*Imogen*

CYMBELINE, ACT 3, SC. 6.

New York: D. Appleton & Co. 346 & 348, Broadway

the half of his estates against the diamond ring which Posthumus wore—that he would repair to Britain and bring back abundant proof that he had won Imogen's love, and accomplished her dishonor. The wager was accepted; and Iachimo arrived at the British court with a letter from Posthumus to his wife, recommending his honored friend to her courteous attention.

Iachimo, after insinuating doubts of her husband's fidelity into the chaste mind of the princess, told her of his shameless relations with some Roman woman, and ended by inciting her to revenge herself upon her recreant lord by accepting his own infamous proposals. Imogen's indignation at this gratuitous insult to her virtue, left Iachimo no chance of success; but he quickly obtained her forgiveness by confessing it a ruse to test her chastity. Before he took his leave he received permission from Imogen to allow a chest of valuables, in which he said her husband was interested, to be conveyed to her bed-chamber for safe-keeping. In this trunk he concealed himself; and when the princess was asleep, he emerged from his hiding-place, took careful note of the furnishings of the apartment, as well as of a secret mark on her person, and possessed himself of the precious bracelet, that he might take back to Rome plausible proofs of his having succeeded in his extraordinary adventure.

Provided with these, he had little difficulty in deceiving Posthumus, who, distracted with grief, sent orders to Pisanio to kill Imogen. At the same time, Posthumus despatched a letter to his wife, instructing her to meet him at a Welch town. Pisanio, convinced of his mistress's innocence, revealed to her her husband's suspicions, and assured her that, so far from obeying his master's cruel orders, he had accompanied her thus far only to set her on the way to Posthumus, whom she must disabuse of his false impressions; for her better protection, he disguised her as a page, and,



in case she should be ill, gave her a powerful drug, which the queen had bestowed upon him as a valuable restorative.

Exhausted with fatigue and hunger, Imogen entered a cave, in the forest through which she was journeying, which was inhabited by an old man and his two sons, who led the lives of hunters. They made her welcome to their rude comforts; but she fell ill, and bethinking her of Pisanio's drug, swallowed a portion of it, and was thrown into a trance, which so resembled death that the youths laid her in the forest, making her a grave of leaves and flowers.

Awaking from this deep slumber, she was found by Lucius, the Roman general, who took her into his service as a page; and thus she travelled with the grand Roman army, which had then invaded England, and was marching towards the capital. Posthumus also was following this army, to join the British host so soon as it should reach its destination.

In an engagement between the opposing forces, Posthumus, and the two hunter-lads who had entertained Imogen, by their desperate valor saved King Cymbeline from defeat and death. Lucius, together with his page Fidele, and Iachimo, were taken prisoners and brought before the king—Posthumus being summoned likewise, to receive sentence of death for having, unbidden, returned from banishment. Whereupon all mystery was cleared away: the two youths proved to be Cymbeline's lost sons, who had been brought up by Belarius; Imogen discovered herself, to the great joy of her father; Iachimo confessed his treachery; and Posthumus, freely pardoned by his king and wife, was restored to her faithful love.

---

To Imogen has been awarded, almost without a dissenting voice, the high distinction of being the most admirable of her immortal company—a woman in whom all perfections meet in rare harmony—who never cloys, never disappoints.

Of all Shakspeare's *wives*—and he delighted in shaping models of conjugal fidelity—she is the master-piece; chaste, ardent, brave, devoted, and beautiful, she is indeed "best of wives, most delightful of women." The secret charm of Imogen's character is that she comes within the range of popular sympathy more successfully than her equally excellent married sisters: we never recognize Juliet as a wife—in fact, she never assumes that position; at the best, we offer but cold tribute of admiration to the classic virtues of Hermione and the Roman Portia; Desdemona we pity, tenderly, though with a degree of half-conscious contempt. But our sweet princess of Britain commands our exalted respect, while she elicits a sympathy which can never degenerate into commiseration.

With all her softness, her "fear and niceness"—a "lady so tender of rebukes that words are strokes, and strokes death to her"—she is not, like Desdemona, passive under injustice, even to painful self-humiliation; or, like Hermione, statuesquely heroic. Her dignity is never more proudly asserted than in her very subjection to her husband's will, even when he is no longer entitled to her duty.

An excellent exemplification of this trait of her character is afforded by the scene in which Pisanio detains her, when midway on her rapturous journey to meet her banished lord, to confess that Posthumus has ordered him to kill her, on an accusation of infidelity.

She receives the astounding intelligence, at first, with all the indignation natural to a woman whose purity is equalled by her spirit:



False to his bed! What is it to be false?
To lie in watch there, and to think on him?
To weep 'twixt clock and clock? if sleep charge nature,
To break it with a fearful dream of him,
And cry myself awake? That's false to his bed,
Is it?

Yet her despair, her shocking disappointment in one who, to her fond eyes, had "sat 'mongst men like a descended god," even a half malicious desire to die, in order that her husband's remorse may be complete when he discovers his mistake, influence her to pray for death at Pisanio's hands:

*Imo.* * * * * * * * *
Come, fellow, be thou honest:
Do thou thy master's bidding. When thou see'st him,
A little witness my obedience. Look!
I draw the sword myself! take it; and hit
The innocent mansion of my love, my heart!
Fear not; 'tis empty of all things, but grief.
Thy master is not there, who was, indeed,
The riches of it. Do his bidding; strike!

How similar, and yet how unlike, too, is the following remonstrance to Hermione's words to her husband under almost the same circumstances:

* * * * * * * * *
And thou, Posthumus, thou that didst set up
My disobedience 'gainst the king my father,
And make me put into contempt the suits
Of princely fellows, shalt hereafter find
It is no act of common passage, but
A strain of rareness; and I grieve myself
To think, when thou shalt be disedg'd by her
That now thou tir'st on, how thy memory
Will then be pang'd by me.

# IMOGEN.

THE princess Imogen, daughter of Cymbeline, King of Britain, had secretly married Posthumus, an orphan, who had been in a manner adopted by the king, and educated as his own son. Cymbeline, by his first queen, had three children—Imogen, and two sons, who were stolen in infancy by a revengeful courtier; his second queen had one son by a former marriage, named Cloten, for whom she employed every means to secure the hand of Imogen, sole heiress to the British throne. The discovery of Imogen's secret marriage frustrated these ambitious plans, and so incensed the king, her father, that he banished Posthumus from the kingdom. Posthumus left with his bride, for their mutual service, his faithful gentleman Pisanio; and so they parted, after having exchanged love-pledges—Imogen giving her husband a rare diamond ring, and he bestowing in return a curious bracelet.

Arrived in Rome, Posthumus fell in company with a party of gay young fellows, who were descanting on the charms and superior excellencies of their respective mistresses; and he, joining the good-humored wranglers, boasted his blessed possession of the faultless Imogen. Whereupon Iachimo, a Roman, laid a wager—