

THE OMEN.

THERE was a cheerful and even noisy Evening Party in the parlour of Crofthead, the humble residence of a Scottish Laird, who inherited a small estate from a long line of obscure ancestors. The family consisted of himself, wife, and only daughter, and about half a dozen servants belonging to the house, the dairy, and the farm. A good many neighbours had now been gathered together at a tea-drinking; and the table, on this occasion, exhibited various other liquids, in tall green bottles, and creaked on its old legs under the weight of a world of viands. Not a few pretty girls and good-looking young men were judiciously distributed round the board; and from the frequent titterings and occasional hearty bursts of laughter, it could not be doubted that much delicate wit and no little broad humour was sported during the festive hour. The young ladies from the Manse were in excellent spirits, and the comely daughters of Mr M'Fayden, a retired Glasgow manufacturer, lent themselves both to the jammed cookies and the jocularity of the even-

ing with even more than their usual animation. But though she was somewhat more silent than her wont, and had even a slight shade of sadness on her face not quite congenial with the scene of merriment, not one of them all looked so well as the Daughter of the good Old People; and her simply braided auburn hair, with no other ornament than a pink ribband, had an appearance that might well be called elegant, when gently moving among the richly adorned love-locks and ringlets that waved so seducingly round the brows and cheeks of the other more ambitious and unmerciful young ladies. There was not one in the whole parish, high or low, rich or poor, that could for a moment be compared with "sweet Jane Nasmyth;" this was so universally allowed, that she had even no rivals; and indeed had her beauty excited the envy of her companions, her unpretending manners, and the simplicity of her whole character, would have extinguished that feeling, and converted it into willing admiration and affectionate regard. "Sweet Jane Nasmyth" she was always called; and that expression, although at first hearing it may not seem to denote much, was indeed just the one she deserved in her loveliness that courted not the eyes which it won, and in her goodness which flowed on uninterruptedly in its own calm and unconscious course of home-born happiness.

It was now a beautiful moonlight night, and Jane Nasmyth contrived to leave the merry party, whether

unobserved or not is uncertain, and glide away through the budding lilacs into a small Arbour in the garden. It could not be supposed that she went there to sit alone and read the stars; a friend joined her in the bower, and she allowed herself to be taken into his bosom. For two years had she been tenderly and truly beloved by Arthur Crawford, a young man of an ancient but decayed family, and now a Lieutenant in the Navy. He was to join his ship next day—and as the frigate to which he belonged had a fighting character, poor Jane, although it was not the first time she had parted from him, was now, more than she had ever been, depressed and disturbed. The din of merriment came from the bright uncurtained windows of the cottage-parlour to the lovers in their Arbour; and the Sailor gaily said, “How could you leave so joyful a party to come and weep here?” In a few minutes Jane Nasmyth dried her tears; for she was not one who gave way needlessly to desponding thoughts; and the manly tenderness and respectful affection of her lover restored her heart almost to its usual serenity, so that they were both again quite cheerful and happy. He had often sailed away, and often returned; he had been spared both in battle and in shipwreck; and while that remembrance comforted her heart, it need not be said that it likewise sent through all its strings a vibration of more thrilling and profounder love.

It was a mild night in Spring, and the leaves yet

upfolded might almost be heard budding in the bower, as the dews descended upon them with genial influence. A slight twittering of the birds in their new built nests was audible, as if the happy creatures were lying awake in the bright breathless night; and here and there a moth, that enjoys the darkened light, went by on its noiseless wings. All was serenity and peace below, and not a stain was round the moon—no dimness over the stars. “We shall have fair weather for a fortnight at least, Jane, for there is no halo yonder;” and as she looked up at these words, her head continued to rest upon her sailor’s bosom. To think on waves and storms at such a moment was natural, but to fear them was impossible; her soul was strong in the undisturbed quiet of nature, and all her accustomed feelings of trust in Providence now gathered upon it, and she knew her Sailor would return well and happy to her arms—and that she would then become his Wife.

“I will cut two little branches off this Rose-tree, and plant them side by side on yonder bank that first catches the morning light. Look at them, now and then, when I am away, and let them be even, as ourselves, united where they grow.” The cuttings from the Rose-bush were accordingly placed in the ground. Nor did these Lovers think, that in this half playful, half serious mood there was any thing foolish, in persons at their time of life. To be sure they were rather too old for such trifling; for Arthur was twenty-two

years of age, and Jane wanted but a few months of nineteen. But we all become wiser as we get old; and perhaps the time came when these rose-plants were suffered to blossom unheeded, and to cover the ground about them with a snow-shower of fragrance, enjoyed only by the working bees. At present they were put into the mould as carefully as if on their lives had depended the lives of those who planted them; and Jane watered them, unnecessarily, in a vernal night of dew, with a shower of tears. "If they grow—bud—and blossom, that will be a good OMEN—if not, I must not allow myself to have any foolish fears!"

The parting kiss was given, and the last mutual benedictions, and then Arthur Crawford, clearing his voice, said, "I hear the fun and frolic is not yet over, nor likely to be so soon. Why don't you ask me to join the party?" It was well known that they were betrothed, and that the marriage was to take place on his return from this cruize, so, with a blush, Jane introduced him into the parlour. "I presume, Lieutenant," said one, "you have come here in a balloon." "Well, Jane," said another, "I declare that I never missed you out of the room—were you giving orders about supper—or have you been in the garden to see if the cresses are fit to be cut?" The Sailor was, during this time, shaking the Old Man by the hand so firmly, that the water stood in his eyes, and he exclaimed, "Why, Arthur, your fist is like a vice. It would not do for you to shake hands with any of the young lasses

there—you would make the blood tingle in their fingers. Sit down, my dear son, and while the younkers are busy among themselves, let us hear what the French and Spaniards are about, and if it be true that Lord Nelson is going to give them a settling again." So passed the evening by;—charades and songs lent their aid, and after a breaking up of the party, which lasted about half an hour in finding and fitting on straw bonnets, shawls and shoes, the laughter and voices of one and all, as they receded from the cottage up the hill, or down the vale, died away, and Croft-head was buried in silence and in sleep.

Days and weeks passed on, while Jane Nasmyth sat in her cottage, or walked about the adjacent fields, and her lover was sailing far and wide upon the seas. There were many rumours of an expected engagement, and her heart fluttered at the sight of every stranger. But her lover's letters came, if not regularly, yet in pleasant numbers, and their glad and cheerful tone infused confidence into her heart. When he was last away, they were lovers; but now their marriage was fixed, and his letters now were written as to his bride, overflowing with gratitude and delighted affection. When she was reading them, he seemed to be talking before her—the great distance of land and sea between them vanished—and as he spoke of his ship of which he was so proud, she almost expected, on lifting up her eyes, to see its masts towering up before her, with all their glorious flags and ensigns. But

they were streaming to the wind above the foam of the ocean, and her eyes saw only the green shade of the sheltering Sycamore,—her ears heard only the deep murmur of the working bees, as if a whole hive had been in that tent-like Tree.

Nor did Jane Nasmyth forget to visit, many times every day, the two Roses which her lover had planted, and to which he had told her to look as an OMEN of his state when far at sea. To the bank on which they grew she paid her earliest visit along with the beams of the morning sun; and there, too, she marked the first diamonds of the evening dew. They grew to her heart's desire; and now that the year was advanced, they showed a few flower-buds, and seemed about to break out into roses, slender as were their bending stems. That one which bore her lover's name hung over her own, as if sheltering it with its flexile arch, and when weighed down by the rain-drops, or by the breeze, it touched gently the leaves of its companion, and seemed to intertwine with it in a balmy embrace. The heart can accumulate love and delight upon any object whatever; but these plants were in themselves beautiful, and every leaf swarmed, not with poetic visions, but with thoughts of such deep human tenderness, that they were seldom looked at without a gush of tears. They were perfectly unlike all the other shrubs and flowers in that garden; and had they been dug up, it would have been felt as sacrilege; had they withered, the OMEN would have struck through her very life.

But they did not wither ; and nothing touched them but the bee or the butterfly, or haply for a moment the green linnet, the chaffinch, or the red-cap, half balanced on the bending spray, and half supported by his fluttering wings.

Crofthead was a cottage in a sheltered vale—but it was not far inland, and by ascending a green hill behind it, Jane Nasmyth could, on clear days, get a glimpse of the blue ocean. The sight even of the element on which her lover now dwelt was delightful to her eyes, and if a white sail shone forth through the sun-light, her heart felt a touch of dear emotion. Sometimes, too, when walking in the vale, she would gaze with love on the beautiful white sea-mew that came floating on the sea-born air into the fields of the quiet earth. As the creature alighted on the green turf, and folding its wings sat there motionless, or walked as if pleased with the soft pressure of the grass beneath its feet, she viewed it as a silent messenger from the sea, that perhaps might have flown round her lover's ship. Its soft plumes bore no marks of the dashing waves ; its eyes, although wild, were gentle ; its movement was calm as if it had never drifted with the rapid tides, or been driven through the howling tempest ; and as it again rose up from the herbage and the wild-flowers, and hovering over her head for a little while, winged its way down the vale over the peaceful woods, she sent her whole soul with it to the

ocean, and heaved a deep sigh unconsciously as it disappeared.

The summer was now over, and the autumn at hand. The hay fields were once more green with springing herbage—and bands of reapers were waiting for a few sunny days, till they might be let loose in joyful labour upon the ripened grain. Was the Amethyst frigate never to finish her cruize? September surely would not pass away without seeing her in harbour, and Arthur Crawford at Crofthead. Poor Jane was beginning to pine now for her lover's return; and one afternoon, on visiting, almost unhappy, the Rose trees, she thought that they both were drooping. She forgot that September mornings have often their frost in Scotland; and on seeing a few withered leaves near the now wasted blossoms, she remembered Arthur's words about the OMEN, and turned away from the bank with a shudder of foolish fear. But a trifle will agitate a wiser and older heart than that of Jane Nasmyth, and reason neither awakens nor lulls to sleep the passions of human beings, which obey, in the darkness of their mystery, many unknown and incomprehensible laws. "What if he be dead!" thought she, with a sick pang tugging at her heart—and she hastened out of the garden, as if a beast of prey had been seen by her, or an adder lying couched among the bushes.

She entered the house in a sort of panic, of which she was ashamed as soon as she saw the cheerful and

happy faces of her parents, who were sitting together listening, according to their usual custom, to an old spectacled neighbour busy at a Newspaper, the Edinburgh Evening Courant, a copy of which made visits to about a dozen of the most respectable families in the parish. The old worthy was Emeritus Schoolmaster, and was justly proud of his elocution, which was distinct and precise, each syllable being made to stand well out by itself, while, it was generally admitted, that Mr Peacock had a good deal of the English accent which he had acquired about forty years ago at Inverness. He did not think it worth while to stop very long at the end of a paragraph, or article, but went on in a good business-like style, right through politics, stocks, extraordinary accidents, state of the weather, births, deaths, and marriages, a pleasing and instructive medley. Just as Jane had taken her seat, the good old proser had got to ship-news, and he announced, without being in the least aware of what he was about, "FOUNDERED IN THE LATE TREMENDOUS GALE, OFF THE LIZARD, HIS MAJESTY'S FRIGATE AMETHYST. ALL THE CREW PERISHED!"

After the first shock of horror, the old people rose from their seats, and tried to lift up their daughter, who had fallen down, as if stone-dead, with great violence on the floor. The Schoolmaster, petrified and rooted to his chair, struck his forehead in agony, and could only ejaculate, "God forgive me—God forgive

me !” After many long drawn sighs, and many alarming relapses into that deadly swoon, Jane opened her eyes ; and, looking round with a ghastly wildness, saw the newspaper lying on the floor where it had dropped from the old man’s trembling hands. Crawling with a livid face towards the object of her horror, she clutched it convulsively with her feeble fingers, and with glazed eyes instinctively seizing on the spot, she read, as if to herself, the dreadful words over and over again—and then, as if her intellect was affected, kept repeating a few of them. ““ Foundered”—“ Tremendous gale”—“ Every soul perished.” “ Oh ! great and dreadful God—my Arthur is drowned at last !”

Some of the kind domestics now came into the room, and with their care, for her parents were nearly helpless, the poor girl was restored to her senses. She alone wept not—for her heart was hardened, and she felt a band of cold iron drawn tight round her bosom. There was weeping and sobbing, loud and unrestrained with all others, for Arthur Crawford, the beautiful and brave, was beloved by every one in the parish, from the child of six years to old people of fourscore. Several young men, too, belonging to the parish, had served on board that ship ; and they were not now forgotten, although it was for the young Lieutenant, more than for them of their own rank, that now all the servants wept.

Jane Nasmyth was a maiden of a perfectly pious

mind ; but no piety can prevent nature from shrieking aloud at the first blow of a great calamity. She wished herself dead—and that wish she expressed as soon as she found her voice. Her old father knelt down on the floor at one side of his child, and her old mother at another, while the latter had just strength to say : “ Our Father which art in Heaven—hallowed be thy name—thy kingdom come—thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” The poor girl shut her eyes with a groan ; but she could not repeat a single one of these words. Then was the floor, indeed, drenched with tears. They fell down in big drops—in plashing showers from old eyes, that had not seemed before to contain so much moisture. And in that mortal silence no sound was now heard, but one low quivering voice saying, at intervals, “ All the crew perished—all the crew perished. Woe is me—woe is me—Arthur is drowned at last !”

They lifted her from the floor—and to her own wonder, she fell not down, but could stand unsupported on her feet. “ Take me up stairs to my bed, Mother—let me lie down there—and perhaps I may be better. I said that I wished to die. Oh ! these were wicked words. May I live to do my duty to my dear parents in their old age. But, oh ! this sickness is mortal—mortal indeed : but let me put my trust in God and my Redeemer, and pray to them—my parents—to forgive my impious words !”

They supported her steps—and she asked to go to

the window just to take one look out into the calm and beautiful afternoon—for not a breath was stirring, and the western sun diffused over the scene a bright but softened repose. “ Oh ! merciful God—there is Arthur’s ghost—I saw it pass by—it waved its hand—bright and smiling were its eyes—take me away—take me away, for I feel that visions beset my brain !” They half lifted her in their arms towards the door—while she continued to say faintly, “ It smiled—yes, it smiled—but Arthur’s body is mangled, and bruised, and crushed by timber, and stones, and rocks—lying on the sand somewhere, while I was singing or laughing in my miserable delusion—his face gnawed by sea-monsters,”—and then her voice was choked, and she could speak no more.

The door burst open ; and there entered, no ghost, but the bold, glad, joyful, living sailor himself, who clasped Jane to his bosom. So sudden was his entrance, that he had not time to observe the dismay and grief that had been trampling on all now beside him—nor did he, during that blest embrace, feel that his betrothed maiden was insensible to his endearments. Joy had taken possession of all his being—all his perceptions ; and he saw nothing—felt nothing—but his Jane and her bosom prest closely to his own. “ Have I broken in upon a dish of gossip ? Well, no rival in the room—so far good.—What, all silent—pale faces—tears—what is the matter ? Is this a welcome ?” But so many death-like or agitated counte-

nances soon told him that some strong passion pervaded the party—and he began to have his own undefined fears—for he had not yet visited his own father's house. All was soon explained; and Jane having been revived into tolerable composure, the servants retired, but not before shaking hands one and all with the Lieutenant; and the old Schoolmaster, too, who felt himself to blame, although sent for on purpose to read aloud the News, and certainly not answerable for erroneous nautical intelligence, feeling rather uneasy in the room, promised to call next evening, took up his old-fashioned chapeau, and making a bow worthy of a distinguished pedagogue, made the best of his way out and beyond the premises.

Arthur Crawford coming in upon them in the transport of his joy, could not easily bring home to his heart a perfect understanding of the scene that had just preceded his arrival. He never perhaps knew the full terror that had nearly deprived his sweet Jane of life; but he knew enough to lay an eternal obligation of tenderness towards her upon his inmost soul. “Instead of foundering, the *Amethyst* is in as good trim as any frigate in the fleet—but she had to scud for some leagues under bare poles—for the squall came upon us like a sheet of iron. A large ship, name unknown, went down near our stern.”—“And all on board perished!” exclaimed Jane in a dewy voice of pity. “They did indeed!” “Oh! many eyes now are weeping, or doomed to weep, for that ship, while mine

are dried. Her name will be known soon enough!" And as she looked on her lover, once more did the maiden give way to the strong imagination of the doom which she felt he had narrowly escaped. "Come, cheer up, Jane—my life is in God's hand—and with him it rests whether I die on my bed in the cottage at last, or, like many a better man, in battle or wreck. But you are willing to marry a Sailor—for better or worse—a longer or shorter date—and no doubt I shall be as happy as any of my mess-mates. Not one of them all has such a sweetheart as thou art—a dutiful daughter makes a loving wife."

After an hour's talk and silence—during which Jane Nasmyth had scarcely recovered from a slight hysteric, her father proposed returning thanks to God for Arthur's return. The sailor was a man of gay and joyous character, but in religion he was not only a firm but impassioned believer. He had not allowed the temptations of a life, which with too many is often wild and dissipated, to shake his faith in Christianity; the many hardships and dangers which he had encountered and escaped had served to deepen all his religious impressions; so that a weak person would have called him methodistical or superstitious. He was neither; but he had heard God in the great deep, and he did not forget the voice in the silence of the green and stedfast earth. So he knelt down to prayer with a humble and grateful spirit, and as he felt his own Jane breathing by his side, on her knees, and knew

that she was at the same time weeping for joy at his return, neither was he ashamed also to weep ; for there are times, and this was one of them, when a brave man need not seek to hide his tears either before his fellow creatures or his Creator.

After they had risen from their fervent prayer, and a short silent pause had ensued, "How," said the sailor, "are our two Rose-bushes? Did they hang their heads, do you think, because false rumour sank the good ship Amethyst? Come—Jane—let us go and see." And as some hundreds of swallows were twittering on the house-top in the evening sunshine, collected there with a view either of flying across seas to some distant country, or of plunging down to the bottom of some loch near at hand, (probably the former,) the lovers walked out into the open air—unlatched the little white gate canopied with an arch of honeysuckle, that guarded a garden into which there were no intruders, and arm in arm proceeded to the "Bank of the Two Roses." They had nothing now of that sickly and dying appearance which they had showed to Jane's eyes a few hours ago ; no evil OMEN was there now,—but they seemed likely to live for many years, and every season to put forth their flowers in greater number and in richer beauty.