

Wynn; and may very possibly, at this present writing, be pluming her wings among the breezy bowers of Wynnstay.



FORTUNE-TELLING.

Each city, each town, and every village
Affords us either an alms or pillage.
And if the weather be cold and raw,
Then in a barn we tumble on straw.
If warm and fair, by yea-cock and nay-cock,
The fields will afford us a hedge or a hay-cock.

MERRY BEGGAES.

As I was walking one evening with the Oxonian, Master Simon, and the general, in a meadow not far from the village, we heard the sound of a fiddle rudely played, and looking in the direction from whence it came, we saw

a thread of smoke curling up from among the trees. The sound of music is always attractive; for, wherever there is music, there is good humor, or goodwill. We passed along a footpath, and had a peep, through a break in the hedge, at the musician and his party, when the Oxonian gave us a wink, and told us that if we would follow him we should have some sport.

It proved to be a gypsy encampment, consisting of three or four little cabins, or tents, made of blankets and sail-cloths, spread over hoops that were stuck in the ground. It was on one side of a green lane, close under a hawthorn hedge, with a broad beech-tree spreading above it. A small rill tinkled along close by, through the fresh sward, that looked liked a carpet.

A tea-kettle was hanging by a crooked piece of iron, over a fire made from dry sticks and leaves, and two old gypsies, in red cloaks, sat crouched on the grass, gossiping over their evening cup of tea; for these creatures, though they live in the open air, have their ideas of fireside comforts. There were two or three children sleeping on the straw with which the tents were littered; a couple of donkeys were grazing in the lane, and a

thievish-looking dog was lying before the fire. Some of the younger gypsies were dancing to the music of a fiddle, played by a tall, slender stripling, in an old frock coat, with a peacock's feather stuck in his hatband.

As we approached, a gypsy girl, with a pair of fine roguish eyes, came up, and, as usual, offered to tell our fortunes. I could not but admire a certain degree of slattern elegance about the baggage, Her long black silken hair was curiously plaited in numerous small braids, and negligently put up in a picturesque style that a painter might have been proud to have devised. Her dress was of a figured chintz, rather ragged, and not over clean, but of a variety of most harmonious and agreeable colors; for these beings have a singularly fine eye for colors. Her straw hat was in her hand, and a red cloak thrown over one arm.



The Oxonian offered at once to have his fortune told, and the girl began with the usual volubility of her race; but he drew her

on one side near the hedge, as he said he had no idea of having his secrets overheard. I saw he was talking to her instead of she to him, and by his glancing towards us now and then, that he was giving the baggage some private hints. When they returned to us, he assumed a very serious air. "Zounds!" said he, "it's very astonishing how these creatures come by their knowledge; this girl has told me some things that I thought no one knew but myself!"

The girl now assailed the general: "Come, your honor," said she, "I see by your face you're a lucky man; but you're not happy in your mind; you're not, indeed, sir; but have a good heart, and give me a good piece of silver, and I'll tell you a nice fortune."

The general had received all her approaches with a banter, and had suffered her to get hold of his hand; but at the mention of the piece of silver, he hemmed, looked grave, and turning to us, asked if we had not better continue our walk. "Come, my master," said the girl archly, "you'd not be in such a hurry if you knew all that I could tell you about a fair lady that has a notion for you. Come, sir, old love burns strong; there's many a one comes to see weddings that go

away brides themselves!" Here the girl whispered something in a low voice, at which the general colored up, was a little fluttered, and suffered himself to be drawn aside under



the hedge, where he appeared to listen to her with great earnestness, and at the end paid her half-a-crown with the air of a man that has got the worth of his money.

The girl next made her attack upon Master Simon, who, however, was too old a bird to

be caught, knowing that it would end in an attack upon his purse, about which he is a little sensitive. As he has a great notion, however, of being considered a roister, he chucked her under the chin, played her off with rather broad jokes, and put on something of the rake-helly air, that we see now and then assumed on the stage by the sad-boy gentlemen of the old school. "Ah, your honor," said the girl, with a malicious leer, "you were not in such a tantrum last year when I told you about the widow you know who; but if you had taken a friend's advice, you'd never have come away from Doncaster races with a flea in your ear!"

There was a secret sting in this speech that seemed quite to disconcert Master Simon. He jerked away his hand in a pet, smacked his whip, whistled to his dogs, and intimated that it was high time to go home. The girl, however, was determined not to lose her harvest. She now turned upon me, and, as I have a weakness of spirit where there is a pretty face concerned, she soon wheedled me out of my money, and in return read me a fortune which, if it prove true, and I am determined to believe it, will make me one of the luckiest men in the chronicles of Cupid.

I saw that the Oxonian was at the bottom of all this oracular mystery, and was disposed to amuse himself with the general, whose tender approaches to the widow have attracted the notice of the wag. I was a little curious, however, to know the meaning of the dark hints which had so suddenly disconcerted Master Simon: and took occasion to fall in the rear with the Oxonian on our way home, when he laughed heartily at my questions, and gave me ample information on the subject.

The truth of the matter is, that Master Simon has met with a sad rebuff since my Christmas visit to the Hall. He used at that time to be joked about a widow, a fine dashing woman, as he privately informed me. I had supposed the pleasure he betrayed on these occasions resulted from the usual fondness of old bachelors for being teased about getting married, and about flirting, and being fickle and false-hearted. I am assured, however, that Master Simon had really persuaded himself the widow had a kindness for him; in consequence of which he had been at some extraordinary expense in new clothes, and had actually got Frank Bracebridge to order him a coat from Stultz. He began to

throw out hints about the importance of a man's settling himself in life before he grew old; he would look grave whenever the widow and matrimony were mentioned in the same sentence; and privately asked the opinion of the squire and parson about the prudence of marrying a widow with a rich jointure, but who had several children.

An important member of a great family connection cannot harp much upon the theme of matrimony without its taking wind; and it soon got buzzed about that Mr. Simon Bracebridge was actually gone to Doncaster races with a new horse, but that he meant to return in a curriole with a lady by his side. Master Simon did, indeed, go to the races, and that with a new horse; and the dashing widow did make her appearance in her curriole; but it was unfortunately driven by a strapping young Irish dragoon, with whom even Master Simon's self-complacency would not allow him to enter into competition, and to whom she was married shortly after.

It was a matter of sore chagrin to Master Simon for several months, having never before been fully committed. The dullest head in the family had a joke upon him; and there is no one that likes less to be bantered than

an absolute joker. He took refuge for a time at Lady Lillycraft's, until the matter should blow over; and occupied himself by looking over her accounts, regulating the village choir, and inculcating loyalty into a pet bullfinch by teaching him to whistle "God save the king."



He has now pretty nearly recovered from the mortification; holds up his head, and laughs as much as any one; again affects to pity married men, and is particularly facetious about widows, when Lady Lillycraft is not by. His only time of trial is when the general gets hold of him, who is infinitely

heavy and persevering in his waggery, and will interweave a dull joke through the various topics of a whole dinner-time. Master Simon often parries these attacks by a stanza from his old work of "Cupid's Solicitor for Love :"

"'Tis in vain to woo a widow over long,
In once or twice her mind you may perceive;
Widows are subtle, be they old or young,
And by their wiles young men they will deceive."



LOVE-CHARMS.

— Come, do not weep, my girl,
Forget him, pretty pensiveness; there will
Come others, every day, as good as he.

SIR J. SUCKLING.

THE approach of a wedding in a family is always an event of great importance, but particularly so in a household like this, in a

retired part of the country. Master Simon, who is a pervading spirit, and, through means of the butler and housekeeper, knows everything that goes forward, tells me that the maid-servants are continually trying their fortunes, and that the servants, hall has of late been quite a scene of incantation.

It is amusing to notice how the oddities of the head of a family flow down through all the branches. The squire, in the indulgence of his love of everything that smacks of old times, has held so many grave conversations with the parson at table, about popular superstitions and traditional rites, that they have been carried from the parlor to the kitchen by the listening domestics, and, being apparently sanctioned by such high authorities, the whole house has become infected by them.

The servants are all versed in the common modes of trying luck, and the charms to ensure constancy. They read their fortunes by drawing strokes in the ashes, or by repeating a form of words, and looking in a pan of water. St. Mark's Eve, I am told, was a busy time with them; being an appointed night for certain mystic ceremonies. Several of them sowed hemp-seed, to be reaped by

their true lovers; and they even ventured upon the solemn and fearful preparation of the dumb-cake. This must be done fasting and in silence. The ingredients are handed down in traditional form;—"An egg-shell full of salt, an egg-shell full of malt, and an egg-shell full of barley meal." When the cake is ready, it is put upon a pan over the fire, and the future husband will appear, turn the cake, and retire; but if a word is spoken, or a fast is broken, during this awful ceremony, there is no knowing what horrible consequence would ensue!

The experiments in the present instance came to no result; they that sowed the hemp-seed forgot the magic rhyme that they were to pronounce, so the true-lover never appeared; and as to the dumb-cake, what between and awful stillness they had to keep, and the awfulness of the midnight hour, their hearts failed them when they had put the cake in the pan, so that, on the striking of the great house-clock in the servants' hall, they were seized with a sudden panic, and ran out of the room, to which they did not return until morning, when they found the mystic cake burnt to a cinder.

The most persevering at these spells, however, is Phœbe Wilkins, the housekeeper's

niece. As she is a kind of privileged personage, and rather idle, she has more time to occupy herself with these matters. She has always had her head full of love and matrimony, she knows the dreaming book by heart, and is quite an oracle among the little girls of the family, who always come to her to interpret their dreams in the mornings.

During the present gayety of the house, however, the poor girl has worn a face full of trouble ; and, to use the housekeeper's words, " has fallen into a sad hystericky way lately." It seems that she was born and brought up in the village, where her father was parish-clerk, and she was an early playmate and sweetheart of young Jack Tibbets. Since she has come to live at the Hall, however, her head has been a little turned. Being very pretty, and naturally genteel, she was been much noticed and indulged: and being the housekeeper's niece, she has held an equivocal station between a servant and a companion. she has learnt something of fashions and notions among the young ladies, which have effected quite a metamorphosis ; insomuch that her finery at church on Sundays has given mortal offence to her former intimates in the village. This has occasioned the misrepresent-

ations which have awakened the implacable family pride of Dame Tibbets. But what is worse, Phœbe, having a spice of coquetry in her disposition, showed it on one or two occa-



sions to her lover, which produced a downright quarrel ; and Jack, being very proud and fiery, has absolutely turned his back upon her for several successive Sundays.

The poor girl is full of sorrow and repent-

ance, and would fain make up with her lover ; but he feels his security, and stands aloof. In this he is doubtless encouraged by his mother, who is continually reminding him of what he owes to his family ; for this same family pride seems doomed to be the eternal bane of lovers.

As I hate to see a pretty face in trouble, I have felt quite concerned for the luckless Phœbe, ever since I heard her story. It is a sad thing to be thwarted in love at any time, but particularly so at this tender season of the year, when every living thing, even to the very butterfly, is sporting with its mate ; and the green fields and the budding groves, and the singing of the birds, and the sweet smell of the flowers, are enough to turn the head of a love-sick girl. I am told that the coolness of young Ready-Money lies heavy at poor Phœbe's heart. Instead of singing about the house as formerly, she goes about, pale and sighing, and is apt to break into tears when her companions are full of merriment.

Mrs. Hannah, the vestal gentlewoman of my Lady Lillycraft, has had long talks and walks with Phœbe, up and down the avenue, of an evening ; and has endeavored to

squeeze some of her own verjuice into the other's milky nature. She speaks with contempt and abhorrence of the whole sex, and advises Phœbe to despise all the men as heartily as she does. But Phœbe's loving temper is not to be curdled ; she has no such thing as hatred or contempt for mankind in her whole composition. She has all the simple fondness of heart of poor, weak, loving women ; and her only thoughts at present are, how to conciliate and reclaim her wayward swain.

The spells and love-charms, which are matters of sport to the other domestics, are serious concerns with this love-stricken damsel. She is continually trying her fortune in a variety of ways. I am told that she has absolutely fasted for six Wednesdays and three Fridays successively, having understood that it was a sovereign charm to ensure being married to one's liking within the year. She carries about, also, a lock of her sweetheart's hair, and a ribbon he once gave her, being a mode of producing constancy in her lover. She even went so far as to try her fortune by the moon, which has always had much to do with lovers' dreams and fancies. For this purpose she went out in the night of the full



moon, knelt on a stone in the meadow, and repeated the old traditional rhyme : —

“ All hail to thee, moon, all hail to thee :
I pray to thee, good moon, now show to me
The youth who my future husband will be.”

When she came back to the house, she was faint and pale, and went immediately to bed. The next morning she told the porter's wife that she had seen some one close by the hedge in the meadow, which she was sure was young Tibbets ; at any rate, she had dreamt of him all night ; both of which, the old dame

assured her, were most happy signs. It has since turned out that the person in the meadow was old Christy, the huntsman, who was walking his nightly rounds with the great staghound ; so that Phoebe's faith in the charm is completely shaken.

A BACHELOR'S CONFESSIONS.

I'll have a private, pensive single life.

THE COLLIER OF CROYDON.



I WAS sitting in my room a morning or two since, reading, when some one tapped at the door, and Master Simon entered. He had an unusually fresh appearance ; he had put on a bright green riding-coat, with a bunch of violets in the button-hole, and had the air of an old bachelor trying to rejuvenate himself. He had not, however, his usual briskness and vivacity, but loitered about the room with somewhat of absence of manner, humming the old song,—“ Go, lovely rose, tell her that wastes her time and me ;” and then, leaning against the window and looking upon the

landscape, he uttered a very audible sigh. As I had not been accustomed to see Master Simon in a pensive mood, I thought there might be some vexation praying on his mind, and I endeavored to introduce a cheerful strain of conversation ; but he was not in the vein to follow it up, and proposed that we should take a walk.

It was a beautiful morning, of that soft vernal temperature, that seems to thaw all the frost out of one's blood, and to set all nature in a ferment. The very fishes felt its influence : the cautious trout ventured out of his dark hole to seek his mate, the roach and the dace rose up to the surface of the brook to bask in the sunshine, and the amorous frog piped from among the rushes. If ever an oyster can really fall in love, as has been said or sung, it must be on such a morning.

The weather certainly had its effect even upon Master Simon, for he seemed obstinately bent upon the pensive mood. Instead of stepping briskly along, smacking his dog-whip, whistling quaint ditties, or telling sporting anecdotes, he leaned on my arm, and talked about the approaching nuptials ; from whence he made several digressions upon the character of womankind, touched

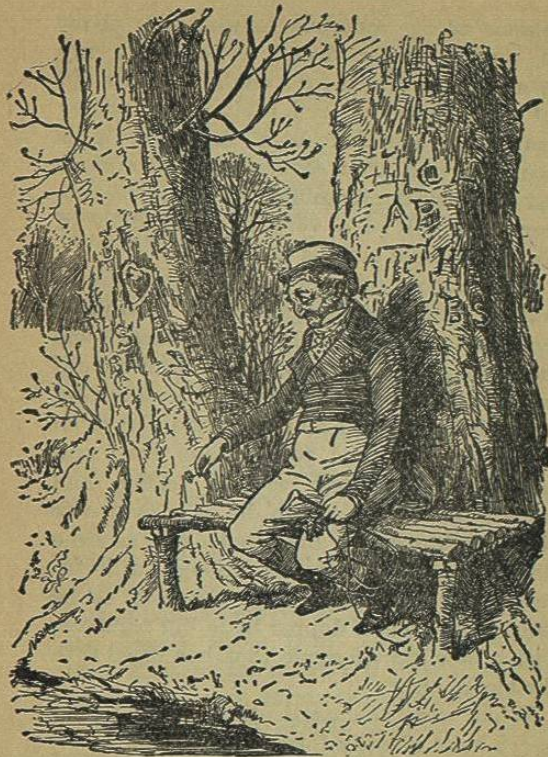
a little upon the tender passion, and made sundry very excellent, though rather trite, observations upon disappointments in love. It was evident that he had something on his mind which he wished to impart, but felt awkward in approaching it. I was curious to see to what this strain would lead; but I was determined not to assist him. Indeed, I mischievously pretended to turn the conversation, and talked of his usual topics, dogs, horses, and hunting; but he was very brief in his replies, and invariably got back, by hook or by crook, into the sentimental vein.

At length we came to a clump of trees that overhung a whispering brook, with a rustic bench at their feet. The trees were grievously scored with letters and devices, which had grown out of all shape and size by the growth of the bark: and it appeared that this grove had served as a kind of register of the family loves from time immemorial. Here Master Simon made a pause, pulled up a tuft of flowers, threw them one by one into the water, and at length, turning somewhat abruptly upon me, asked me if ever I had been in love. I confess the question startled me a little, as I am not over fond of making con-

fessions of my amorous follies; and, above all, should never dream of choosing my friend Master Simon for a confidant. He did not wait, however, for a reply; the inquiry was merely a prelude to a confession on his own part, and after several circumlocutions and whimsical preambles, he fairly disburthened himself of a very tolerable story of his having been crossed in love.

The reader will, very probably, suppose that it related to the gay widow who jilted him not long since at Doncaster races;—no such thing. It was about a sentimental passion that he once had for a most beautiful young lady, who wrote poetry and played on the harp. He used to serenade her; and indeed he described several tender and gallant scenes, in which he was evidently picturing himself in his mind's eye as some elegant hero of romance, though unfortunately for the tale, I only saw him as he stood before me, a dapper little old bachelor, with a face like an apple that has dried with the bloom on it.

What were the particulars of this tender tale I have already forgotten; indeed I listened to it with a heart like a very pebble stone, having hard work to repress a smile



• Here Master Simon made a pause, pulled up a tuft of flowers, and threw them one by one into the water. —PAGE 164.

while Master Simon was putting on the amorous swain, uttering, every now and then a sigh, and endeavoring to look sentimental and melancholy.

All that I recollect is, that the lady, according to his account, was certainly a little touched ; for she used to accept all the music that he copied for her harp, and all the patterns that he drew for her dresses ; and he began to flatter himself, after a long course of delicate attentions, that he was gradually fanning up a gentle flame in her heart, when she suddenly accepted the hand of a rich, boisterous, fox-hunting baronet, without either music or sentiment, who carried her by storm, after a fortnight's courtship.

Master Simon could not help concluding by some observation upon "modest merit," and the power of gold over the sex. As a remembrance of his passion, he pointed out a heart carved on the bark of one of the trees ; but which, in the process of time, had grown out into a large excrescence ; and he showed me a lock of her hair, which he wore in a true lover's knot, in a large gold brooch.

I have seldom met with an old bachelor that had not, at some time or other, his nonsensical moment, when he would become ten-

der and sentimental. talk about the concerns of the heart, and have some confession of a delicate nature to make. Almost every man has some little trait of romance in his life, which he looks back to with fondness, and about which he is apt to grow garrulous occasionally. He recollects himself as he was at the time, young and gamesome; and forgets that his hearers have no other idea of the hero of the tale but such as he may appear at the time of telling it; peradventure, a withered, whimsical, spindle-shanked old gentleman. With married men, it is true, this is not so frequently the case; their amorous romance is apt to decline after marriage; why, I cannot for the life of me imagine; but with a bachelor, though it may slumber, it never dies. It is always liable to break out again in transient flashes, and never so much as on a spring morning in the country; or on a winter evening, when seated in his solitary chamber, stirring up the fire and talking of matrimony.

The moment that Master Simon had gone through his confession, and, to use the common phrase, "had made a clean breast of it," he became quite himself again. He had settled the point which had been worrying



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his mind, and doubtless considered himself established as a man of sentiment in my opinion. Before we had finished our morning's stroll he was singing as blithe as a grasshopper, whistling to his dogs, and telling droll stories ; and I recollect that he was particularly facetious that day at dinner on the subject of matrimony, and uttered several excellent jokes, not to be found in Joe Miller, that made the bride-elect blush and look down, but set all the old gentlemen at the table in a roar, and absolutely brought tears into the general's eyes.

