

Mountain Gentilme.

"WE GO WHERE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES POINT THE WAY;—WHEN THEY CEASE TO LEAD, WE CEASE TO FOLLOW."

BY ANDREW J. RHEV.]

EBENSBURG, THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 1851.

VOL. 7.—NO. 23.

SECRET TALE.

From Chamber's Edinburgh Journal.

The Conflict of Love—A Tale of Real Life.

In the north of France, near the Belgian frontier, is situated a small, obscure town. It is surrounded by high fortifications, which seem ready to crush the mean houses in the centre. Inclosed so to speak, in a net-work of walls, the poor little town has never sent a suburb to wander on the smooth green turf outside; but as the population increased, new streets sprang up within the boundary, crowding the already narrow space, and giving to the whole the aspect of some huge prison.

The climate of the north of France during half the year is usually damp and gloomy. I shall never forget the sensation of sadness which I felt when obliged by circumstances to leave the gay, sunny south, and take up my abode for a while in the town I have described. Every day I walked out; and in order to reach the nearest gate, I had to pass through a narrow lane, so very steep, that steps were cut across it in order to render the ascent less difficult. Traversing this disagreeable alley, it happened one day that my eyes rested on a mean-looking, gray-colored house, which stood detached from the others. Seldom, indeed, could a ray of sunshine light up its small, green-painted windows, and penetrate the interior of its gloomy apartments. During the winter the frozen snow on the steps made it so dangerous to pass through the narrow alley, that its slippery pavement seemed quite deserted. I do not remember to have met a single person there in the course of my daily walk; and my eyes to rest with compassion on the silent gray house. "I hope," thought I, "that its inhabitants are old—it would be fearful to be young there!" Spring came; and in the narrow lane the ice changed into moisture; then the damp gradually dried up, and a few blades of grass began to appear beneath the rampart wall. Even in this gloomy passage there were tokens of awakening life, but the gray house remained silent and sad as before. Passing by it, as usual, in the beginning of June, I remarked, placed on the window-sill of the open casement, a glass containing a bunch of violets. "Ah," thought I, "there is a soul here!"

To love flowers, one must either be young, or have preserved the memories of youth. The enjoyment of their perfume implies something ideal and refined; and among the poor a struggle between the necessities of the body and the instincts of the soul. I looked at the violets with a feeling of sadness, thinking that they probably formed the single solace of some weary life. The next day I returned. Even in that gloomy place the sweet rejoicing face of summer had appeared, and dissipated the chill silence of the air. Birds were twittering, insects humming, and one of the windows in the old gray house was wide open.

Seated near it was a woman working busily with her needle. It would be difficult to tell her age, for the pallor and sadness of her countenance might have been caused as much by sorrow as by years, and her cheeks was shadowed by a profusion of rich dark hair. She was thin, and her fingers were long and white. She wore a simple brown dress, a black apron and white collar; and I remarked the sweet, though faded bunch of violets carefully placed within the folds of her kerchief. Her eyes met mine, and she gently inclined her head. I then saw more distinctly that she had just reached the limit which separates youth from mature age. She had suffered, but probably without a struggle, without a murmur—perhaps without a tear. Her countenance was calm and resigned, but it was the stillness of death. I fancied she was like a drooping flower, which, without being broken, bends noiselessly toward the earth.

Every day I saw her in the same place, and, without speaking, we exchanged a salutation. On Sundays I missed her, and concluded that she walked into the country, for each Monday a fresh bunch of violets appeared in the window. I conjectured that she was poor, working at embroidery for her support; and I discovered that she was not alone in the house, for one day a somewhat impatient voice called "Ursula!" and she rose hastily. The tone was not that of a master, neither did she obey the summons after the manner of a servant, but with an expression of heartfelt readiness, yet the voice breathed no affection; and I thought that Ursula perchance was not loved by those with whom she lived.

Time passed on, and our silent intimacy increased. At length each day I gathered some fresh flowers, and placed them on the window-sill. Ursula blushed, and took them with a gentle, grateful smile. Clustering in her girdle, and arranged with-

in her room, they brought summer to the old gray house. It happened one evening that I was returning through the alley a sudden storm of rain came on. Ursula darted toward the door, caught my hand as I was passing, and drew me into the narrow passage which led to her room. Then the poor girl clasped both my hands in hers, and murmured, softly, "Thanks!" It was the first time I had heard her voice, and I entered her apartment. It was a large, low room, with a red-tiled floor, furnished with straw chairs ranged along the walls. Being lighted by only one small window, it felt damp and gloomy. Ursula was right to seat herself close by the casement to seek a little light and air. I understood the reason of her paleness—it was not that she had lost the freshness of youth, but that she had never possessed it. She was bleached like a flower that has blossomed in the shade.

In the farthest corner of the room, seated on arm-chairs, were two persons, an old man and woman. The latter was knitting without looking at her work—she was blind. The man was unemployed; he gazed vacantly at his companion without a ray of intelligence in his face; it was evident that he had overpassed the ordinary limit of human life, and that now his body alone existed. Sometimes in extreme old age the mind, as though irritated by its long captivity, tries to escape from its prison, and in its efforts, breaks the harmonious chord that links them together. It chafes against the shattered walls; it hurls not taken flight, but it feels itself no longer in a place of rest.

These, then, were the inhabitants of the silent gray house—a blind old woman, an imbecile old man, and a young girl faded before her time by the sadness and gloom that surrounded her! Her life had been a blank; each year had borne away some portion of her youth, her beauty, and her hope, and left her nothing but silence and oblivion. I often returned to visit Ursula, and one day, while I sat next her in the window, she told me the simple story of her life.

"I was born," said she, "in this house, and I have never quitted it; but my parents are not natives of this country—they came here as strangers, without either friends or relatives. When they married, they were already advanced in life; for I can not remember them ever being young. My mother became blind, and this misfortune rendered her melancholy and austere, so that our house was enveloped in gloom. I was never permitted to sing, or play, or make the slightest noise; very rarely did I receive a caress. Yet my parents loved me; they never told me that they did; but I judged their hearts by my own, and I felt that I loved them. My days were not always as solitary as they are now; I had a sister—Her eyes filled with tears, but they did not overflow; they were wont to remain hidden in the depths of her heart. After a few moments, she continued—"I had an elder sister: like our mother, she was grave and silent, but toward me she was tender and affectionate. We loved each other dearly, and shared between us the cares which our parents required. We never enjoyed the pleasure of rambling together through the fields, for one always remained at home; but whichever of us went out, brought flowers to the other, and talked to her of the sun, and the trees, and the fresh air. In the evenings we worked together by the light of a lamp; we could not converse much, for our parents used to stumber by our side; but whenever we looked up, we could see a loving smile on each other's face; and we went to repose in the same room, never lying down without saying 'Good-night! I hope, dear sister, you will sleep well! Was it not a trial to part? Yet I do not murmur: Martha is happy in heaven. I know not if it is the want of air and exercise, or the dull monotony of her life, which caused the commencement of Martha's illness, but I saw her gradually languish and fade. I alone was disquieted by it; my mother did not see her, and she never complained. With much difficulty I at length prevailed on my sister to see a physician. Alas! nothing could be done; she lingered for a time, and then died. The evening before her death, as I was seated by her bed, she clasped my hand between her trembling ones. 'Adieu! my poor Ursula!' she said: 'take courage, and watch well over our father and mother. They love us, Ursula; they love us, although they do not often say so. Take care of your health for their sakes; you can not die before them. Adieu! sister: don't weep for me too much, but pray to our heavenly Father. We shall meet again, Ursula!' Three days afterward, Martha was borne away in her coffin, and I remained alone with my parents. When my mother first heard of my sister's death she uttered a loud cry, sprang up, took a few hasty steps across the room, and then fell on the ground. I raised her up, and led her back to her arm-chair. Since then

she has not wept, but she is more silent than before, save that her lips move in secret prayer. I have little more to tell. My father became completely imbecile, and at the same time lost nearly the whole of our little property. I have succeeded in concealing this loss from my parents; making money for their support by selling my embroidery. I have no one to speak to since my sister's death: I love books, but I have no time for reading—I must work. It is only on Sunday that I breathe the fresh air; and I do not walk far, as I am alone. Some year since, when I was very young, I used to dream while I sat in this window. I peopled the solitude with a thousand visions which brightened the dark hours. Now a sort of numbness has fallen on my thoughts—I dream no more. While I was young, I used to hope for some change in my destiny; now I am twenty-nine years old, and sorrow has chased my spirit: I no longer hope or fear. In this place I shall finish my lonely days. Do not think that I have found resignation without a conflict. There were times when my heart revolted at living without being loved, but I thought of Martha's gentle words, 'We shall meet again, sister!' and I found peace. Now I often pray—I seldom weep. And you, madam—are you happy?"

I did not answer this question of Ursula's. Speaking to her of happiness would be like talking of an ungrateful friend to one whom he had deserted.

Some months afterward, on a fine autumn morning, as I was preparing to go to Ursula, I received a visit from a young officer who had lately joined the garrison. He was the son of an old friend of my husband's, and we both felt a lively interest in his welfare. Seeing me prepared for a walk, he offered his arm, and we proceeded toward the dwelling of Ursula. I chanced to speak of her; and as the young officer, whom I shall call Maurice d'Erval, seemed to take an interest in her story, I related it to him as we walked slowly along. When we reached the old gray house he looked at her with pity and respect, saluted her, and withdrew. Ursula, startled at the presence of a stranger, blushed slightly. At that moment she looked almost beautiful. I know not what vague ideas crossed my brain, but I looked at her, and then, without speaking, I drew the rich bands of her hair into a more becoming form. I took a narrow black velvet collar off my neck, and passed it round hers, and I arranged a few brilliant flowers in her girdle. Ursula smiled without understanding why I did so; her smile always pained me—there is nothing more sad than the smile of the unhappy. They seem to smile for others, not for themselves. Many days passed without my seeing Maurice d'Erval, and many more before chance led us together near the old gray house.

It was on our return from a country excursion with a large gay party. On entering the town, we all disappeared in different directions: I took the arm of Maurice, and led him towards Ursula's abode. It was one of those soft, calm autumn evenings, when the still trees are colored by the rays of the setting sun, and every thing breathes repose. It is a time when the soul is softened, when we become better, when we feel ready to weep without the bitterness of sorrow. Ursula, as usual, was seated at the window. A slanting ray of sunshine falling on her head lent an unwonted lustre to her dark hair; her eyes brightened when she saw me, and she smiled her own sad smile. Her sombre dress showed to advantage her slender, gracefully-bending figure, and a bunch of violets, her favorite flower, was fastened in her bosom. There was something in the whole appearance of Ursula which suited harmoniously the calm, and beauty of the evening, and my companion felt it. As we approached, he fixed his eyes on the poor girl, who, timid as a child of fifteen hung down her head, and blushed deeply. Maurice stopped, exchanged a few words with us both, and then took his leave. But from that time he constantly passed through the narrow alley, and paused each time for a moment to salute Ursula. One day, accompanied by me, he entered her house.

There are hearts in this world so unaccustomed to hope, that they can not comprehend happiness when it comes to them. Enveloped in her sadness, which, like a thick veil, hid from her sight all external things, Ursula neither saw nor understood. She remained under the eyes of Maurice as under mine—dejected and resigned. As to the young man, I could not clearly make out what was passing in his mind. It was not love for Ursula, at least so I thought, but it was that tender pity which is nearly allied to. The romantic soul of Maurice pleased itself in the atmosphere of sadness which surrounded Ursula. Gradually they began to converse; and in sympathizing with each other on the misery of life, they experienced that happi-

ness whose existence they denied. Months passed on; the pleasant spring came back again; and one evening, while walking with a large party, Maurice d'Erval drew me aside, and after some indifferent remarks, said, "Does not the most exalted happiness consist in making others share it with you? Is there not great sweetness in imparting joy to one who would otherwise pass a life of tears?" I looked at him anxiously without speaking. "Yes," said he, "dear friend, go ask Ursula if she will marry me!"

An exclamation of joy was my reply, and I hurried toward the gray house. I found Ursula, as usual, seated at her work. Solitude, silence, and the absence of all excitement had lulled her spirit into a sort of drowsiness. She did not suffer; she even smiled languidly when I appeared, but this was the only sign of animation she displayed. I feared not giving a sudden shock at this poor paralyzed soul, or stirring it into a violent tumult of happiness; I wanted to see if the mental vigor was extinct, or merely dormant. I placed my chair next hers, I took both her hands in mine, and fixing my eyes on hers, I said, "Ursula, Maurice d'Erval has desired me to ask you if you would be his wife!"

The girl was struck as if with a thunderbolt; her eyes beamed through the tears that filled them, and her blood, rushing through the veins, maniled richly beneath her skin. Her chest heaved, her heart beat almost audibly, and her hands grasped mine with a convulsive pressure. Ursula had only slumbered, and now the voice of love awakened her. She loved suddenly; hitherto she might, perchance, have loved unwittingly, but now the veil was rent, and she knew that she loved.

After a few moments, she passed her hand across her forehead, and said, in a low voice, "No; it is not possible!"

I simply repeated the same phrase. "Maurice d'Erval asks you if you will be his wife," in order to accustom her to the sound of the words, which, like the notes of a harmonious chord, formed for her, poor thing, a sweet, unwonted melody.

"His wife!" repeated she with ecstasy; "his wife!" And running toward her mother, she cried, "Mother, do you hear it? He asks me to be his wife!" "Daughter," replied the old blind woman, "my beloved daughter, I knew that, sooner or later, God would recompense your virtues."

"My God!" cried Ursula, "what hast Thou done for me this day! His wife! beloved daughter!" And she fell on her knees with clasped hands, and her face covered with tears. At that moment footsteps were heard in the passage. "It is he!" cried Ursula. "He brings life!" I hastened away, and left Ursula glowing with joyful happiness to receive Maurice d'Erval alone.

From that day Ursula was changed. She grew young and beautiful under the magic influence of joy, yet her happiness partook in some measure of her former character: it was calm, silent, and reserved; so that Maurice, who had first loved a pale, sad woman, seated in the shade, was not obliged to change the coloring of the picture, although Ursula was now happy. They passed long evenings together in the low, dull room, lighted only by the moon-beams, conversing and musing together.

Ursula loved with simplicity. She said to Maurice, "I love you—I am happy—and I thank you for it!" The old gray house was the only scene of these interviews. Ursula worked with unabated diligence, and never left her parents. But the walls of that narrow dwelling no longer confined her soul; it had risen to freedom, and taken its flight. The sweet magic of hope brightens not only the future, but the present, and through the medium of its all-powerful prism changes the coloring of all things. The old house was as mean-looking and gloomy as ever, but one feeling, enshrined in the heart of a woman, changed it to a palace. Dreams of hope, although you fleet and vanish like golden clouds in the sky, yet come to us ever! Those who have never known you, are a thousand times poorer than those who live to regret you!

Thus there passed a happy time for Ursula. But a day came when Maurice entering her room in haste, said, "Dearest we must hasten our marriage; the regiment is about to be moved to another garrison, and we must be ready to set out."

"Are you going far, Maurice?"

"Does it frighten my Ursula to think of seeing distant countries? There are many lands more beautiful than this."

"Oh, no, Maurice, not for myself, but for my parents: they are too old to bear a long journey." Maurice looked at his betrothed without speaking. Although he well knew that, in order to share his wandering destiny, Ursula must leave her parents, yet he had never reflected seriously on the subject. He had foreseen her grief, but confiding in her affection, he had thought that his devoted love would

soothe every sorrow of which he was not himself the cause. It was now necessary to come to an explanation; and sad at the inevitable pain which he was about to inflict on his betrothed, Maurice took her hand, made her sit down in her accustomed place, and said, gently, "Dearest, it would be impossible for your father and mother to accompany us in our wandering life. Until now, my Ursula, we have led a loving, dreamy life, without entering soberly into our future plans. I have no fortune but my sword; and now, at the commencement of my career, my income is so small, that we shall have to submit together to many privations. I reckon on your courage; but you alone must follow me. The presence of your parents would only serve to entail misery on them, and hopeless poverty on us."

"Leave my father and my mother!" cried Ursula.

"Leave them, with their little property, in this house; confide them to careful hands; and follow the fortunes of your husband."

"Leave my father and my mother!" repeated Ursula. "But do you know that the pittance they possess would never suffice for their support—that without their knowledge, I work to increase it—and that, during many years, I have tended them alone?"

"My poor Ursula!" replied Maurice, "we must submit to what is inevitable.—Hitherto you have concealed from them the loss of their little fortune; tell it to them now, as it can not be helped. Try to regulate their expenditure of the little which remains; for, alas! we shall have nothing to give them."

"Go away, and leave them here! Impossible! I tell you, I must work for them!"

"Ursula, my Ursula!" said Maurice, pressing both her hands in his, "do not allow yourself, I conjure you, to be carried away by the first impulse of your generous heart. Reflect for a moment: we do not refuse to give, but we have it not.—Even living alone, we shall have to endure many privations."

"I can not leave them," said Ursula, looking mournfully at the two old people slumbering in their arm-chairs.

"Do you not love me, Ursula?" The poor girl only replied by a torrent of tears. Maurice remained long with her, pouring forth protestations of love, and repeating explanations of their actual position. She listened without replying; and at length he took his leave. Left alone, Ursula leaned her head on her hand, and remained without moving for many hours. Alas! the tardy gloom of happiness which brightened her life for a moment was passing away; the blessed dream was fled never to return! Silence, oblivion, darkness, regained possession of that heart whence love had chased them. During the long midnight hours who can tell what passed in the poor girl's mind? God knew: she never spoke of it.

When day dawned, she shuddered, closed the window, which had remained open during the night, and, trembling from the chill which seized both mind and body, she took paper and pen, and wrote—"Farewell, Maurice! I remain with my father and my mother: they have need of me. To abandon them in their old age would be to cause their death: they have only me in the world. My sister, on her death-bed, confided them to me, saying, 'We shall meet again, Ursula!' If I neglected my duties, I should never see her more. I have loved you well—I shall love you always. You have been very kind, but I know now that we are too poor to marry. Farewell! How hard to write that word! Farewell, dear friend—I knew that happiness was not for me."

Ursula.

I went to the old gray house, and so did Maurice; but all our representations were useless—she would not leave her parents. "I must work for them!" she said. In vain I spoke to her of Maurice's love, and, with a sort of cruelty, reminded her of her waning youth, and the improbability of her meeting another husband. She listened, while her tears dropped on the delicate work at which she labored without intermission, and then in a low voice she murmured, "They would die: I must work for them!" She begged us not to tell her mother what had passed. Those for whom she had sacrificed herself remained ignorant of her devotion. Some slight reason was assigned for the breaking off of the marriage, and Ursula resumed her place and her employment near the window, pale, dejected, and bowed down as before.

Maurice d'Erval possessed one of those prudent, deliberating minds which never allow themselves to be carried away by feeling or by impulse. His love had a limit: he prayed and interceded for a time, but at length he grew weary, and desisted.

It happened one day, while Ursula was seated in her window, that she heard a

distant sound of military music, and the measured tramping of many feet. It was the regiment departing. Tremblingly she listened to the air, which sounded as a knell in her ears; and when the last faint notes died away in the distance, she let her work fall on her lap, and covered her face with her hands. A few tears trickled between her fingers, but she speedily wiped them away, and resumed her work; she resumed it for the rest of her life. On the evening of this day of separation—this day when the sacrifice was consummated—Ursula, after having bestowed her usual care on her parents, seated herself at the foot of her mother's bed, and, bending toward her with a look, whose tearful tenderness the blind old woman could not know, the poor deserted one took her hand, and murmured softly, "Mother! you love me; do you not? Is not my presence a comfort to you?—Would you not grieve to part with me, my mother?"

The old woman turned her face to the wall, and said in a fretful tone, "Nonsense, Ursula. I'm tired; let me go to sleep!" The word of tenderness which she had sought as her only recompense was not uttered; the mother fell asleep without pressing her daughter's hand; and the poor girl, falling on her knees, poured out her sorrows in prayer to One who could both hear and heal them.

From that time Ursula became more pale, more silent, more cast down than ever. The last sharp sorrow bore away all traces of her youth and beauty. "All is ended!" she used to say; and all, save duty, was ended for her on earth. No tidings came of Maurice d'Erval. Ursula had pleased his imagination, like some graceful melancholy picture, but time effaced its coloring from his memory, and he forgot. How many things are forgotten in this life! How rarely do the absent mourn each other long!

One year after these events, Ursula's mother began visibly to decline, yet without suffering from any positive malady.—Her daughter watched and prayed by her bed, and received her last benediction. "Once more she is with thee, Martha," sighed Ursula: "be it mine to watch over her in heaven." She knelt down, and prayed by the side of the solitary old man. She dressed him in mourning without his being conscious of it; but on the second day he turned toward the empty arm-chair next his own, and cried, "My wife!"

Ursula spoke to him, and tried to divert his attention; but he repeated, "My wife!" while the tears rolled down his cheeks.—In the evening, when his supper was brought, he turned away from it, and fixing his eyes on the vacant chair, said, "My wife!"

Ursula tried every expedient that love and sorrow could suggest; but in vain.—The old man continued watching the place which his wife was wont to occupy; and refusing food, he would look at Ursula, and with clasped hands, in the querulous tone of a child imploring some forbidden indulgence, repeat, "My wife!" In a month afterward he died. His last movement was to raise his clasped hands, look up to Heaven, and cry "My wife!" as though he saw her waiting to receive him. When the last coffin was borne away from the old gray house, Ursula murmured softly, "My God! couldst thou not have spared them to me a little longer?" She was left alone; and many years have passed since then.

I left the dark old town and Ursula to travel into distant lands. By degrees she ceased to write to me, and after many vain efforts to induce her to continue the correspondence, I gradually lost all trace of her. I sometimes ask myself, "What has been her fate? Is she dead?" Alas! the poor girl was ever unfortunate: I fear she still lives!

Compliment to American Ship-Builders.—The Baltimore Sun of Monday says—"An English mercantile house in New York received by the Pacific orders from parties in England to have a clipper ship of 1,100 tons built in this country. The admirable running qualities of the clipper have between our ports and San Francisco seems to have waked up the English merchants, and the receipt of such an order here is a tacit acknowledgment of the superior skill of American shipwrights. We may also mention, as another complimentary circumstance, the fact that the British Government has chartered the American clipper ship *Raman*, to convey troops to Bombay.

A beautiful form is better than a beautiful face; a beautiful behavior is better than a beautiful form. It gives a higher pleasure than statues or pictures; it is the finest of the fine arts.

Time is a ship which never anchors.