THE MYSTERY OF NATURE.

The works of God are fair for naught,
Unless our eyes, in seeing,
See hidden in the thing the thought
That animates its being.

The outward form is not the whole,
Or every part is moulded
To image forth an inward soul,
That finally is unfolded.

The shadow, pictured in the lake
But every tree that trembles
In cast from some living form, just the sake
Of that which it resembles.

The dew falls nightly, not alone
Because the meadows need it,
But on an errand of its own,
To human souls that need it.

The stars are lighted in the skies,
Not merely for their shining,
But, like looks of loving eyes,
Have meanings worth divining.

The waves that moan along the shore,
The winds that sigh in blowing,
Are sent to each a mystic lore
Which men are wise in knowing.

The clouds around the mountain peak,
The coquetting of their winding,
Have secrets which, to all who seek,
Are secrets in the finding.

Thus Nature dwells within our reach,
But though we stand so near her,
We will interpret half her speech,
With care too dull to hear her.

Whoever, at the coarsest sound,
Shall listen to the finest,
Shall learn the noisy world go round
To music the divinest.

Whoever yearns to see aright
Because his vision is tender,
Shall catch a glimpse of heavenly light,
In every earthly splendor.

So, since the universe began,
And till it shall be ended,
The soul of nature, soul of man
And soul of God are blended.

THE HALLOW-EVE MYSTERY.

A Legend of the Black Hall.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEARERS OF THE BURNING HEARTS.

"Ever thine own to feel and know
That burns in Elsie's breast of snow."

Near the end of a dark autumn day, not many years ago, a young couple, returning from their bridal tour, arrived at the old city of Norfolk, and, taking a hack, drove directly to the best inn.

The gentleman registered himself and his party as Harold Ashby and lady, of Black Hall, Virginia, and two servants.

"Give them a private parlor and chamber communicating for our own use, and a couple of rooms for our servants," said Mr. Berners, as he handed his hat and cane to the bowing waiter.

"Certainly, sir. What would you like for tea?" asked the landlord.

"Oh, anything you please, so that it is nice and neatly served," said Mr. Berners, with a slightly impatient jerk of his hand, as if he would have been rid of his obsequious host.

"Ashes! anything! please! It is easy to see what ails him. He lives upon love just now; but he'll care more about his bill of fare a few weeks hence," chuckled the landlord, as he let the public parlor to the excessive bridegroom's orders.

The bridegroom was no sooner left alone with his bride than he seated her in the easiest armchair, and began with affectionate zeal to untie her bonnet strings and unclasp her mantle.

"You make my maid a useless appendage, dear Lyon," said the little lady, smiling up in his eyes. "You love me so much! Yet not too much either! for oh! if you should ever cease to love me, or even if you were ever to love me less,"—I dare not think, Lyon!" she added, she muttered in a long, deep, shuddering tone.

"Why, Sybil, my wife, my beautiful mad creature! You are a true daughter of your house! A Berners of the burning heart! A Berners of the boiling blood! A Berners of whom it has been said, that it is almost as fatal to be loved as to be hated by—"

"Suddenly, in the midst of their converse, they heard the sound of weeping—low, deep, heart-broken weeping.

Both paused, looked at each other, and listened.

The sound seemed to come from a room on the opposite side of the passage to their own apartment.

"What is that?" inquired Sybil, looking up to her husband's face.

"I seems to be some woman in distress," answered Lyon.

"Oh! see what it is, dear, will you?" entreated Sybil.

She was herself so happy that it was really dreadful to be reminded just then that sorrow should exist in this world at all.

But if she could have foreseen the woe that was to come to herself, to her husband, and to the object of her sympathy, she would have held Lyon back, as with the grip of fate, from the mission on which she now hastened.

For the weeper was a beautiful woman—a deserted wife—named Rosa Blondelle, who, although but a few days landed from the vessel which had brought her from Europe, had been robbed of her jewels and money by her husband, and then left to her fate in the Norfolk hotel.

Sybil was deeply moved by this lady's story, and insisted on taking Mrs. Blondelle home with her to Black Hall, and Mr. Berners gave his assent to her wishes.

But before they got ready to set out on their journey, Sybil bitterly repented of the arrangement. Mrs. Blondelle was so enchantingly lovely, that Sybil was at once begun to yield to her charms; and Sybil, for the first time, saw him pay the homage of admiration to other beauty than her own.

This kindled the fires of jealousy in her heart, and by the time they reached Black Hall, those fires had become fainter, but inextinguishable flame.

And as jealous had ever been known to forgive an object of jealousy.

Black Hall, the abode of Mr. and Mrs. Berners, was a palatial old Virginia mansion, situated in the heart of the Black Valley, a few miles from Blackville, the county town. It had been in Mrs. Berners's family for generations, and was renowned for the scenes of gayety and hospitality which had transpired beneath its roof.

Mrs. Berners, the last of her race, to give vent to the emotions of her unbridled heart, resolved to relinquish the festivities of the time, and for that purpose announced a mask ball for the ensuing All-Hallow Eve, and at once set about giving the house in readiness.

One, while she was absent at Blackville, making purchases, Lyon and Rosa became so absorbed in one another, as to forget the lyrics of the entry of Mrs. Winterose, the old housekeeper, who found them sitting closely side by side, her hand clasped in his. On hearing Sybil's return, the old housekeeper described this scene to her, with many exaggerations. The revelation seemed to freeze Sybil into ice.

"Oh, my heart! my heart!" she exclaimed, turning deathly pale. And then, after a long silence, she bitterly added, "Deceived! Betrayed! Scorned! Laughed at! Well, well!" she continued, laying her hand on her heart, since deceit is the fashion of the day, I too will be in the fashion; I too will wear a mask of smiles! But behind that mask I will watch! —Oh, how I will watch! I will see, I will know, alone will I play a part, but before it, and perhaps after it? None shall ever know how I watch, what I see, until I descend with the fell sweep of the eagle. And henceforth let me remember that I am a daughter of the house of Berners, who never failed a friend or spared a foe. And, oh, let the spirit of my fathers support me, for I must endure until I can avenge!"

And she could those triffers with sacred love whose wanderers on the brink of a fearful abyss—have seen the look of her face then, they would have fled from each other forever, rather than to have dared the desperation of her wounded spirit.

"But they saw nothing, knew nothing, suspected nothing!

And thus all the three drifted towards the awful brink of ruin!

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST FATAL HALLOW EVE.

It was All-Hallow Eve, a night long anticipated with delight by the whole neighborhood, and much longer still remembered by some!

The occasion of Sybil Berners's mask ball; and Black Hall, the Black Valley, and the town of Blackville were all in a state of unprecedented excitement; for this was the first entertainment of the kind that had ever been given in the locality, and the gentry of three contiguous counties had been invited to assist at it.

The throng at Black Hall was great, and the characters assumed by the maskers were various and well sustained.

But far the most beautiful, far the most terrible figure in the pageantry of the evening was that of Sybil Berners! She had chosen for her character the unprecedented part of the impersonation of the Spirit of Fire. It suited well with her whole nature. Her costume was but the outward sign of the inward fervor.

Sybil had confided the secret of her costume to no one but her husband, who was himself attired as "Harold the Saxon," while Mrs. Blondelle assumed the character of "Edith the Fair."

Sybil had not been long in the room, when the concerting of her husband and Mrs. Blondelle drove her nearly to distraction. Observing that whenever she came near them, they were on their guard, Sybil exchanged dirgeous with one of her gaudy-masked guests, Beatrix Pendleton, and was thus enabled to watch her husband and his companion without the least restraint.

Sybil observed that a masker, representing Death, whom nobody seemed to know, watched Mrs. Blondelle as closely as she did herself; and she subsequently had occasion to remember and ponder upon this fact.

Seating herself in a secluded place, she was soon joined by her husband, who, as she fancied, had grown cold, and, as she thought, had left her to her fate.

"Why, who has done this?" he wildly demanded, as, almost paralyzed with horror, he knelt beside her, and tried to stanch the gushing wound from which her life-blood was fast welling.

She opened her bloodless lips, now pallid in death, and gasped forth the words:

"She—Sybil—your wife. I told you she would do it, and she has done it. Sybil Berners has murdered me," she whispered. Then raising herself with a last dying effort, she cried aloud, "Hear, all! Sybil Berners has murdered me! Let all beware! Sybil Berners is in readiness."

Even in that supreme moment Lyon Berners's first thought, almost his only thought, was for his wife! He looked up to see who was there—who had heard this awful, this fatal charge.

All were there! guests and servants, men and women, dressed in the gay dresses shown to their rooms, and the others having gone, as fate would have it, the Black Death went into the little reception parlor to meet her. Berners, who had heard her that morning he could never extend to her more than a brother's affection.

"Then give me a brother's kiss," he signed.

"It is not much to ask, and I have no one to kiss me now. So give me a brother's kiss, and let me go," she pleaded plaintively.

He hesitated for a moment, and then bending over her, he said:

"It is the first, and for your own sake it must be the last, Rosa!" and he pressed his lips to hers.

It was the last as well as the first; for at the meeting of their lips they were stricken as under as by the fall of a thunderbolt!

And Sybil, blazing with wrath, like a spirit from the Lake of Fire, stood between them.

She looked not upon her husband, who fled from heaving, palpitating, flashing forth the lightnings of anger.

"Sir, sir!" exclaimed her husband, thunder-struck, appalled.

She waved her hand towards him, as if to implore or command silence.

"There is nothing to say to you," she muttered, in low and husky tones, as if aches were in her throat. "But to you!" she cried, her voice rose clear and strong as she turned and pointed her hand and her arm towards Rosa, who was leaning in affright against the wall—"to you, traitress, who have come between the true husband and his wife—in the morning you must leave this house, you have deceived me, if you do not, or if ever I find your false face here again, I will tread down and crush out your life with less remorse than ever I see hot upon a spider! I will, as I am a Berners!

And now, begone, and never let me see your form again!"

Rosa Blondelle, who had stood spell-bound by the terrible gaze and overwhelming words of Sybil, the wronged wife, now suddenly threw up her hands and with a low cry fled from the room.

And Sybil dropped her arm and her voice at the same instant, and stood dumb and motionless.

And now, at length, Lyon Berners spoke again.

"Sybil!" he said, "this house is yours! You must do as you please. But this I tell you: that if the same hour which sees that poor and friendless young creature driven from the shelter of this roof, I leave it too, and leave it forever!"

Lyon Berners really meant this, or thought to bring his fiery-hearted wife to terms by the threat. He was mistaken in his reading.

"Oh, go!" she answered, bitterly—"go as soon as you like, Lyon Berners. Your injured—good-bye," she said, and with a wave of her hand she passed from the room.

He was mad to have spoken as he did; madder still to let her leave him as she had, mad he was soon to learn.

Lyon Berners remained walking up and down the room some time longer. The lights were all out, and the servants had left the hall, and he continued to pace up and down the parlor floor, until suddenly piercing shrieks smote his ear.

In great terror he started forward and instinctively rushed towards Rosa's room, from the door of which the shrieks came, and there he was met by his wife, leaning against the wall—ro ver, trifiers, who have come between the true husband and his wife—in the morning you must leave this house, you have deceived me, if you do not, or if ever I find your false face here again, I will tread down and crush out your life with less remorse than ever I see hot upon a spider! I will, as I am a Berners!

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