” cried Fayzenheim, too royal for moralities, and he whirled the beautiful Nymphalin into a waltz. Then forth issued the fairies, and out went the dwarfs. And the Faun leaning against an aged elm, ere yet the midnight waned, the elves danced their charmed round to the antique minstrelsy of his pipe—the minstrelsy of the Grecian world!

“Hast thou seen yet, my Nymphalin,” said Fayzenheim in the pauses of the dance; “the recess of the Hartz, and the red form of its mighty hunter?”

“It is a fearful sight,” answered Nymphalin; “but with thee I should not fear.”

“Away, then,” cried Fayzenheim; “let us away, at the first cock-crow, into those shagged dells, for there is no need of night to conceal us, and the unwitnessed blush of morn, or the dreary silence of noon, is, no less than the moon's reign, the season for the sports of the superhuman tribes.”

Nymphalin, charmed with the proposal, readily assented, and at the last hour of night, bestriding the starbeams of

the many-titled Friga, away sped the fairy cavalcade to the gloom of the mystic Hartz.

Fain would I relate the manner of their arrival in the thick recesses of the forest; how they found the Red Hunter seated on a fallen pine beside a wide chasm in the earth, with the arching boughs of the wizard oak wreathing above his head as a canopy, and his bow and spear lying idle at his feet. Fain would I tell of the reception which he deigned to the fairies, and how he told them of his ancient victories over man; how he chafed at the gathering invasions of his realm, and how joyously he gloated of some great convulsion in the northern states, which, rapt into moody reveries in these solitary woods, the fierce demon broodingly foresaw. All these fain would I narrate, but they are not of the Rhine, and my story will not brook the delay. While thus conversing with the fiend, noon had crept on and the sky had become overcast and lowering; the giant trees waved gustily to and fro, and the low gatherings of the thunder announced the approaching storm. Then the Hunter arose and stretched his mighty limbs, and seizing his spear, he strode rapidly into the forest to meet the things of his own tribe that the tempest wakes from their rugged lair.

A sudden recollection broke upon Nymphalin. "Alas, alas!" she cried, wringing her hands; "What have I done! In journeying hither with thee, I have forgotten my office. I have neglected my watch over the elements, and my human charge is at this hour, perhaps, exposed to all the fury of the storm."

“Cheer thee, my Nymphalin,” said the prince, “we will lay the tempest,” and he waved his sword and muttered the charms which curb the winds and roll back the marching thunder; but for once the tempest ceased not at his spells; and now, as the fairies sped along the troubled air, a pale and beautiful form met them by the way, and the fairies paused and trembled. For the power of that Shape could vanquish even them. It was the form of a Female, with golden hair, crowned with a chaplet of withered leaves; her bosoms, of an exceeding beauty, lay bare to the wind, and an infant was clasped between them, hushed into a sleep so still, that neither the roar of the thunder, nor the livid lightning flashing from cloud to cloud, could even ruffle, much less arouse, the slumberer. And the face of the Female was unutterably calm and sweet, (though with a something of severe,) there was no line or wrinkle in her hueless brow; care never wrote its defacing characters upon that everlasting beauty. It knew no sorrow or change; ghost-like and shadowy floated on that Shape through the abyss of Time, governing the world with an unquestioned and noiseless sway. And the children of the green solitudes of the earth—the lovely fairies of my tale, shuddered as they gazed and recognised—the form of DEATH!

DEATH VINDICATED.

“And why,” said the beautiful Shape, with a voice soft as the last sighs of a dying babe; “why trouble ye the air with spells; mine is the hour and the empire, and the storm is

the creature of my power. Far yonder to the west it sweeps over the sea, and the ship ceases to vex the waves; it smites the forest, and the destined tree, torn from its roots, feels the winter strip the gladness from its boughs no more!—The roar of the elements is the herald of eternal stillness to their victims; and they who hear the progress of my power, idly shudder at the coming of peace. And thou, O tender daughter of the faery kings, why grievest thou at a mortal's doom? Knowest thou not that sorrow cometh with years, and that to live is to mourn? Blessed is the flower that, nipped in its early spring, feels not the blast that one by one scatters its blossoms around it, and leaves but the barren stem. Blessed are the young whom I clasp to my breast, and lull into the sleep which the storm cannot break, nor the morrow arouse to sorrow or to toil. The heart that is stilled in the bloom of its first emotions,—that turns with its last throb to the eye of love, as yet unlearned in the possibility of change,—has exhausted already the wine of life, and is saved only from the lees. As the mother soothes to sleep the wail of her troubled child, I open my arms to the vexed spirit, and my bosom cradles the unquiet to repose!”

The fairies answered not, for a chill and a fear lay over them, and the Shape glided on; ever as it passed away through the veiling clouds, they heard its low voice singing amidst the roar of the storm, as the dirge of the water-sprite over the vessel it hath lured into the whirlpool or the shoals.