New Orleans Daily Crescent.

WEDNESDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 26, 1860.

INTERESTING CORRESPONDENCE.

Below we present a correspondence between a number of the most respectable citizens of the parish of Ascension and E. Jones McCall, Esq., inviting the latter to give formal expression to the opinions he entertains on the vital issue of the day, he having been favorably mentioned in connection with the candidacy for that Senatorial District.

The reply of Mr. McCall is lucid, frank and manly, and will be acceptable to all loyal Southern Rights men. He meets the question boldly, and while he regrets that a severance of the Union is about to be forced by our Black Republican enemies, sees little or no hope of amendment or reform in the North in the future. In this we fully agree with him, and also concur in the views held in regard to separate State action on the part of Louisiana. Separate action first, and cooperation afterwards, is the plan which best comports with honor, dignity and security, in our judgment.

With these introductory observations, we submit the correspondence:

ASCENSION, LA., December 17, 1860.

E. J. McCall, Esq.—Dear Sir: Your name having been suggested as a candidate for the State Convention, (Senatorial District) it becomes a matter of universal interest to ascertain your views upon the questions now agitating the public mind.

It is desirable that every one casting his vote on the 7th of January next, shall do so with the knowledge of the responsibility he incurs and an assurance that he be not deceived in the exponent of his sentiments.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
THOS. H. WEIGHTMAN.

Addressed similar letters to Messrs. Dr. T. Cottman, L. D. Nicholls, James Hewitt, D. A. Randall, Dr. E. Duffel, D. F. Kenner, R. C. Martin, Michel Thibodaux.

EVAN HALL, December 19, 1860.

Thomas H. Weightman, Esq.—Sir: I have this morning received your letter of the 17th instant, informing me that "my name had been suggested as a candidate for the State Convention in the Senatorial District, and that it becomes a matter of universal interest to ascertain my views upon the questions now agitating the public mind." In reply, I hasten to state that I fully recognize the vital importance of the present issues, and that in the event of my name coming before the people for election on the 7th January next, it is incumbent upon me to make known my views lest any one be "deceived in the exponent of the principles." Before proceeding, however, permit me to say that I have never sought political honors or advancement, and that in allowing my name now to be used as a candidate for election to the State Convention, I act under a sense of imperative duty which, in this momentous crisis, should impel every one to abjure all selfish or personal considerations and devote himself heart and soul to the service of his country.

What then is the issue involved in the election of Delegates to the State Convention? In my humble opinion it is simply whether Louisiana shall or shall not, through her representatives in convention assembled, pass an ordinance dissolving her connection with the General Government, and declaring her independence of it, and her determination to maintain at all hazards her seperate sovereignty. With this issue before us two parties have arisen dividing the sentiment of the State, one favors separate and immediate secession, and the other, while it admits the probability of the ultimate dissolution of the Union demands the cooperation of all the Southern States before assuming the responsibility of so grave a proceeding. But whichever alternative the Convention may choose it is to me very evident that South Carolina will inevitably secede from the Union, and that her action will be endorsed and *followed* by several of the other Southern States. Now, if this be so—and I believe it is universally admitted—then, it appears to me, it will avail but little what expedients Louisiana may propose—for, the dissolution of the Union once consummated by a withdrawal of a certain number of the Southern States, she will be compelled by every consideration of *interest* and *safety* to sustain their action and share their fate.

I believe then that we have reached that point in our political history, when we must either acknowledge our inferiority to the North, and accept the position that the institution of slavery is maintained on sufferance, or that we must boldly proclaim our determination to dissolve our connection with the Union, and take into our own keeping our interest and our honor. Sooner or later, *if we would be equals*, it must come to this, and whatever may be the consequences of such a step, I am unwilling to throw upon our children the responsibility of deciding a question which fairly devolves on us. I fear that to await the joint action of the Southern States will not *avert*, though it may delay the evil day; and that if we really mean to repel Black Republican agression we must show them that for once we are earnest and united—I have no faith in further compromises, for the reason that those which now exist have invariably been broken; and I can place no confidence in the promises of men as regards the future who refuse persistently to atone for the past. I am in favor of the Union as it is, believing that it has been the great source of our prosperity at home, and our consideration abroad; but I am unwilling to sacrifice to it the vital principle which is at the foundation of Southern society, and I prefer to see our interests suffer for a while, rather than owe their safety to the caprice or toleration of the Republican party. If, however, in the course of events, circumstances should arise warranting the hope that the North had repented of her course, and was ready to render us justice, then the Union would know no *truer friend* or *firmer supporter* than myself; but until I see some evidence of a returning sense of justice, you must pardon me if I doubt the efficacy of compromises and delay. In a word, I look in vain for an evidence of the moderation or contrition of the Black Republican party, and am forced to conclude that they will never retrace their steps until compelled to do so by their own people; and that the only mode of effecting this change and of bringing the Northern people to their senses, is to show them beyond a doubt that the consequence of their obstinacy will be a dissolution of the Union. Then, *perhaps*, they may pause, and I would fain believe that some at least of the free States would join us in making a new compact, and in abiding faithfully by its provisions. As for those who shall still cling to their fanatical prejudices, let them seek their own welfare in their own way; but let us put it out of their power to interfere any more with our institutions. God forbid that a dissolution of the Union should bring on civil war and all its horrors, but if it must come, let history attest that on the heads of the Black Republican party rests the responsibility, and that in taking up arms in self-defence we are but exercising a right which God has implanted in our bosoms. I fervently pray that an all-wise Providence may provide an issue to our troubles which we in our blindness cannot forsee; and that the Union of these States may be preserved by the fidelity of each and every one to the spirit and letter of the Constitution.

I remain, sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
E. JONES McCALL.

POETIC SADNESS.—At the close of the Mexican War, the First Pennsylvania Regiment of volunteers was sent up the river, in order to be disbanded at Pittsburg. On their way up one of the poor sick fellows died. The boat was hauled up alongside a wood-yard, a rough coffin made, and a file of men, with drum and fife, proceeded a short distance into the timber, where a grave had been hastily dug, to pay the last sad respect to the dead soldier. One of his companions, also much wasted with the disease that so fearfully decimated our ranks, staggered ashore to accompany the detachment, but being too weak to follow, seated himself on a log, and with his face buried in his hands, on hearing the Dead March played by the drum and fife, gave vent to a torrent of tears. Almost in sight of home, the thought that his turn would probably come next, overpowered the weak nerve of the soldier. While sorrowing thus, he was rudely accosted by a rough woodsman:

"I say, stranger! I reckon you've hearn that tune afore, time of the war?"

"Heard it," answered the poor fellow, as he looked up at his interlocutor through his tears; "heard it, did you say? why the very birds learned to sing it in Mexico."

The officer of the deck on board a man-of-war asked the man at the wheel one day, "How does she head?" It was blowing a gale of wind. "South-ayst," replied Pat, touching his hat, but forgetting to add sir to his answer. "You'd better put a few more s's in your answer, when you speak to me'" said the huffy Lieutenant. "Ay, ay, sir-r-r," returned the witty Irishman. A day or two after, the officer called out again—"how does she head now?" "South ayst and be south, half south, and a little southerly, sir-ree, your honor, sir," screamed Pat.

A lady expressed to Hogarth a wish to learn to draw caricature. "Alas! young lady," said the painter, "it is a faculty not to be envied. Take my advice and never draw a caricature; by the long practice of it, I have lost the enjoyment of beauty. I never see a face but distorted; I never have the satisfaction of beholding the human face divine."

A SAILOR'S DESCRIPTION OF A DANCE.—Have'nt had any fun with the land-lubbers till Thursday night at a dance. When I arrived in the cabin I found them under headway of a Spanish dance. Took my station in line with Sue Tucker, fell back and filled, then shot ahead two fathoms, hauled up on the starboard tack to let another craft pass, and then came stern on another sail, spoke her and then bore round against the sun and fell in with another sail in full chase, passed twenty sail on the same course, and when half way across the other shore dropped astern, fell back, could'nt ..ll, so let go anchor and hauled up for repairs.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

—FOR THE COLUMNS OF THE—

NEW ORLEANS CRESCENT,

—WITH—

THE KINDLY GREETINGS

—OF—

ELLIS AMMONETTE.

LOST IN SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

"I cannot but remember such things were."—Shakspeare.

One—Two—Three—Four—Five—Six—Seven—Eight—Nine—Ten—Eleven—Twelve.—Midnight!

Another instant, and once again the revolving course of Time ushers in the day that has for more than eighteen hundred years been hailed with prayers of thanksgiving, because of the birth of the Holy Being whose precious blood was yielded a free-will offering to wash away the sins of erring humanity.

The sound that marks its advent is solemn, and as it floats in widening circles on the air, sinking down and around, and swelling upward and on, it has an inarticulate grandeur which thrills as might the voice of a celestial messenger.

The sound is solemn, and yet around the day which its throbbing note proclaims as come, are clustered some of the most joyful associations of life.

Remembering that He came in the guise of infancy, those who have little ones circling the hearthstone, whereon is blazing the genial yule-time fire, lay aside the cares and austerities which may possess them, and with gentle hand-and-lip caresses, and glances which speak the over-flowing heart, bid them rejoice in the name of Him who called them unto Him, and said, "forbid them not."

Thinking how He wandered an outcast, without shelter for his sacred head, the beggar who claims pity for his sorrows and alms for his poverty is warmed and cheered, and shares the worldly store, of which a portion thus goes forth even as bread upon the waters.

Mindful of the Divine compassion and magnanimity which framed the prayer for those who cruelly taunted and persecuted: "Father forgive them, they know not what they do"—offences which have rankled sore through all the long round of months are soothed with the balm of forgiveness, and hatreds which have swelled like bitter tides recede to rise no more, as the tender thought awakes, "we are brothers."

Solemn, holy, and happy Christmas. Let thy bells ring "come up to the House of God." Let the man of prayer carry the aspirations of hearts in his petition. Let gentle words, and good deeds, and gladness, and rejoicing, and festivity, crown thee as a diadem above price.

Ah, well-a-day! Here I sit, a lonely old woman, knowing a sympathy and tenderness for all humanity, but separated by a distance wide as that which intervenes between life and the spirit-land, from those whom I loved, and whose happiness lay bound with mine.

Ashes of bitterness and despair, gray and pallid as those lying at my feet, were heaped upon their graves, but the gentle winds of God's mercy wafted them aside, and the dew of his grace, and the sunshine of his love, have caused to blossom upon them the lonely flowers of resignation and of unfading faith.

Memories of loving glances and tender words which can never come again are my Christmas treasures, and they sparkle in their preciousness, brighter than the jewel the trembling lover places with the first granted kiss on his mistress' white hand.

There comes to me to-night, as there has many a time before in the dark watches of sleeplessness, a vision almost like a palpable presence, of one (I will not say who or what she was to me) in whose life there was begun on the anniversary of this holy Christmas-time, long years gone by, the scenes of what proved to be to more than one heart the deepest tragedy.

It was far away from this sunny Southern clime.

The snow rested white and pure on lowland and upland, and the branches of the trees lay against the clear, brilliant sky, like the delicate tracery of a network of lace, except where the sheeny leaves and crimson berries of the holly and the ever-green hemlock strove to make decorations for the festal time. No more bird calls were sounding from hill-side to hill-side, but only the disconsolate note of starveling wanderers, as they sought their precarious meal from a stray worm or a charitable crumb.

The lowing of sleek herds driven forth from rich pastures, or the bleating of lambs as they frisked in the sunshine, no longer fell upon the ear, mellowed and made harmonious by distance, but a deep silence, making chance noises seem doubly loud, prevailed over all the scene.

This repose, however, did not extend to the substantial homes of the thriving country village.

Well-tilled fields had yielded plentiful harvests, and abundance and good cheer was on every table.

The little white-spired church had been filled to overflowing, by those who lifted up devout hearts, and as night closed in the gleaming lights, and the gay notes of music for the dance, elicited by some rustic Paganini, told of lightly tripping feet, clasped hands that thrilled to meet, soft cheeks flushed to deepest rose, floating locks, and eyes that flashed with love or joy.

Squire Hall, the rich man of the village who lived in the great house on the hill-side, this night yielded it to the sway of his fair and gentle daughter, Abbie, whose previous preparations made every room delightful with warmth and fragrance and light.

All the young and fair and light-hearted of the community, of both sexes, had been summoned to grace the merry-making, and among them Abbie glided in her rich dress, with a word and a glance, and a delighted recognition for each.

Not a few of the young gallants would fain have detained her dainty hand for the opening dance, but the favor was denied with the shy whisper, as her eyes drooped and the pink flush deepened on her cheek, "that it was promised to her father's guest, Mr. Richard Conyngsby."

The gentleman mentioned had but just arrived at night-fall, and had not yet made his appearance among us; still it was quite well known that he was a distant relative of the Squire, a medical student in a not remote city, and rich, pursuing his studies more as a branch of science than from any positive intention of following them up as an occupation in life.

It could not have been prejudice, it must have been instinct which prompted me to greet him so coldly, when the Squire introduced him to my acquaintance, for both appearance and manner were, to casual observation, prepossessing.

He was not tall, above medium height, nor was his figure of remarkable perfection, but it was set off by entire elegance of dress. His hair, which was worn quite long, and fell in curls of tutored negligence, appeared at a first glance to be brown, but in certain lights a fiery tint leaped out, which heightened it to an auburn.

His features were straight and even classic in their outline, save the mouth, where Sybaritic sensuality was traced in lines so ineffaceable by policy and circumspection that it was proof they were of Nature's workmanship. His eyes were blue—dark—and more warm and glowing than any of the color I have seen before or since.

His voice was soft and low at all times, and I observed that when it uttered words to meet a woman's ear, it had a wooing, caressing cadence, which, taken in connection with his air of devotion, and ardent glances, exerted an almost mesmeric effect, in inducing them to yield him at least temporary favor.

Before the first dance had ended, not a few had decided that sweet Abbie had learned to give at least a fair portion of her kindly feeling and admiration to her fascinating kinsman, when she had met him in the city the previous season, and argued the more than probability that she was the motive cause of his present visit.

When the mazy evolutions were concluded, however, he resigned her, without an apparent desire to monopolize her time, to other aspirants, and slowly, and with many graceful bows and words of high-bred courtesy, separated himself from the thick clustering groups of dancers.

As I lingered on the outskirts of the room I saw him pause as if struck, when his eyes fell upon a young girl who, clad with austere plainness, seemed solitary among the crowd.

What was it that made me feel like I could plant a dagger at his heart with a willing hand, when the look of pleased surprise deepened into warmest admiration, and the full red lips wreathed into a smile where treachery mingled with its winningness?

After a moment's hesitation he turned away, with the apparent intention of seeking some one, and as my glance then wandered to the person who had fixed his attention, I felt her power to win the hearts of men, though she was but an humble New England sewing girl, the daughter of a widowed mother, who, with pious aspirations for her future, had bestowed upon her at the baptismal font the sweet but, alas! as it proved, misapplied name of Christiana. She was apart, unsought and uncared for, and yet did not seem conscious of any neglect, but with proud head erect and beautiful face aglow with appreciation of the element of the beautiful in the scene before her, she stood a marvel of perfection, all palpitating with life—the life and fierce splendor of the half-tamed leopardess.

At this moment the young hostess, followed by the stranger guest, emerged from the crowd and joined her.

The costly robe of the fair heiress glittered with jewels, wherewith parental love delighted to adorn her, and that of her companion was guiltless of aught to mar its white simplicity, yet the one might have been imagined a simple peasant who was masquerading, and the other supposed a Cleopatra who had but laid aside the regal diadem.

A few whispered words between the two girls, and the gentleman was presented.

Christiana turned to greet him with the air of haughty indifference which characterized her general manner, a dower, as it seemed, from nature, but as she met the deferential salutation and caught the fixed, expressive gaze, her large, dilating eyes sank beneath their lids, and she fell into a tremor of timid confusion—she who was so daringly self-possessed, or so coldly reserved.

"Dance with me?" Mr. Conyngsby asked, as Miss Hall turned away with some laughing remark, and in his tone there came the soft, wooing inflection, which made the simple request a prayer.

"I have never danced at a party in my life," was the frank reply.

"You can, though, and well. Your soul beats rythm to the music. Come?"

Without waiting for words of consent, he took her finely moulded hand in his, examined it for an instant with a critical eye, and placed it on his arm.

At his touch a spasm of indignant defiance passed over her face, and words of refusal rose to her lips, but an involuntary glance upward caught the willful mastery of his eyes, and with a billowy swell of hitherto unknown emotions she yielded to their spell.

Familiar as were all present with the beauty of her face and form, a murmur of scarcely suppressed admiration rose among the dancers when she glided in her midst.

Fierceness and coldness both were gone.

A sense of being appreciated, a new light of happiness, softened yet irradiated the magnificent creature, and she was the impersonation of womanly beauty.

Each time that she wandered back from the figure of the set, her companion drew her to his side with a something in touch, and glance, and low breathed word, which, though imperceptible to others, conveyed to her unmistakably a message of new born devotion, and prideful satisfaction in having her near him.

It was the first incense offered at the shrine of her beauty, and it came with dangerous and intoxicating effect, not as outwardly manifested, but to her soul, to her heart, to her senses, setting them all a-thrill with rosy delight, and waking in them perceptions which had never dawned to them before.

It was a fairy evening, and the stranger who had strayed within the circle of her life yielded the enchanter's wand.

No thought wandered to the past or went out to the future, but the sum of existence seemed concentrated in the present—that present which had let in the first sunflash of light, whose radiance it seemed could never dim, whose overwhelming glory come to her as a foretaste of the blissful light of the celestial home where there is no night, and the brightness fades not away.

No presence of shadow to come—alas! and alas!

As occurs so often in the midst of a crowd, this heart-change, which revolutionized an entire being, was unnoted by those around, and so unobservant were they, that the unanimous decision, when the merry-makers separated, would have been that the burden of Richard Conyngsby's devotions had, during the entire evening, been laid at the feet of the guileless Abbie—she herself, perhaps, being the blindest among the blind.

CHAPTER II.

Orest. Did I not see
Her hate, her rage, her indignation rise
Against the ungrateful man?
Pyl. Its love me,
'Twas then she loved him most!
[Andromaque, translated by Ambrose Philips.

With the morning, a change had come. The steel-like brilliancy of the sky was gone, and in its place were dull, leaden clouds. A decided abatement of temperature had deprived the atmosphere of its bracing, exhilarating effect, and the mental barometer fell down to zero under the depressing influence.

Rain, and a consequent thaw, was impending. Christiana, who had remained to assist the young mistress in restoring order to her disordered household, and to complete, before the week closed in, garments which Abbie desired for her approaching visit to the city, and to which she imagined the dexterous fingers of the young sewing-girl imparted a peculiar grace, awoke, and arose from her sleep, but not from the delicious trance that wrapped her soul.

She did not observe that the sky was overcast, or the day was sullen, for, self-centered, she was lost to surroundings.

A beautiful reflection from the inner glow and warmth rested on her face, and as she proceeded with her simple toilet, there were pauses and rests—not of meditation—no, but of mingled remembrance and hope; this morning there was a past to recall, a future to anticipate—in the one they had met; in the other, they would meet again.

The summons to a late meal was at last given, and the family and its inmates, with tardy steps, assembled in the breakfast-room.

The last to make his appearance was Mr. Conyngsby.

He lost nothing of his attractiveness either of appearance or manner, when seen by the light of day, and made his morning salutations to his host and daughter with consummate grace and appropriateness.

The passionate, untutored heart, which had so unwarily opened its inner sanctuary to his possession, swelled and throbbed as if to break way from its confining breast at his approach, and to the glorious eyes came a black darkness, and a cold faintness to the trembling limbs.

What brought the sudden revulsion? The haughtily lifted head, the hot flush, and the wild glare as of the wounded panther preparing for the revengeful spring!

After the interchange of courtesies, a glance, a smile, a word, or a pressure of the hand for each, at the moment when she almost realized the ecstacy of his greeting, he passed with cool composure to his seat, without recognition, and apparently unconscious of her presence.

She busied herself in assisting to arrange the appointments of the coffee tray at the corner of which she was placed; but her breast heaved irregularly, her lungs seemed to refuse to perform their functions, a sense of suffocation swelled in her throat, and hot, wild tears, would have trembled in her eyes, but that a resolution firm as fate put them back.

She did not see the quick glance of investigation that was given to her face, the beauty of which was heightened by these emotions, but only observed, upon the recovery of forced calmness, that his every thought seemed centered on his fair young hostess—cousin.

When a pause of silence came in the somewhat listless circle, Christiana realized that for the first time that morning she was awake; grew conscious of the fact that it was gloomy and sullen and dispiriting, and that rain was beginning to fall with a dismal patter on the roof.

Everything took a leaden aspect, and the roseate hue faded from life more quickly than transpire the evanescent changes of a sunset sky.

She who had hitherto been so sufficient to herself, and consequently so impregnable to humiliation from neglect or coldness, suddenly had a realizing sense of her lowliness of lot among the crowd who toil for sustenance, and, with a keen pang, sunk in spirit to a level with her situation.

A sewing girl mate herself with a gentleman born and bred? She scoffed at the weakness that could have engendered such an idea, and shrunk away from the assemblage of social equals to hide herself in the quiet and dimness of the room where her labor was pursued.

This groveling of the spirit, however, was foreign to her nature, and she rose from it indignant and defiant, angry and bitter with herself, and filled with a sentiment which she believed to be contemptuous hatred for the person who had surprised her into it.

Mr. Conyngsby's visit was prolonged beyond the original period assigned for it, but Christiana, in manner, was as icily unconscious of his presence as if he had never passed before her vision.

She was not permitted, however, to put him, if she could, from her recollection, for his name had grown familiar to her benefactress and friend, and despoiled of the cousinly appendage, "Richard" was enunciated with increasing frequency by Abbie's sweet lips.

On the evening of the last day but one, of Christiana's stay in Squire Hall's household, she had gone to a window for the benefit of the last rays of the sun, for the placing of a few stitches in a nearly completed garment.

The task finished, her hands fell nerveless on the sill, and the sad, dispirited brow leaned against the cold glass.

Filled with scorn for herself, she lifted her head and refused to yield to the weakness that was stealing over her.

It was but for a moment, though; why not? There was no one to sneer, no one to taunt, no one to look askance at the pouring out of her heart's blood, though who could there be who would do it so bitterly as she herself, when the tide had ceased.

One more day he would live to her sight, and after that, my God! a long death! Never, never, never to see him again, or else, wide as was the gulf that parted her from him now, to meet once more, and have between them a chasm which death alone could bridge.

Ah! kind Lord spare me that! He does not, he shall not love, he shall not marry another.

A quick clatter of approaching horses feet rung out on the cold air, and as Christiana lifted her bowed head and straightened her disordered locks, she discovered through the deepening twilight that Abbie and Mr. Conyngsby were returning from a horseback ride.

As they drew rein under the window, she turned away, though not so quickly but that she noted the instant's detention of the slight form in his arms, and the whispered words, as he assisted Abbie to a light.

The time of her indulgence was gone by; no human eye might rest upon traces of emotion for which she hated herself.

Placing her work to one side, she bathed her aching head in cold, refreshing water, and smoothly brushed the luxurious black burnished tresses that folded back from her face.

Then she passed into Abbie's room, prepared a light, and arranged some trifles for the change of toilet which she knew Abbie would ascend to make, and stood waiting, her appearance with an exterior of composure.

Abbie was childishly demonstrative, both of love and pleasure; and as she came dancing into the room, threw her arms round the statuesque figure of her attendant companion, saying, half whisperingly:

"Be glad with me, Anna, I am so happy."

In her little flutter of pleasure she did not notice the sudden tremor that shook the stately form of her friend, nor observe that her tender clasp was unreciprocated.

Had the first impulse been yielded to, Christiana would have repelled her almost with a blow; as it was, she lifted the hat from the golden curls, drew Abbie to the light, and looked into her face long, searchingly, and even curiously, and asked, in a low, measured voice—

"Could you live if that happiness was blasted? Would you curse the destroyer?"

"No," said Abbie, to both questions; "but how strangely you look. Are you ill? Are you troubled?"

"No," to both questions, mechanically repeated Christiana, with a forced laugh. "I did but wonder if to the charm that nature had given you over hearts was added an exemption from sorrow."

"I cannot hope for that," replied Abbie, quite seriously; "but oh! dear Anna, my future lies before me now an opening vista of happiness."

Christiana released her hold on Abbie quickly, as if dreading further confidence, and said, hurriedly:

"I leave you after to-morrow, Abbie, and your approaching absence from town makes it probable that we shall not meet again. If aught should come between us, or if we should never meet, remember that I am grateful for your steadfast friendship, and thankful for my mother's sake for the assistance you have rendered me."

"Why, what change can come?" asked Abbie, "Or what shall hinder our meeting again?"

"As to the former, we know not what lies for us in the hand of time; regarding the latter, it is death and sometimes absence that parts the tenderest ties. I have thought of leaving here, of trying a wider field, of ceasing to be a sewing girl," she wound up bitterly.

"Ah, now you are not kind," quickly replied Abbie. "You make me think that surely by some inadvertent act, I have wounded, have hurt you."

"Far from it. You are always good and gentle and kind," said Christiana, with a truthful magnanimity, "and it is I who am perverse and wayward and fitful past your understanding. Do not let it worry you. Let me kiss you, and then go to your happiness."

Pressing her crimson lips on Abbie's blue-veined lids with an almost passionate tenderness, Christiana turned abruptly away, and withdrew to hide the anguish which had this evening swelled to such dangerous life in the darkness and solitude of her own room.

CHAPTER III.

"And Rosalie was loved—not with that pure
And holy passion which can age endure;
But loved with wild and self-consuming fires—
A torch which glares—and scorches—and expires."
L. E. L.

Abbie had appointed that the succeeding day should be passed by Mr. Conyngsby, her father and herself, with some friends, resident a few miles distant.

Mr. Conyngsby appeared at the table languid and dispirited, and announced himself so much indisposed as to almost preclude the possibility of his fulfilling the engagement, whereupon it was proposed that it should be entirely abandoned.

To this proposition he would not listen, insisting that they should go, and declaring his intention of at least making an effort to accompany them.

The result was that when they assembled for departure, an addition had been made to the expedition in the shape of Mr. Conyngsby's riding horse, which occurrence he explained by saying that if he found himself too much indisposed to remain through the day, it would enable him to return without deranging the stay of Abbie or the Squire.

Of these arrangements Christiana was in ignorance, as she had found an excuse for not appearing at the morning meal.

At Abbie's request she had promised to remain through the day, and supervise during her absence the domestic affairs.

When she found they had departed, she gave herself no leisure for reflection, but busied herself by rendering what was entirely superfluous assistance in all the details of household affairs.

Without its presenting itself in the shape of a positive thought, she seemed intuitively to dread the emotions that would wake in idleness and solitude, and was strong in her determination to give them no encouragement.

At last the minutest arrangement that ingenuity could suggest had been made, the scarcely tasted noon-day meal had been cleared away, her humble wardrobe had been packed for removal to her mother's roof, and there still remained a frightful length of the day to be passed.

Wandering restlessly through the house, she at last entered the room which contained Abbie's piano. Mechanically sinking into the seat before it, she passed her fingers over the yielding keys with an untutored skill that marked the native talent, though the simple, expressive strains elicited no response from the soul which had heretofore gone out in such rapture to their call.

The voice which essayed to cast its melodious richness on the air, this day would breathe no note that did not tell of sadness—sadness the hardest to be borne, the most grievous that can come in life, that which the young heart knows, when cast back upon itself, and all its tender hopes lie withered in an untimely blight.

This would not do.

Rising hastily, she looked around for some object that might interest or amuse, among the works of art and beauty, which decorated the apartment, but without success.

At last she bethought herself of the Squire's study, where, among the choice assemblage of books, she had often sought information or recreation of mind.

When she entered, and the door swung to after her, on noiseless hinges, it shut her in, to surroundings which formed a scene of luxurious comfort.

The softly tempered light, the glowing fire, the genial atmosphere, the antique book-cases, the few and carefully selected pictures, the graceful tables, and chairs suggestive of repose in every curve, all were calculated to minister to the senses, and through them lull inward storms to peace.

Christiana was for a brief space lulled to forgetfulness and rest.

There come to her ardent imagination a glimpse of love reciprocated, and the delight of a union that should be eternal.

The beautiful lips syllabled the loved name, the hand idly toying, traced the letters that formed it, her own grew to light beside it, and there come a sense of pleasure, weak though she knew it to be, at the companionship.

It was not for self-indulgence though that she had sought this solitude; it was not to listen to heart-whispers, but to hush them to sleep, to reduce them to a silence that should know no waking.

With an effort she aroused herself.

The desired book was sought and found.

Christiana resumed her seat in the arm-chair which stood by the large table in the center of the room, and commenced its perusal.

Words and sentences passed before her eyes, and pages were turned, but the thoughts, whether grave or gay, did not reach the appreciation of her mind.

The form, however, was continued a wearisome space of time, until at last a full sense of its mockery seemed to burst upon her, and the book fell, and her head bent, while a low cry, as if she had been stricken a mortal blow, issued from her lips.

Then come a tempest of sobs and tears, and the murmur oft-repeated, as though she plead with cruel fate: "I love him! I love him!"

All the proud strength of her nature seemed leveled to the dust, and, in the midst of the wreck, she lay at last voiceless, rigid and despairing.

As she rested, motionless, her head pressed on the table, her features hid from the light of day, the door opened without premonitory sound, and the object of this wayward, untutored love, the cause of this abject abandonment to grief, appeared in the entrance.

That he had been apprised of Christiana's presence, and that it was her he sought, was made manifest by the quickness with which the door was drawn to and the eager step that placed him at her side.

As he bent over her there was love in his eyes—such love as he could feel; but, alas! where there should have been pity for the wrecked peace that alone could have bowed that proud head, there was a gleam of exultation, and a too appreciative glance for the grace that lay in every pose of the slender figure; and a quick taking in of the joint tracery of their names, showed that he was not entirely given up to solicitude and concern for her distress.

As for Christiana, it was impossible to decide whether she thought it the chance entrance of a servant, or whether conscious of Conyngsby's presence, she was sullenly defiant, and refused either to recognize it or fly.

Ardent as had been his gaze, and the gesture accompanying it, as if he would have encircled her in his arms, his first words were cold, and even took an inflection of mockery. They were, as he lifted the paper from the table and read,

"Richard."

"Christiana."

"Harmonious in sound, bold and free in chirography; written too, if I mistake not, with the left hand."

Christiana lifted her pallid face, her eyes glittering with indignant wrath.

"Give it me," she said, holding the hand indicated, and which Conyngsby had often before noted that she used as others do their right, extended towards the paper he still retained.

The request was not complied with, and he returned her steadfast, yet scintillant gaze, with one of laughing admiration.

"It is said that those to whom the singular habit belongs have the grasp which never grows cold in friendship, and can strike unerringly the blow that is to revenge trust betrayed," she added in a measured, unvarying voice, which yet had a threatening inflection.

"I feel that with the peculiarity I have the gift."

"Then it is the hand I love," he answered, impetuously seizing it, and pressing dozens of kisses on taper fingers, dimpled back, rosy palm, and rounded wrist, before the astonished girl could snatch it from his hold.

"How dare you? I hate you—such insult is for me alone," incoherently gasped the wounded and angered Christiana. "I hate you," she repeated, and the beautiful hand was dashed against the table with a force that seemed sufficient to shatter its slender bones, and then wrapped and hid away in her handkerchief as if it offended her sight.

"Christiana," came in a deep, low voice, its intonation bearing reproof and tenderness. Unchanged as was her mien, and deeply aggrieved as she knew herself to be, the girl's heart thrilled in response to the soft tone.

After a moment's pause, as if to subdue agitation, Conyngsby continued:

"If to have yielded you every thought of my mind, every pulse of my heart, every aspiration of my soul, is to insult you, I have.

"If to prize one glance from your eyes more than the warmest gaze of favor from all the world of women beside, or to value one touch of that dear hand beyond the tenderest embrace of love from those of rarest mould, be to insult you—I do.

"If to love, to love against every conviction of reason and expediency, to worship so that every gift of fate or fortune is as naught, if that my idol is withheld, be to insult and merit hatred, I have sinned, and your return is simple justice."

Christiana felt the barrier of indignation and wounded pride melting away before these impassioned confessions, but remembrance nerved her to say:

"You have no right to speak of love to me. You have given Abbie cause to think that all your preference was for her."

"I do love Abbie as a sweet cousin, or a gentle sister; if she has made other interpretation of my tenderness she is self-deceived. Have you, too, been deceived? Have you doubted, Christiana, at whose shrine was laid my life-long devotion?

"Never for one instant since the moment when your hand first rested in mine, have I been recreant to my faith in your love. I am not even now, while expressions of hatred are yet warm upon your lips. I only wait to have those sounds chased away by the most precious words that ever blessed the ear of man. Christiana, I love you."

One step he advanced, with entreaty in voice and gesture.

The love it appealed to would not be put back. Forgetful of coldness and indignity, unmindful of inconsistency or treachery, the stately form was caught yielding to his breast, while the lips which had breathed of hate, whispered truthfully, "I love you better than life."

When they parted there was on the finger of the bruised and swollen hand which had been so grievously martyrized, a plain gold circlet, the pledge of truth that Christiana should be the wife of Richard Conyngsby.

There had been a promise made, how exacted the party bound could scarce have told, that as yet no mention of the engagement should be made to her mother, to whose roof she returned before the sun had sunk to rest.

After this there were, in the few remaining days of Mr. Conyngsby's stay, frequent interviews between the lovers, all but one the result of chance, so far as Christiana was concerned. Sometimes she returned from these meetings joyous and elated, sometimes sad and depressed, and sometimes with a wandering, wavering, unsettled spirit, which bespoke a combat within.

At last the time came for Mr. Conyngsby's departure, and he left the Squire's, carrying with him the golden opinions of all, and was driven to the depot to take his seat which had been quite ostentatiously engaged in the railroad train of that day.

Abbie was consoled for his absence by the thought that ere many days they should meet again, and looks and glances, and some whispered words had made her believe that the sun of his happiness would suffer eclipse until he found himself again at her side.

CHAPTER IV.

"And she has left the aged one to sleep
Her nightly couch with tears for that lost child,—
...... who left her age to weep,
When that the tempter flattered her, and wiled
Her steps away, from her own home beguiled."

After this come the beginning of the end. A morning dawned with every premonition of a storm.

Long, soughing breaths of wind came wandering up the valley—were palpaple to the touch, were lost, retreating and still retreating, with a moan disconsolate, as might have come from souls whose corses, weed-shrouded, were the playthings of the waves.

The gusts increased in violence until noon, when the trees, which had at first but bent and tossed their arms in supplication, commenced their keen cry of anguish; and when night fell the blast went shrieking and screaming into space, with a fury that drove all things living to shelter.

It was a fearful night; and when the light of day came again to earth, and its fury was spent, there went up a wail from a desolate hearthstone, and a cry of one who refused to be comforted, because the child of her old age had left her to the the ministrations of those who held not the same blood in their veins.

There was a piteous tale told by quivering lips, of sleepless eyes, which had searched the scriptures of Him, who had said unto the tempest, "Peace, be still;" of a consciousness that had come of lingering footsteps at her door, and the suggested idea that possibly a daughter was seeking comfort and companionship.

Her name, "Christiana," had been spoken; whereupon, the steps had receded in haste, and the mother's eyes had only been assured of her presence by the fluttering of her robe, as it swept across the outer threshhold.

Down, into the darkness and storm of the night, she had followed, crying, "Christiana, Christiana," but without response.

One glimpse she had had of her "ewe lamb;" it was as it passed athwart the long gleam of light, shed from her mid-night lamp of prayer, and then was lost in shadow—lost, alas! to her, in the shadow of supposed guilt, and certain desertion of duty.

Her voice struck silent by the fearful thought, the widow had borne to her strained ears through the rush of wind and rain, the quick rattle of wheels, and then conviction setting deep that she was abandoned of filial love, she had tottered home to lie senseless till the morn—then to wake and know, it was not a horrid vision conjured of the night, but a too hard reality.

Public rumor soon coupled the names of Christiana and Richard Conyngsby.

But why? Had he not taken honorable leave before her disappearance from our midst.

None would tell from what source the thought had had its origin.

Under its fatal influence one frail lily bud drooped its head, nor waited for the soft breath of spring to warm it to new life, but fell to earth, and lay at rest on her peaceful bosom.

Gentle Abbie, as the world said, succumbed to rapidly developed disease which had come an inheritance from the young mother who had slept so many years in a consumptive's grave.

Be that as it may, the keen pang which comes of love betrayed, struck the first blow at the roots of her life.

CHAPTER V.

"And this, then, is love's ending. It is like
The history of some fair Southern clime:
Hot fires are in the bosom of the earth,
And the warm soil puts forth its thousand flowers,
Its fruits of gold—summer's regality;
And sleep and odors float upon the air,
Making it heavy with its own delights;
At length the subterranean element
Bursts from its secret solitude, and lays
All waste before it. The red lava storm
Sweeps like a pestilence; and that which was
A garden for some fairy tale's young queen,
Is one wild desert, lost in burning sand."

For twice twelve months, the space which Christiana had occupied in the community since childhood, was left a blank.

Then there come wandering across the ocean's waves a vague story of a queenly beauty, who had been shrined by love's care in a home that realized all tales of oriental splendor, under the sunny skies of France.

It told how the noblest of the land, and those whose learning had lifted them to fame, bent in adulation at her feet. It said that poets yielded homage at her shrine, and counted words as weak when used to paint her charms; but it also told that this worship was received with such favor as the sovereign lady grants to the humble subject of her domain—she turning always to the one dearer to her heart than life and all its duties.

Then come a pause, and after that the details of an awful tragedy.

Over the wine cup words were uttered which chance gave to the wronged one's ears, and changed her to an avenging fury.

She learned, even while her heart was swelling with its wealth of tenderness—learned it in one fell sentence—heard it told with laughing sneers, that she was dupe, mistress, victim, and the words she thought had made her wife, nought save a skillful mockery. She heard the specious lie narrated and applauded which had won her from her poor old mother, and the shelter of her humble home—heard the vaunting boast of ingenuity which had detained money, that should have been sacred, from its expiatory mission to the sefar-off shores—and listened to the banters and anticipations as to what extent of time might elapse before the rare toy would grow wearisome and be thrown aside for objects of newer interest.

Can you wonder that that proud and wayward heart, and high-strung fiery nature, grew crazed with horror at its own abasement?

Can you wonder that in the dark hours of that night dreadful deeds were enacted, which made that house a house of blood? Can you wonder that a rash hand let out two lives which had mingled here, and which might not go to their dread hereafter one without the other, but must stand together—accuser and accused?

Judicial and medical investigation proved that the murderous blow had been given left-handed, and the wound in Richard Conyngsby's traitorous breast corresponded to the weapon which was buried to the heart of the dead woman, who lay a suicide at his feet.

Lost, lost in shadow!

Lost in the threefold gloom of the world's stigma, crime, and the impenetrable darkness of the grave.

"'Tis a wild tale—and sad, too, as the sigh,
That young lips breathe when love's first dreamings fly;
When blight, and canker worm, and chilling showers,
Come withering o'er the warm heart's passion flowers."

'Tis a sad story for the Christmas time, and o'er true; but pass it not by, you who think it a light thing to betray a woman's trust; and list its teachings, fair maiden, in that sweet spring, when love dawns to the girlish heart, and shun not the holy sympathy that distils from a mother's breast into words of precious counsel.

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