

THE COMEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. A. ABBEY, AND COMMENT BY ANDREW LANG.

XII.—WINTER'S TALE.

NONE of Shakespeare's comedies are more appropriately named than the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* and *Winter's Tale*.

Midsummer night not only was, but still is, the season when goblin, ghost, and fairy play their pranks beneath the moon. My friend, a certain game-keeper in a certain part of England, is a person of good sense, of excellent temper, of wonderful keen sight, of some reading, and not more superstitious than a sceptical member of the Society for Psychical Research. Yet he has but now told me a tale of his one solitary abnormal experience—abnormal enough in all conscience, and shared by a gallant officer in her Majesty's service. The events (which were congenial to *Puck*, but not to Shakespearian criticism in general) occurred on Midsummer night. Hence I infer that the spells of that season are as potent now as when Shakespeare chose the name of the great fairy comedy, the most magical page in the literature of the world.

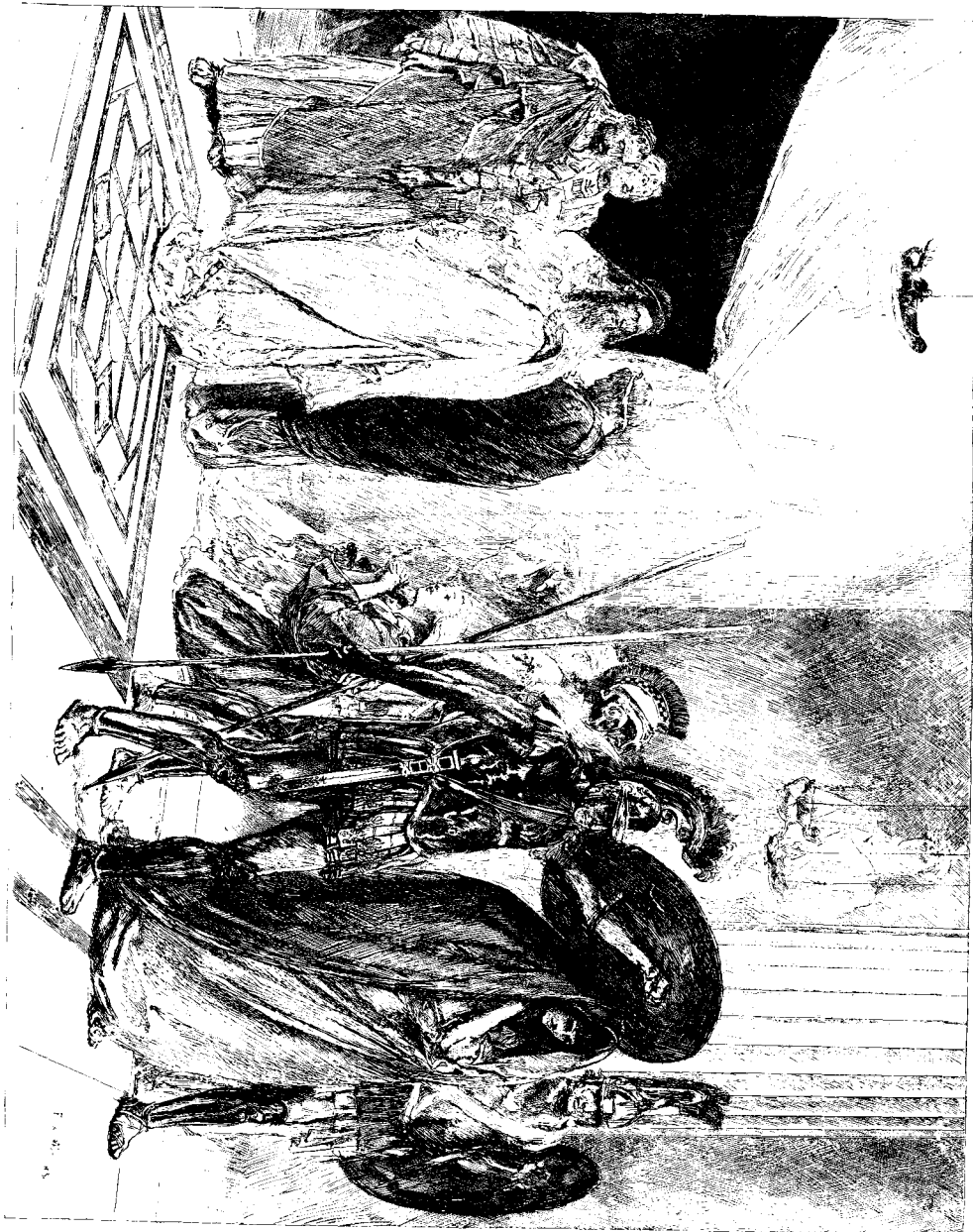
Not less appropriate to the matter is the title of *Winter's Tale*. The old Greeks spoke of "a winter's dream, when the nights are longest," and in Elizabethan speech "a winter's tale" corresponded to the French *conte à dormir debout*. An endless long rambling story of exposed children, reanimated corpses, recovered heirs—"this news, which is called true, is so like an old tale," says the Second Gentleman—such is the matter of *Winter's Tale*. Wandering about through a generation, skipping long tracts of years, the topic and theme of *Winter's Tale* entirely lacks unity. Such dramas as this, or rather dramas on such a *donnée* as this, were mocked at by Sir Philip Sidney in a famous passage of *The Defence of Poesy*:

"Now of time they are much more liberal: for ordinary it is that too young princes fall in love" (here a chaste generation requires a change in the phrase; let us say, she becomes a mother); "her fair boy is lost, groweth a man, falleth in

love, and is ready to get another child; and all this in two hours' space, which, how absurd it is in sense, even sense may imagine; and art hath taught, and all ancient examples justified, and at this day the ordinary players in Italy will not err in."

However, Shakespeare chose not to heed such objections as Sidney's, and was wholly indifferent to the unities of Aristotle. For this negligence Ben Jonson seems to have glanced severely at Shakespeare, in his conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden. Now there can be no doubt that Aristotle and Sidney and Ben Jonson are right in theory. A work of art should be duly and decorously organized. The instinct, as it were, of the Greeks told them this; they naturally evolved the unities, in practice (there are certain exceptions), long before Aristotle extracted, from the use and wont of the stage, his celebrated rule. In this matter of art we encounter a curious paradox. Nothing is really so easy as the construction of a plot, the organization of a play. To say that a plot holds water, and is not marred by inconsistencies and incoherencies, to say that a drama is *bien charpenté*, is to say very little. These excellences are almost mechanical; any playwright, any critic, could show how the organization of *A Winter's Tale*, how the conduct of a Waverley novel, might be made more "correct," more in accordance with the canons of Aristotle and Sidney. Thus Euripides would have put all the earlier part of the *Winter's Tale*, all the affairs of Hermione, Polixenes, and Leontes, into a prologue. Apollo (as his oracle takes part in the play) might have prologized and told the beginnings of the tale. I cannot see that this is really a more artistic plan than "Enter Time, as Chorus," at the opening of Act IV. The predecessors of Euripides, Æschylus and Sophocles, would probably have made the drama begin in the second generation (the generation of Perdita and Florizel), and would have

THE IMPRISON-
MENT OF THE
QUEEN.
Act II., Scene 1.



made some messenger, nurse, or courtier tell the tale of the earlier generation in the course of the play. "And so," says Sidney, "was the manner the ancients took by some *nuntius* to recount things done in former time or other place."

All these expedients are easy, familiar, traditional. It is easy to wind up a novel or a play with a seemly, satisfactory *dénouement*. We could all do these things—we critics and intelligent amateurs. We are like Andrea del Sarto, in Mr. Browning's poem, criticising Raphael:

"That arm is wrongly put; and there again,
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak; its soul is right.
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it.
.... And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare—yet, only you to see—
Give the chalk here, quick,—thus the line
should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!"

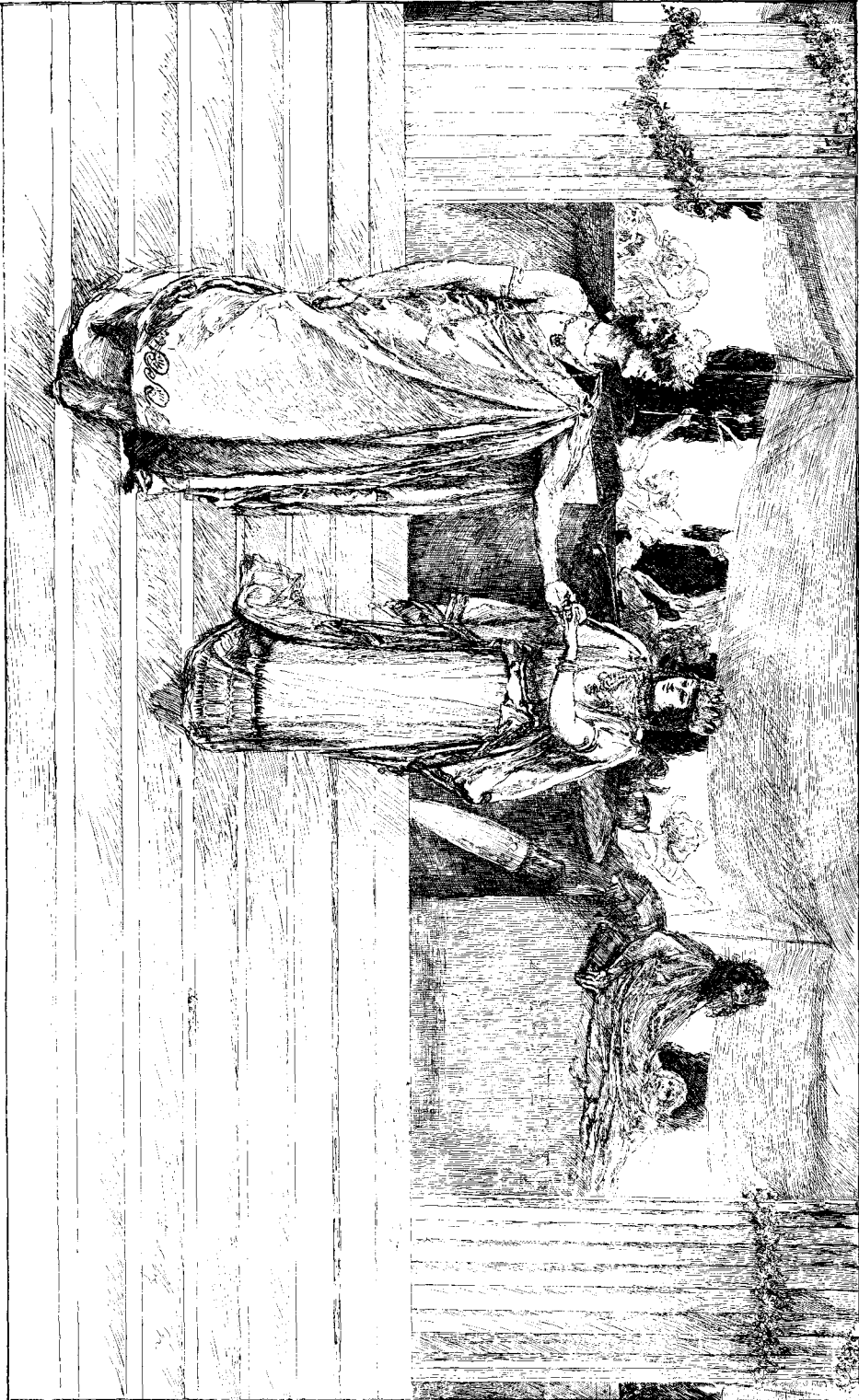
This is the paradox and this the puzzle. Why, when it is easy enough to get the body right, the drawing right—why do artists who can give the soul neglect the body? Any one almost can see the great good-humored faults in the *dénouements* of Shakespeare, Molière, Scott. The carelessnesses of the English and the Scotch poets "leap at the eyes." Shakespeare cannot but have known, Scott cannot but have known, that a very little care would better, in the eyes of the ordinary spectator or critic, the structure of their plays or tales. But they, who could give us the soul, displayed often a lordly indifference to the body, to the drawing of the arm, as in Andrea's soliloquy.

Thus in the *Winter's Tale* Shakespeare seems to have deliberately illustrated Sidney's criticism. It is as if he had read, or heard, such remarks, and had said, "I shall fly in the face of all this learning, and yet make an immortal masterpiece." To men who naturally grasp the essentials, the life of art, like Shakespeare and Scott, the rules, the unities, even finish, may seem almost contemptible. In *Winter's Tale* we may almost fancy that Shakespeare is mocking at contemporary critics. "You say that I am not a university man, no scholar. Very good. I shall make, by design, such blunders, such anachronisms, as even a dunce could hardly make inadvertently, and yet my work shall be immortal." Shakespeare was so entirely devoid of vanity, of touchy self-consciousness, that, doubtless, he never

deliberately reflected thus. Yet he piled up anachronisms only to be matched in Thackeray's *Barbazure*; "Four hundred knights and six times as many archers fought round the banner of Barbazure at Bouvines, Malplaquet, and Azincour. For his services at Fontenoy against the English, the heroic Charles Martel was appointed the fourteenth Baron, Hereditary Grand Boot-jack of the Kingdom of France."

Shakespeare sins in this large plausible manner. The sea-shore of Bohemia; the Delphic oracle appealed to by a Sicilian tyrant who has wedded a daughter of the Czar; a statue of this lady executed by Giulio Romano—these among other playful excesses does Shakespeare commit, throwing in printed ballads at an age earlier than the last utterance of the last oracle, the immortally beautiful strain rescued for us by Cedrenus. Perhaps even Autolycus is intended for the old classic Autolycus who "outdid men in skill with the oath," as Homer informs us. I like to think of Ben Jonson, that learned poet, in his stall at the first night of the play, and bounding in his seat as he hears the monstrous anachronisms come out all unashamed. It may be disrespectful to think that Shakespeare went too far wrong in a spirit of humorous despite against pedantic critics, but the hypothesis has its temptations.

Mr. Halliwell Phillipps thinks that the name of the *Winter's Tale* "is probably owing to its having been produced in the winter season." This reason would only have a very temporary meaning. The phrase "winter's tale," as Mr. Halliwell Phillipps himself remarks, was usual in English with the sense of a very extravagant story. The materials of the comedy are adapted, as is well known, from *Pandosto*, a novel by Robert Greene, published not later than 1588. The hero and heroine, Dorastus and Fawnia, correspond to Florizel and Perdita. Their adventures, reduced to the shape and price of a chap-book, amused the populace of England till the end of the last century. Our own age of "progress" has entirely destroyed the purely literary culture of which the populace once had its share. In addition to the charmed imagination of our oldest literary inheritance, folk-lore, the people read in cheap editions the tale of Troy, which had fascinated Caxton's contemporaries, and the adventures of Dorastus



HECUBA ENTREATS POLIXENES—*Act I, Scene II*



ENTER TIME, AS CHORUS.

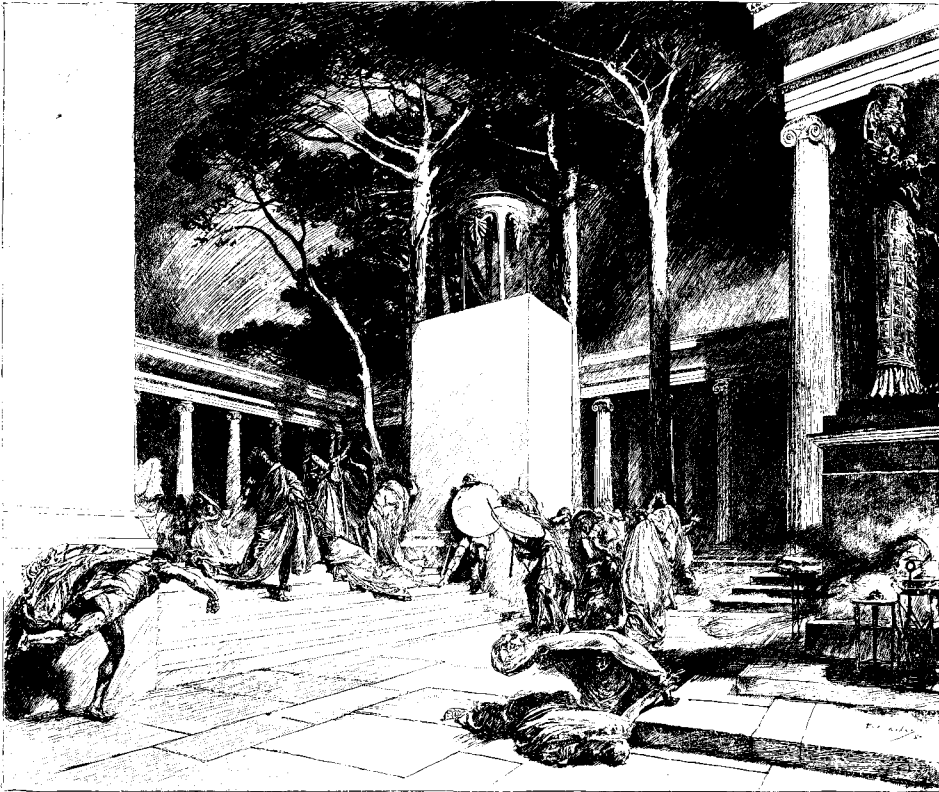
and Fawnia, which had beguiled the leisure of Elizabethan courtiers. Now, for poetry, the populace has music-hall songs; for literature, it studies cheap appeals to political passions and cheap scandal about people in general. These are the fruits of progress and of education, as far as letters are concerned.

The novel of Robert Greene reads as if

it had been conveyed from the French or the Italian, but its foreign source, if foreign source it possesses, has not yet been discovered. The great popularity of the story, no doubt, depends on the pure and disinterested passion of Dorastus. Here is a prince who loves a shepherd's daughter *pour le bon motif*. His royal father may rage, "but Love shall still be Lord

of all." This in itself is very popular, but when fidelity gets its worldly reward, when the shepherdess proves to be no shepherdess, but a princess in disguise, then the ancient popular sentiment (which was not envious) received all the pleasure which dreams could give. Fawnia enjoyed the advantages of the Claimant to the Tichbourne estates. Popular sentiment espoused his cause, for that he was a Butcher. Popular logic also, without difficulty, recognized in Arthur Orton a "B. B. K.," a Baronet. Fawnia was dear to the people as a daughter of the people, still more dear as the daughter of a king "kep' out of her own." Recognitions of exposed children, or of children "changed at nurse," have been dear to human fancy since the earliest days of the Greek drama; nay, since earlier days. Trojan Paris was a prince, exposed on Mount Ida, and "kep' out of his own." Such a plot is still dear to the unsophisticated novel-reader, and will ever be dear. *Repetita placebit.* In a recent book, Mr.

Gosse, perhaps ironically, says that the old, old plots are outworn, and expresses the desire entertained by Culture for a novel which shall contain instructive information about the pilchard fishery. This must assuredly be an employment of the figure called irony. The mass of mankind that reads fiction does not care a baubee for the details of the pilchard fishery. Humanity is like children, who cry for the same old story over again. The lost child, the wandering heir, have aroused the world's hopes and fears since long before Homer's day. These plots sufficed for Sophocles, Euripides, and Shakespeare. In their plays we see that the staleness of the plot, the fact that the stories have been told and retold eternally, is a matter of no importance. There is only a certain very limited number of stories to tell. Mr. Kipling and Mr. Haggard, in the last year, have gone back to Romulus and Remus, to Signy and Sinfjötli, to the Wolf Brethren. For his part, Shakespeare never, perhaps, dreamed of



THE ORACLE DEFIED.—Act III., Scene II.



PERDITA DISCOVERED — Act III., Scene III.

inventing. The old, old story, a threadbare plot, sufficed him, as in *Winter's Tale*.

The falsely accused queen of the fairy tales and legends like *Berthe aux grans piés*; the exposed child; the course of true love; the feigned death—these sufficed him as materials for a deathless poem. Neither he and his contemporaries, nor Homer and his contemporaries, nor Sophocles and his contemporaries, regarded Romance as a kind of Blue Book, valuable for its interesting information about the pilchard fishery. We are warned not to prophesy before we know, yet I would gladly pledge my most indispensable garment to secure funds for a bet that the exposed child and the faithful shepherdess will outlive all the novels which rely on moving details about the sardine trade or the millinery business.

In adapting Greene's novel, Shakespeare made many changes, some of them demanded by the necessities of the stage. He altered all the names of the characters except that of Mopsa. He inverted the

relations of Sicily and Bohemia. This process makes it inevitable that Bohemia must have a seaboard. That geographical rearrangement has been learnedly apologized for by students of mediæval history, but Shakespeare does not need their assistance. One fantasy among so many is not worth explaining away.

The jealousy of Leontes (Pandosto in the novel) is gradual in the tale; inevitably it is represented as a sudden madness on the stage. This is not, however, wrong in psychology. Many mental changes, especially that of religious conversion (as in Colonel Gardiner's case), seem sudden to the patient. They have really been maturing for long in the dim regions of the "subliminal self." Thus Leontes becomes explicitly conscious of his jealousy in a moment when Hermione and Polixenes display their honorable and blameless affection by those salutations which were so offensive to John Knox. The old English, from the time of Erasmus at least, down to that of Mr. Samuel Pepys, were a great people for kissing.



AUTOLYCUS.



PERDITA'S FOSTER-RELATIVES.—*Act IV., Scene II.*

Mr. Pepys records his discomfort when he saw a French friend kissing Mrs. Pepys, though, as he says, he "knows there is no harm in it." In similar circumstances, Leontes carries his sentiment very much further than Mr. Pepys did. He awakes, as it were, to find himself jealous, the captive and victim of a credulous passion. But the passion (as in Greene's novel) had probably been maturing for months. The personal meetings of kings, as Comines argues very acutely, are invariably dangerous. Even such old

friends from boyhood as Leontes and Polixenes could not meet without danger, and James V. was not as ill-advised as Mr. Froude supposes when he did not meet Henry VIII. Such opportunities, Comines thought, are too much for mortal virtue, and so it proves in the play; Leontes conspires to poison Polixenes. In the novel, Pandosto (Leontes) commits suicide; in no other way can he escape from his grief and shame.

The unvarying smiling tolerance of Shakespeare, his godlike charity for his

POLIXENES AND
PERDITA.
Act IV, Scene III.



creatures, rescues the wretched Leontes from this doom. Shakespeare regards his jealousy as a long madness, out of which he wakens at the last. In the novel the accused queen also dies; the statue by Giulio Romano is Shakespeare's own device, or rather the use of it here is his device.

As to the date of the play, Mr. Halliwell Phillips quotes an entry in the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert. In 1623 he licensed "an old play, *A Winter's Tale*," previously licensed by his predecessor, Sir George Buck, and likewise by himself. Now, in 1603, Buck received a reversionary grant of the office of Master of the Revels, and entered fully on the office in 1610. As deputy, he had been licensing plays long before 1610, and the *Winter's Tale* might, conceivably, be as old as 1603. Probably it was not acted, however, before 1610; it alludes to the song "Whoop, do me no harm, good man," of which the music was published in 1610 by William Corkine, in "Ayres to sing and play to the Lute and Basse Viol." On May 15, 1611, the comedy was witnessed at the Globe Theatre by Dr. Forman, the notorious astrologer.* The doctor made some notes on the piece. "Remember also the rog that came in all tottered like Coll Piper;" he draws a moral against trusting "feined beggars." The *Winter's Tale* was not published during Shakespeare's lifetime; at least there is no trace of a separate publication. Had we a quarto, perhaps some obscurities in an early speech of Leontes might be cleared up.

Though seldom seen on the modern stage in England (for Mr. Irving would be something over-parted with Florizel, and Polixenes is not always "on"), the *Winter's Tale* is probably among the very foremost favorites of students. The frank and noble Hermione, that heart of gold; Mamillius, that rare and living study of a boy; the loyal Paulina, a termagant for the right, like Beatrice; the half-insane Leontes, an object at once of pity and contempt—are all among Shakespeare's most original portraits. The picture which Polixenes draws of boyish friendship,

"We were, fair queen,
Two lads, that thought there was no more behind,
But such a day to-morrow as to-day,
And to be boy eternal,"

* The curious may consult "*Forman, a Tale*," in three volumes. London: 1819.

contains the very sum of the delight of youth. The affecting misery of the earlier acts, wherein we are only less pained for Hermione than, in *Othello*, for Desdemona, is happily relieved by the golden rustic world of Bohemia. Perhaps those Bohemian shepherds are the most winning of all Shakespeare's humorous rustics. They pun less than most of such characters in Shakespeare; they are shrewd, but not quite shrewd enough to escape from the most enchanting of all Shakespeare's rogues, Autolycus. Shakespeare decidedly likes rogues. As Thackeray says, in a kindred spirit, "the mind loves to repose, and broods benevolently over this expanded theme. What thieves are there in Paris, oh heavens! . . . or else, without a rag to their ebony backs, swigging quass out of calabashes, and smeared over with palm-oil, lolling at the doors of clay huts in the sunny city of Timbuctoo!" There is no doubt that Shakespeare likes his rogues; he cannot bear to see them punished. He gives Autolycus some of his prettiest songs: "How bless'd are we, that are not simple men!" says this delicious knave. The jangling country girls, the good old shepherd, the honorable clown with his "first gentlemanlike tears," are all rare foils to Autolycus. As for Perdita, Shakespeare has deliberately made her one perfection, the flower of beauty, innocence, goodness; fragrant and fair as the blossoms which she bestows, like a happier Ophelia, on her visitors. In the affection of Florizel and Perdita, Shakespeare again, as in *The Tempest*, draws a love soft, pure, and passionate, of indefeasible loyalty: the ideal first and last love, so rarely found on earth. That Florizel's conduct is not exactly filial, the audience forgives, for Florizel's father is only a king, with royally conventional ideas, and he must submit to the sway of "Love, that is a great master." But these graces are not hid, as in Sir Andrew Aguecheek's case, and need no pointing to and no commendation. Out of his hackneyed old materials Shakespeare has made an immortal poem, ringing with every note of pain and pleasure, of jealousy and mirth; fragrant, too, of an older, a fresher, a happier, and a wiser world than ours. For out of that world "country Content" had not yet taken flight; Content, the lost good angel, whom no Reforms, no Revolutions, no innumerable multitude of votes, can ever recall to earth.

TRILBY.*

BY GEORGE DU MAURIER.

Part Fourth.

MID-DAY had struck. The expected hamper had not turned up in the Place St.-Anatole des Arts.

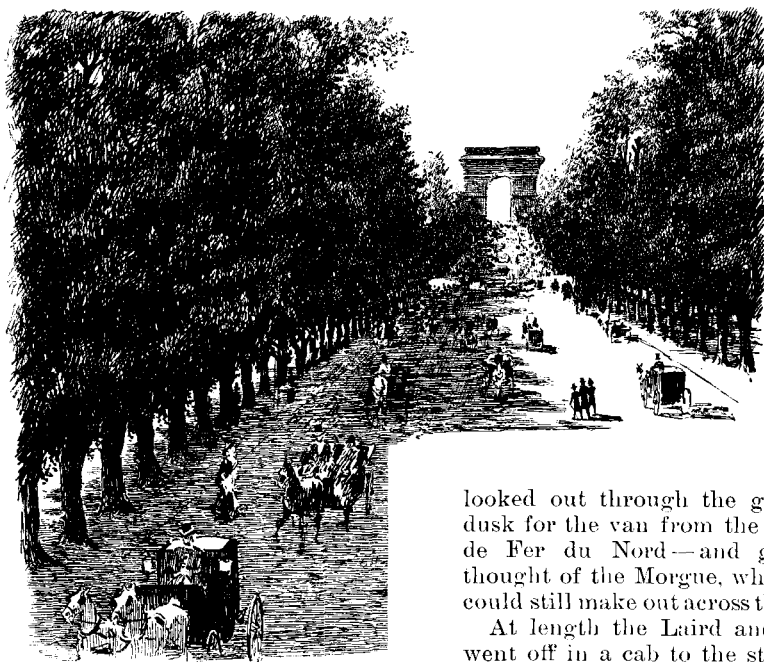
All Madame Vinard's kitchen battery was in readiness; Trilby and Madame Angèle Boisse were in the studio, their sleeves turned up, and ready to begin.

At twelve the Trois Angliches and the two fair blanchisseuses sat down to lunch in a very anxious frame of mind; and

that did not rightly belong to her, and of course getting her own way in the end.

And that, as the Laird remarked, was her confounded Trilbiness.

Two o'clock—three—four—but no hamper! Darkness had almost set in. It was simply maddening. They kneeled on the divan, with their elbows on the window-sill, and watched the street lamps popping into life along the quays--and



SOUVENIR.

finished a pâté de foie gras and two bottles of Burgundy between them, such was their inquietude.

The guests had been invited for six o'clock.

Most elaborately they laid the cloth on the table they had borrowed from the Hôtel de Seine, and settled who was to sit next to whom, and then unsettled it, and quarrelled over it—Trilby, as was her wont in such matters, assuming an authority

looked out through the gathering dusk for the van from the Chemin de Fer du Nord—and gloomily thought of the Morgue, which they could still make out across the river.

At length the Laird and Trilby went off in a cab to the station—a long drive—and, lo! before they came back the long-expected hamper arrived, at six o'clock.

And with it Durien, Vincent, Sibley, Lorrimer, Carnegie, Petrolicocnose, Dodor, and l'Zouzou—the last two in uniform, as usual.

And suddenly the studio, which had been so silent, dark, and dull, with Taffy and Little Billee sitting hopeless and despondent round the stove, became a scene of the noisiest, busiest, and cheerfulest animation. The three big lamps were lit, and all the Chinese lanterns. The pieces of resistance and the pudding were

* Begun in January number, 1894.