

GOTHIC BOURNES

**THE UNKNOWN!
OR, THE KNIGHT OF
THE BLOOD-RED PLUME.**

By ANNE OF SWANSEA

(1826)

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LEGENDS OF TERROR
AND
TALES
OF THE
WONDERFUL AND THE WILD

Original and Select,

IN PROSE AND VERSE.
WITH HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS.

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THE UNKNOWN!
OR,
THE KNIGHT OF THE BLOOD-RED PLUME.

A Welsh Legend¹.

On a rising eminence, east of the river Clwyd,² in Flintshire, about two miles from its influx into the sea, are the majestic ruins of Rhuddlan castle;³ which derives its name from the colour of the soil on which it is situated, according to Leland, who thus deduces its etymology in his Itinerary: "Rethlan, communely⁴ called Rudelan, cummeth of Reth, that ys⁵ to saye⁶, *color*, or *pale*, *redde*, and *glan*, that ys *shore*; but *g*, when *glan ys set* with a word preceding *g*, *ys exploded*." Camden reports it to have been built by Llewellyn ap Sitshilt, a brave and amiable prince, who, after a reign of great glory, in which he had gained the love of his subjects, was assassinated by Howel and Meredydh, the sons of Edwyn by regular descent, of Howel Dha, in hopes of gaining the crown of South Wales; but their schemes were defeated by the odium which the people manifested towards them, and they were obliged to fly to Ireland. He left only one son, by name Gryffyd, who succeeded him, and during his life time made Rhuddlan his chief residence. Of the ruin, there are many legendary tales related; but this, though not the most popular, is perhaps the most extravagant, and is equally credited with the rest by the superstitious peasantry, who tremble to pass the ruin in the dusk of evening, when it is believed that witches and ghosts are there holding their revels.

"—STAY, pilgrim; whither wendst⁷ thou?"

"—Cold is the north wind that plays around the mountains—heart-chilling the snow that's wafted across the moor—still bleaker blows the blast, cutting, keen, and freezing, as the grey mist of evening falls upon the vales;—frozen is the path that winds through yon⁸ forest; upon the leafless trees hangs the [262] winter's hoary frost—and cheerless the bosom of him doom'd to wander along the lone path in such a night as this."

"—Turn thee, pilgrim! and⁹ bend thy step to Rhuddlan's ruined walls, where thou mayst, undisturbed, waste the gloomy night, and take the morning to enjoy the road."

"—Pious hermit! knowst thou not, from dusky eve until return of morn, that tortured spirits in yon castle rove? E'en¹⁰ now, the blood runs chill in my veins, while I do think on what I've seen. Such groans have met my ears—such sights my eyes—and screams and riotous laughs mingled with the winds that whistled through the broken arches of the courts—e'en now, the sweat of terror dews my brow, and languid beats my heart.["]¹¹

"—Say, didst thou penetrate the hall?"

"—I did; and, on the hearth, light some dried leaves to warm my shivering [sic] frame. I

¹ The writer uses the term legend to give the story credibility.

² The Clwyd is a river in Wales. Therefore, the setting of this story is a real one.

³ In the original text, the writer places the semicolon separate from the previous word. The writer also separates the first inverted commas when opening a dialogue. In our transcription, we disposed of these spaces for reasons of economy.

⁴ Equivalent in Modern English (ModE): *commonly*.

⁵ Equivalent in ModE: *is*.

⁶ Equivalent in ModE: *say*.

⁷ The writer uses a past tense ending with *st*.

⁸ Archaic form of *that*. The writer also uses the archaic forms *thy*, *thou* and *ye* referring to *your*, *you* (singular) and *you* (plural) respectively.

⁹ The writer does not use capital letters after an exclamation mark.

¹⁰ The writer contracts the *v* in the words *even*, *over* and *overlook*.

¹¹ The closing quotation marks are missing in the original text several times.

spread my wallet's fare upon the ground—with joyful heart, began to merry make—but angry spirits broke upon my glee, and fearful noises hailed my livid cheek. Instantly I dropped upon my trembling knee, and told my beads; but the screams increased—a ray of flame shot through the room, and before me stood a warrior in complete armour clad—his casque¹² was down, and above his brow there waved a blood-red plume. No word he spake¹³, but looked upon me with earnestness; his eye was as the sloe, black—as the basilisk's fascinating—his cheek was wan and deathlike. I would have fled, but my feet seemed chained to the ground, and my heart feared to beat against my bosom. At this moment I heard a female voice, that loudly sounded in the hall.

—“I come, Erilda,” cried the red-plumed knight; and instantly vanished. Again were the screams repeated; and showers of blood fell upon the marble flooring on which I stood.—My veins were filled with icicles from my heart; but, rendered desperate by fear, in the midst of the most horrible howlings, I flew; and the expiring embers of my fire casting a faint light, guided me along the courts, through which I darted with the rapidity of lightning. Venerable hermit, again I dare not trust¹⁴ myself in Rhuddlan's walls. I have opposed my bosom to the Saxon's sword and never trembled; I have braved dangers for my country, and was never known to tremble;—but I dare not face¹⁵ the spirits of the angry Clwyd.”

The hermit smiled.

—“Thou seest yon rock, which threatening, hangs above the river—which, slowly rippling along, now laves against its broken sides. In the bosom of that rock, I dwell. Peace is its inmate. My cell is humble, but hospitable; and in its lap the weary pilgrim has often found repose. Rest thou with me this night to share it, friend, and eke my frugal meal.”

—“Holy father with joy I follow you; hunger and fatigue sore oppress me; and my wearied limbs almost refuse their wonted office.”

The venerable hermit conducted the wearied pilgrim to his cell, which was clean—his meal was wholesome. The pilgrim ate of the frugal repast; and a chrystal [sic] water, springing from the rock, was the beverage on which the man of piety regaled. This was proffered in a rudely carved wooden bowl to his guest, who drank, and felt relieved. He now drew his stool near the hearth, on which the faggot blazed; and the hermit, to beguile the moments, and remove the fear which occupied his companion's breast, thus related of the Knight of the Blood-red Plume and the fair Erilda.

High on the walls of Rhuddlan waved the black flag of death—loud the bell of the neighbouring priory tolled the solemn knell, which every vale re-echoed round, and the sad response floated to the ear through every passing gale.—The monks, in solemn voice, sung a mass for the everlasting repose of the deceased—a thousand tapers illumined the chapel—and bounteously was the dole distributed to the surrounding poor.

[263] The evening blast was keen—the grey mist circled the mountain's craggy brow—and thin flakes of snow beat in the traveller's face, while cold and shivering airs wafted his cloak aside. Sir Rhyswick the Hardy heard, as he advanced, the echo of the distant bell; and spurring his mettled¹⁶ steed, with heart harbouring many fears, pursued his course fleetly through the forest.

¹² French borrowing meaning *helmet*.

¹³ Archaic form of the simple past tense of the verb *speak*.

¹⁴ The scan of the book cuts the word off. We can only presume it refers to the word *trust*.

¹⁵ The scan of the book cuts the word off. We can only presume it refers to the word *face*.

¹⁶ Misprint for *mottled*.

“Use speed, Sir Knight!” cried a voice in his ear. “Egberta dies!”

Rhyswick turned pale.

“Egberta’s bosom’s cold;” continued the voice, “and vain will be your sighs.”

The Knight in dismay checked his horse, and inclined his head to whence he thought the sound proceeded; but nothing met his eye; all was vacant before him, and only the quivering bough, fanned by the breeze, was heard. Rather alarmed, he set spurs to the sides of his steed—still the snow was drifted in his face. Night was now ushered to the heavens, and it was with difficulty he could maintain the path that branched through the forest. The web-winged bat brushed by his ear in her circular flight; and the ominous screech-owl, straining her throat, proclaimed the dissolution of the deceased.

Sir Rhyswick heaved a sigh; a melancholy thought stole across his brain, and, arriving at the banks of the Clwyd, he beheld, with trembling, the many tapers in the priory of Rhuddlan, and heard more distinctly the solemn bell.

“Egberta is no more,” cried the voice that had before accosted him; “Egberta is in Heaven.”

The Knight turned round; but, beholding no one, and agonized by the prediction, again he roused his steed, and flew, pale and breathless to the castle. He blew the loud horn suspended at the gate of Twr Silod, the strong tower which stands upon the banks of the river: and the loud blast echoing in the courts, aroused the ominous bird that had alighted on its battlements, who, flapping her heavy wings, resumed her flight, uttering a wild, discordant scream. The portal was opened to receive him; and Sir Rhyswick entered through a long range of vassals, habited in mournful weeds.

“Is the prediction true, then?” he exclaimed: and, rushing to the apartment of Egberta, found her cold and breathless. The colour that once adorned her cheek was faded—her eyes were shrouded—and her lips became more pale [sic], from which the last breath had so lately issued. A serene smile mantled her countenance—her locks were carefully bound in rose-bands—her corpse was prepared for the earth—and two monks sat on each side of her, offering up their holy prayers for her repose. Sir Rhyswick, overcome by this unexpected sight, with a groan, fainted upon the couch. Some servants that had attended him from the hall, conveyed him in a state of insensibility to his chamber; and, the next day, the virtuous Egberta was deposited in the chapel of the castle. Maidens strewed the path with flowers, along which their sainted lady was borne; and some monks from the neighbouring priory sung a solemn dirge over her—bare-headed and with their arms crossed upon their bosoms. The fair Erilda with her own hands decked the person of her mother with flowers; and those flowers were moist with a daughter’s tears. A requiem, chaunted¹⁷ by the monks, and in which the maiden joined, closed the ceremony; and Erilda, with oppressed heart, returned to the castle.

Sir Rhyswick, whose grief would not permit him to attend the funeral rites, pressed the affectionate girl to his bosom; and they sought mutual consolation in each other.

Rhyswick the Hardy was the friend and favourite of his prince; he had fought in all the wars of his country, since the first moment he could hurl the spear—victory had always attended his arms; but now, his beard was silvered with age—peace was restored to the land, and he had hoped, at Rhuddlan, in the bosom of his Eg[264]berta, to pass away his few remaining years.

¹⁷ Equivalent in ModE: *chanted*.

Bliddyn ap Cynvyn had united in himself by conquest, the sovereignty of Gwynedd, or North Wales, with Powys: and thus had terminated a war that had long threatened destruction to either nation. With pleasure did Wales observe her implacable enemy, the English, struggling to overcome a foreign foe—bloody were the battles fought with William of Normandy, surnamed the Bastard; and, with secret satisfaction, did Bliddyn ap Cynvyn, a silent spectator, see either army reduced and weakened in the sanguinary contest. Sir Rhyswick had by his beloved Egberta, (from whose fond arms the war had often torn him, and who, in his last absence, being attacked by a sudden and violent illness, in a few days expired,) one only daughter. To Erilda he now looked forward for future happiness. She was beautiful as the morn—roseate health sat upon her smiling cheek—meekness and charity in her lustre-beaming eye—her teeth were as so many snow-drops, regularly even—her breath, like the dewed rose-bud, of glowing fragrance—A dimple revelled playfully near her mouth—and the rich ringlets of her yellow hair floated carelessly on her fine curved shoulders. Upon her snowy breasts she wore a ruby cross, suspended by a gold chain—and down her taper limbs the dazzling folds of her white garments flowed. Erilda was not more beautiful in person than in mind; for, as lovely a bosom as ever nature formed, encased a heart enriched with every virtue. She was the subject of universal admiration; all tongues were lavish in her praise, and many suitors came to ask her hand: but, though extremely sensitive, no one, as yet, claimed an interest in her heart: the warm shaft of love had not pierced her glowing veins; and gay and affable to all—reserved to few—she preserved that freedom which the lover cannot retain. The loss of her mother imparted a melancholy to her cheek, that rendered her far more lovely. Sir Rhyswick indulged in grief, and the castle was one scene of mourning. On the brow of the rock, that o'erlooks the angry Clwyd, which rolls beneath, the poorer vassals and dependents of Rhuddlan, every evening came to receive the bounty of their young mistress. It was these excavations in the rock that echoed the soft plaintive notes of her melodious harp.—On this rock she sung, and the spirits of the murmuring river were charmed, as they lay in their oozy bed, with the soft pleasing strains—the billows ceased to roll in admiration, and Zephyrus drew back his head, in mute attention to the rapturous lay.

Once, when the return of twilight was announced in the heavens, by the rich crimson streaks and blushing gold that occupied the vast expanse of sky, and Erilda accompanied with her voice the trembling harp, a warrior Knight, mounted on a barbed steed, in sable armour clad, with a Blood-red Plume waving on his brow, approached the spot from whence¹⁸ the sound proceeded. Erilda, on hearing the advance of horses' feet, turned hastily around; and, with modest courtesy, welcomed the Knight, who had thus obtruded on her privacy. There was a something in his gait and appearance that struck her with awe; and the unknown, dismounting from his steed, occupied a seat beside her. Again she struck upon the trembling chords, with fearful hand. The stranger sighed, as he gazed upon her; and, when her eye met his, she withdrew it, blushing, on the ground. The shade of night approached, and misty fogs obscured the starry sky.

“Sir Knight,” she cried, with a courteous smile, while an unusual palpitation thrilled through her heart, of admiration mingled with fear, “Rhuddlan’s hospitable walls are ready to receive you; and no warrior passes her warlike towers, without partaking and acknowledging the munificence of Rhyswick the Hardy.”

¹⁸ Misprint for *whence*.

“Fair lady!” replied the unknown, “the hospitality of the gallant chief[265]tain, so famed, is not unknown to me; but I must onward on my journey, nor taste the bounty which all admire.”

“Sir Knight! this is not courteous.”

“Lady, adieu! it must not be: I live in hopes that we shall meet again.”

Saying this, he pressed her hand to his lips, and mounting his steed, flew with the rapidity of the winds along the shadowed plain that stood before her. His horse, so fleet, seemed to skim along the ground: and in an instant he was borne from her sight.

Erilda was astonished; there was a wildness in the jet black eye of the unknown, that, while it fascinated, alarmed her—a beautiful colour tinged his cheek; but not of that nature to which she was accustomed. His locks were black and sleek—his figure was noble and commanding—his voice, though harmony itself, still conveyed a hollow sound that was not pleasing. In short, his whole appearance, while it charmed to admiration, filled her with a kind of tremor; and she returned to the palace of Rhuddlan, charmed, and at the same time awed, with the martial appearance of the stranger.

“What majesty in his countenance!” exclaimed she to herself.—“What nobleness in his demeanour! And, ah! what melancholy seems to occupy his soul, that dims the sparkling lustre of his jet black eye, and clouds those animating features, otherwise beaming with cheerfulness. Surely such dejection is not natural in him? No, no; some hidden secret preys upon his heart; perhaps love, which, as I have heard bards relate, feeds upon the roseate hue of health—gives languor to the eye—paleness to the cheek—and despoils the heart of its manhood—that reduce [sic] firmness to trepidity¹⁹—and poisons the noble mind with weaknesses that are engendered by timidity.”

Erilda sighed.—Sir Rhyswick met her as she was seeking her chamber; the good old man bore the resemblance of his grief upon his fretted cheek; but he endeavoured to be cheerful; and, with an assumed smile, he conducted her to the supper-hall.

Erilda vainly attempted to be gay, but variety of thought occupied her brain; the soul-inspiring song of the family bard charmed not her ear, who, at the board, when the gay goblet circulated at the tables, raised high his tuneful voice to the sublimest pitch, in commemoration of deeds of other days, and sung of triumph, and of glorious war.

Erilda, whose heart was affected by another subject, was not moved with the sweet sounds of the trembling harp, nor participated in that emotion which the song of patriotism inspired in the breasts of the auditors. Had the theme been love, the air been plaintive as the ringdove’s tender tale, Erilda’s soul had wasted in the strain, and owned the power of music, when in melody with her feelings. Affectionately imprinting a kiss upon the bearded cheek of Sir Rhyswick, attended by her page, she bade adieu to the knight; and, retiring to her couch, attempted to lull those wild and troubled thoughts that agitated and oppressed her; but the blood-plumed knight, in her slumbers, stood before her: his graceful form—his pensive, melancholy countenance, she pictured to herself: and sighs of regret, when she awoke, and found the unreal image vanished, stole from her heaving breast.

With the first dawn of morning, Erilda arose, and flew to the monastery of Rhuddlan, to offer up her daily prayers. The holy father confessor gave her absolution, on a declaration of her

¹⁹ Equivalent in ModE: *trepidation*.

errors; and again she sought the much-loved spot, where she had met the unknown. She looked towards the path he had taken the preceding evening, but he no longer occupied it; and, seating herself upon the rock, she played an air, soft and melodious as the strains of Philomel; but, dissatisfied with her execution, she turned the instrument aside; her voice, she conceived, wanted its usual sweetness—the harp was out of tune—and her fingers, lingering upon the strings, damped the swelling note.

[266] Erilda sighed, and sighed so deep, that the echo, from the excavated rocks, returned them to her ear.—At length the tear glistened in her eye.

“Why, why am I thus concerned for a wandering unknown, whom chance, perhaps, conducted to this spot for a first, and only time? Who, ere²⁰ now, is leagues distant from my sighs, and who does not entertain one thought of me? Away, hope, thou delusive image, from my bosom—I never shall behold him more—my heart must harbour no such sighs.”

Saying this, with the firmness of resolution, she turned her step towards the castle. Sir Rhyswick was preparing for the chase; the hounds and hawks were abroad—all was noise and confusion—and Erilda consented to make one of the throng. Buckling on her breast the mantle of green, and slinging across her shoulder the bow and arrow quiver, mounted on a cream-backed palfrey, she joined them.

The adjacent forest echoed back the huntsmen’s loud horns, and the affrighted deer pricked up their ears to the well-known blast. The yell of the dogs sounded in the deep glens—the loud halloo succeeded—and nimbly o’er the bogs and marshes bounded the fleet object of their sport. It was noon when Sir Rhyswick ordered his vassals to strike their tents upon the plain; and, after refreshing them with a rich repast, again they repaired to renew the chase; the ripe mead, in a golden goblet, was presented to the fair Erilda, who, in the midst of her damsels, looked like the goddess of the wood—and Sir Rhyswick drank from the hirlas horn the soul-reviving *cwrrw*.²¹ Soon again was the panting deer pursued up craggy cliffs—through streams and vallies [sic]—over the heath—across the moor—and through the mazy forest. Erilda startled a speckled doe from the bosom of a dark glen; and drawing her arrow to the head, in the silver bow, pierced her in the breast. Though wounded the animal made good her flight, and darted away like lightning.

The heroic huntress fleetly pursued; while the horns and hounds echoed from another part of the plain. Long did the doe maintain her speed, and kept in sight, with the arrow in her breast, until the pale-faced moon appeared, emerging from a cloud, and silvering the glassy lake. At length, the wounded animal dropped, and instantly expired.

Erilda dismounted her steed; and now, she first discovered herself to be absent from her train, and at an hour when angry demons ride upon the air and mutter mischief. Cold winds wafted her brown hair aside; and fast descended the grey mist of evening. In vain Erilda listened to catch the halloo of the huntsmen. No longer the horn sounded in the vale—all was drear and silent, save the hollow murmuring of the wind, forcing its passage, sighing through the trees. Almost fainting with fear, she leaned upon her bow: she endeavoured to blow the horn that was suspended at her breast, but it fell from her grasp, and the bow shrunk from her hand. At length, summoning more fortitude, she remounted her steed; and not knowing what road to take, gave her horse the reins, trusting herself to the protection of her household spirit.—Away flew the impatient steed through

²⁰ A poetic word for *before*.

²¹ Welsh ale.

the forest—over hill and dale: the turf trembled beneath his hoofs, and the white foam frothed at his extended nostrils. On a sudden, the bell of a neighbouring monastery sounded in the gale, and blazing torches were seen waving through different parts of a wood that lay before her. “Hilli, oh ho!” cried the huntress, with hope animating her bosom; “Hilli oh ho!” but her voice returned responsive to her ear, and the flaming brands disappeared. Still she pursued the path, and fleetly flew the cream-backed palfrey on which she rode—now again the huntsman’s horn was heard winding at a great distance, and now the approaching clank of horses’ hoofs convinced her that the attendants of the chieftain, her father, were in pursuit of her. Erilda, checking her steed, [267] awaited their coming up with her; but those in pursuit took a different route; and the sounds dying away, as the attendants receded, all was again hushed. At length, weary of suspense, she proceeded; and, turning the angle of a jutting rock that bulged in the fertile Clwyd, she observed a horseman slowly parading its banks. Pensive was his face—his right hand rested on a battle-axe—his left held the reins of a nut-brown courser—his soul seemed occupied by melancholy—his brain to be distracted by tormenting thoughts.—Erilda advanced towards him, and fixing her blue eyes upon his cheek, to her astonishment recognized the stranger Knight of the Blood-red Plume. His vizor was up, and melancholy tinged his whole countenance—a sigh, half suppressed, trembled on his lips—despondency seemed to depress his heart, that shed a transitory gloom over every feature, and preyed upon that energy of mind, which his interesting eye betrayed as certainly possessing. Erilda, unable to curb her impetuous steed, who reared upon his hind legs, and snorted in rage, called to the Knight, who, wrapped in thought, observed her not.

“Good stranger,” cried the daughter of haughty Rhuddlan’s chieftain, “I throw myself under your protection; conduct the strayed Erilda to Rhuddlan’s hall, and the blessings of a distracted parent shall be your’s.”²²

“Divine daughter of the first of chieftains,” replied the Knight, eagerly grasping his horse’s reins; “I am subject to your commands—my life shall be devoted to your service.”

Erilda, smiling, gave him her hand, which he pressed respectfully to his lips: and, proceeding, the lofty turrets of Rhuddlan appeared in view. The pale moon, shedding her rays on its dark battlements, reflected them to the Clwyd, which in soft billows rippled beneath the mount on which it stood. Numberless torches were seen glaring in the hands of the disconsolate attendants of the chieftain, who, in the agony of grief, dispersed them round the country in search of her. All was bustle; and, no sooner did she appear among them, than loud shouts rent the air, and they flew to bear the welcome tidings to Sir Rhyswick. The stranger Knight conducted her across the courts; and the fond father, impatient to clasp her to his arms, hastened towards her. Erilda fell upon his bosom; and the tear of joy dropped from the old man’s beard upon her shoulder. The Knight, in his turn, received the caresses of the venerable chieftain, who, boundless in his joy, would have lavished on him empires, had he had them to command.

“Tell me, Sir Knight,” cried Rhyswick, “to whom am I indebted for the restoration of Erilda to my aged arms? Let me fall upon my knees at his feet, and bless him.”

“Hospitable chieftain, my name is Wertwrold, a forlorn and suffering wanderer; the world contains no home to shelter me—no friend to welcome me; but, though sorrows oppress my heart, I am ever ready to give joy to others,—Erilda is once more yours,” he added with a sigh, and

²² In this text, it seems that the writer uses the possessive pronoun *yours* typed as *your’s*, as well as *her’s* instead of *hers*.

bowing his head, was about to depart.

“Nay, stranger, this night you must share that joy which you have imparted to our breast, and make Rhuddlan your residence.”

“Your pardon,” cried the Knight, “my envious fortune denies that I should taste of pleasure—I must away, ere the stars fade on the horizon.”

“Wertwrold,” returned Erilda, “the maid whom you have protected entreats your stay—upon her knee entreats it: do not dispirit our festivity by your departure. Come, let me conduct you to the marble-hall.”

The Knight, overpowered by their entreaties, at length yielded; and Erilda taking him by the hand, introduced him to the festive board, where sat the harpers, tuning their strings, awaiting the approach of the chieftain and his guests. Wertwrold appeared struck with the dazzling splendor of the hall that had [468] regaled princes: rich crimson tapestry hung down the walls in festoons fringed with gold, between pillars of the fairest marble, disposed at equal distances, supporting cornices of polished silver; the carved ceiling displayed emblematical devices of war and of the chase; in one part, Diana was painted with her bow; in another, Caractacus engaging the Romans.

Erilda conducted the Knight to a cedar stool, covered with crimson, and edged with gold, at the table, on which were profusely scattered carved goblets, sumptuously embossed, and flowing with ripe mead. The harpers, during the repast, raised their voices in praise of the ancestors of Rhyswick, and regularly traced his descent, in bardic song: describing each great feat his fathers had performed. And now, the midnight bell sounding, dissipated their mirth—the bards were dismissed—and Wertwrold was led to a couch by one of the attendants, after saluting the fair hand of Erilda, which she offered to him, in token of her favour. The morning dawned unusually splendid—the early dew sparkled on the grass blade—and the effulgent sun rising, tinted the horizon with his gay beams—gentle was the air that played around the mountains—sweet and odoriferous was the scented gale—the river Clwyd timidly flowing, fearful lest it should interrupt the calmness that prevailed, was scarcely seen to move—and Erilda, whose troubled thoughts the preceding evening had denied her rest, hastened to the delightful rock where she first beheld the stranger, Wertwrold; there to indulge in sighs, and those thoughts that, while they pained, pleased. The solitary spot afforded her an opportunity to indulge in the melancholy of her mind; here she could sit and gaze with pensive eye upon the calm waters, as they laved against the shore, and involve her brain in a chaos of bewildering reflection, unobserved by any one.²³ Erilda never knew till now what it was to love—never knew till now what sighs the absence of him or her we love creates—and now she felt the pains, was unable to sustain them. The Red-plumed Knight was master of her heart and of her fate; violent was the passion that raged in her bosom, threatening to consume her by a slow lingering fire; for it appeared impossible the passion could be gratified. Seated upon an arm of the rock that overhangs the Clwyd, tears flowing down her lovely cheeks, agitated by similar thoughts, and overcome by weight of her emotions, weary, not having tasted of repose the preceding night, she sunk into a gentle slumber, her head reclined upon her lily arm.

Wertwrold left the castle to taste of the refreshing air, ere the Baron descended from his chamber, or the loud bell summoned them to breakfast. His feet, as if by instinct, led him to the spot where first Erilda had attracted his notice. How much was he astonished to behold the lovely

²³ The writer separates indefinite pronouns several times.

maiden in a sweet sleep! He stood awhile to observe her, and the tenderest sensation thrilled through his whole soul; her auburn locks played carelessly upon her tempies,²⁴ and her blue eyes were shrowded²⁵ with her long dark lashes; the tint of the carnation was displayed upon her cheek—a perfect ruby colour were her lips—the white rose leaf, through which runs the blue enamelled vein, was not more fair than her forehead, or more sweet than her breath—the soft air that played around her, wafted the thin gauze aside that shadowed her snowy bosom, and revealed beauties, which monarchs, on beholding, would have languished to enjoy.—Wertwrold, transported in the ecstasy of passion, dropped upon his knee, and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek.

Erilda, at this moment, awoke; and the Knight, conscious of the crime he had committed, drew back, abashed and trembling. Erilda was alike confused, and Wertwrold, seizing this opportunity, clasped hold of her hand with fervour, and pressing it between his, exclaimed, “Lovely Erilda, pardon the presump[269]tion which your beauty has inspired—if ‘tis a crime to adore you, then am I most criminal; but I bow to my fate—doomed to be unhappy, I willingly resign myself the victim of cruel fortune.”

“Say, Sir Knight,” cried the embarrassed Erilda, lending her hand to raise him from the ground, “why are you thus persecuted? Repose your sorrows in my bosom; indeed, you will find in me one much interested for you.—Erilda, from her heart pities you.”

“And does Erilda pity me?” he returned, rising, and assuming a seat by her side. “Oh, welcome, ye sorrows! For, henceforward, mingled with your bitter tears, ye convey a pleasure in the thought, that she whom all the world adores, feels for my sufferings; the scalding tear shall no longer flow without its balm—the arrow of anguish, while it wounds, shall on its poison-tipt point, convey a healing balsam to my soul.”

“But say, Sir Knight—why is your fate involved in mystery? Lend me your confidence—make me mistress of your secret—my bosom shall be its prison-house; and so tenacious will I be in retaining it, that even to myself I will not dare to whisper it.”

“Oh lady, could I burst the fetters that chain my tongue to secrecy, I should enjoy a luxury in my grief; but, no, it is forbid—you behold in me a houseless wanderer, against whom the vengeance of Heaven is imprecated, doomed, for a term, to be a solitary inhabitant of the earth—with no settled home to shelter me—no friend to console me—no one to whom I can confide my sorrows.”

“Well!” cried Erilda, with impatience.

“Lady, I dare reveal no more—the cause must remain unknown.[”]

Erilda could scarce conceal her agitation. “And when,” with a tremulous voice, she added, “will the term expire, that frees you of your misery.”

“Then—when a virgin shall be found, of noble birth, and honour speckless as the mountain’s dazzling snow, whose beauty shall be the theme of courts and palaces—whose virtue shall be the admiration of those, whom, with parent bounty she has fostered—whose hand shall be urged by knights of rank and enterprize—who shall withstand the temptation of wealth and power, equipage and title—who shall sincerely love me for myself alone, and brave all dangers, to arrive at the haven of my arms.”

Erilda turned pale; the colour on her cheek flew, and her whole frame became agitated. At

²⁴ Misprint for *temples*.

²⁵ Simple past tense of *shrowd* (obsolete form of *shroud*).

this moment the loud bell of the castle tolled the breakfast hour, and endeavouring to re-assume her wonted spirits, "Come", she cried gaily, "we have wasted much time in idle talk."

Wertwrold lent her his arm, and they proceeded to Rhuddlan. The young Knight at their earnest solicitation, consented to remain at the castle a few days, and various sports were devised to amuse him: nothing was spared to make him forget his griefs. But, in the midst of splendid gaiety, Wertwrold was still himself—melancholy still clouded his brow, and stole the roseate colour of his cheek.

On the second evening, as the last rays of the sun were reflected upon the lakes, and the misty crown of twilight circled the mountain's peak, Erilda, whose bosom was tortured by the love she bore the unhappy Wertwrold, strayed in the garden adjoining the castle. The day had been rather sultry, and, attended by her little foot page, she made towards the fountain, with an intent to bathe. She had already unloosed her hair, when she observed, extended upon the yellow sands, Wertwrold; he was in a sound sleep—and, approaching with tremulous step, she hung over him with an eye brimful of tears.

"Unhappy Knight!" she cried.—"Where shall be found the maid who can assuage the anguish of thy bosom, and restore it to its former peace?—Where shall that maid be found, speckless as thou hast described, who will renounce every pretension for thee? [270] Alas! Alas! Let me not buoy myself up with faint hopes—Wertwrold shall yet be happy, but Erilda will be for ever miserable. Yes, yes, some more happy maid than thou, Erilda, will gain the heart of Wertwrold, and tear the bond asunder that dates his misery."

Faster flowed her tears—her agony became more acute—and, clasping her hands together, she sunk down by his side—her eyes were pensive, fixed on his, that were shrouded in sleep; and wrapped in ecstasy, she watched every breath that swelled his bosom, and escaped his lips. How beautiful did he appear, as he lay reclined upon the ground—what a dew sparkled on his lips—what a colour revelled upon his cheeks; his jet black hair, on which the water-drop, from bathing, glistened, clustered in silky curls around [sic] his head. He had laid aside his armour, and the true shape and mouldings of his manly limbs were visible; his neck and bosom were bare—they were of the most masculine beauty.

"Ah, Erilda!" exclaimed he in his slumbers, "you alone can liberate my anguished heart—you alone can restore the smile to my fretted cheek—but you do not love me."

"Hear it, Heavens!" cried the enraptured maid; "Oh, Wertwrold!" and fainted upon his bosom.

The Knight awoke from the violence of her fall, and he gazed upon her in astonishment.—"Erilda!" he exclaimed, and bathing her temples with cold water, she soon revived; her wild eyes were timidly revealed to the light—and as soon as she discovered herself in the arms of Wertwrold, she gave a faint scream, and broke from his embrace. "Erilda!" cried the Knight with fervour, "My fate is in your hands—do with me as you please—you alone can avert my cruel destiny. From this moment, I cease to hope or to despair."

Erilda was in an agony insupportable—tears choked her utterance, and pressing his hand between her's, she flew to conceal her anguish in another part of the garden. They met at the supper board, but she, feigning indisposition, begged leave to retire; and full early did the Baron and his guests press the downy pillow.

In her chamber, Erilda indulged her sighs: Sir Rhyswick had chosen the heir apparent of

Wales for her future lord, and she well knew it was in vain to contest his choice. The chieftain loved the happiness of his child, but the love of aggrandisement he cherished in his bosom; and he looked forward with fond delight to the time when Erilda might, with the partner of her pleasures, share the thrones of Gwynedd and Powys. A few days was to see the young Prince at Rhuddlan—preparations were making for his reception—Sir Rhywick [sic] with pleasure beheld the nuptial day advancing—but Erilda viewed its approach with agony. The night was far advanced, ere her troubled thoughts were invaded by sleep, yet still maintaining their empire, they conjured up visions to the closed eyes. Erilda dreamed, that her father, overpowered by his affection for her, and her entreaties, yielded his consent to her union with Wertwrold, and placed her hand in his. Transported with joy, she threw her arms round her love's neck; at this junction awaking, she found the Knight clasped in her embrace. Recoiling with horror from his arms, and recovering her senses, that were at first bewildered: "Away," she cried in a tone of terror: "perfidious Knight, leave me; your conduct calls for my indignation. Oh, Wertwrold! was it possible for me to imagine you would thus repay the hospitality you have here experienced, by invading, in the midnight hour, the chamber of the defenceless?—Begone," she added, with a contemptuous frown, "ere I call my attendants, and expose the serpent who repays the favour of Rhuddlan's lord with abusing his confidence."

"Yet hear me, Erilda," returned the Knight, "ere I am gone for ever; I [271] came but to gaze my last farewell on that lovely countenance that dooms me [t]o²⁶ everlasting misery: my neighing [s]teed now waits at the castle gate, and I must bid these much loved haunts adieu for ever. Farewell, Erilda—irresistible fate leads me hence—and, oh! Sometimes give a thought on him who, added to his agonies, harbours for you a fruitless passion!"

Wertwrold paused.

"For ever!" exclaimed Erilda; "Oh, Wertwrold!"

"Could my absence," continued the Knight, "create one pang in your breast, though grateful would the knowledge be to my heart, still it would in[f]lict²⁷ a wound, Erilda, urging my brain to distraction, when I paused on your unhappiness.—Which ever way I turn, misery attends me—endless sorrow is my bitter portion: that I am indifferent to Erilda creates another pang."

"Oh, Wertwrold!" cried the maid; and, sinking on his bosom, "I am your's, and your's alone."

"Do not my ears deceive me," cried the enraptured Knight; "does Erilda really love me—will she renounce the world for me?"

"The world!"

"Yes," returned Wertwrold, "and then shall my felicity dawn: Erilda must renounce every thing to be mine—to share with me those transports which virtuous love creates."

"You speak in mystery."

"Erilda must, with heroic fortitude, overcome every obstacle to our union—must place implicit confidence in my faith—and sacrifice every thing for me. The firm mind can stand, unshaken, on the stupendous rock, and smile upon the gulph beneath that threatens to devour—so must the devour—so must the woman who would [ga]in²⁸ my arms."

²⁶ The scan of the book cuts the word off. We can only presume it refers to the word *to*.

²⁷ The scan of the book cuts the word off. We can only presume it refers to the word *inflict*

²⁸ The scan of the book cuts the word off. We can only presume it refers to the word *gain*.

“Wertwrold!”

“Take this ring, Erilda, it is a charmed one: which, when breathed upon, brings me to your presence: use it as you need me, and I fly, in obedience to your command, though at the extremity of the world.”

“Yet stay; you leave me in doubt.”

“Erilda must use her own discretion, I have not power to direct her. Farewell,” he cried; and pressing her to his bosom, instantly retired, leaving her lost in wonder and amazement.

For a time she could scarcely believe her senses—every thing appeared as a dream before her eyes—but she possessed the charming ring—and the deluding thought vanished, that told her the preceding scene was the mere fabrication of her imagination.

At breakfast time she met Sir Rhyswick, who was not a little surprized and angered with the abrupt departure of his guest.

Erilda endeavoured to plead his cause—urging that business of the utmost import demanded his immediate attendance, and that to her he apologized.

The generous chieftain was well satisfied with the excuse, although he had hoped Wertwrold, in whose favour he was much interested, should have been present at the solemnization of Erilda’s nuptials, which the fourth day was to see performed, according to a message which he had received from the young Prince, who, impatient to call Erilda his bride, thus early appointed the day.

Sir Rhyswick, with joy expressed in his countenance, imparted the news to his daughter, who, falling upon her knees—her cheeks bathed in tears—and grasping his hand, entreated him, as he considered her happiness, to forego his intentions.

“How?” cried the astonished Baron.

“I shall never know happiness with a man whom my heart will not acknowledge for its lord,” returned the afflicted Erilda; “Oh!” as you love my peace of mind, send back the prince—Erilda cannot be the bride of Morven—another object has enchained her heart.”

“How,” exclaimed the indignant Baron; “Does Erilda reject the heir to the throne of Wales?”

“It would be criminal to bestow my hand, when another possesses my heart. Oh, my father! The happy Morven will [272] find one more worthy of being his bride—one more closely in conjunction with his soul—who will return his fond affection with affection. [”]

“Erilda,” cried the venerable chieftain with firmness, “I seek not to know him whom your heart has chosen. If you value my affection, Morven must be your future lord; if not, your father is lost to you for ever.” Thus saying, he retired, leaving the distracted maid overwhelmed with grief.

Sir Rhyswick would not see her the rest of the day: and a messenger in the evening coming to her chamber, bid her prepare on the morrow to receive Morven, who was expected at the castle, attended by a numerous retinue.

Erilda, in an agony of distraction, threw herself upon the couch; her tears more plenteously flowed to her relief, and eased those labouring sighs that swelled her agitated bosom. She, casting her eyes upon the magic ring that encircled her finger; pressed it to her lips, and her warm breath sullyng the ruby that sparkled upon it, instantly the Blood-red Knight stood before her.

“I come,” he cried, “at your command, from the bosom of the vasty deep, to serve the mistress of my heart.”

Wertwrold took a seat by her side—Erilda hung her head upon his shoulder; her cheek was

pale with weeping—her eyes were languid and heavy.

“Oh, Wertwrold!” she exclaimed, “this must be our last meeting; the son of Cynvyn claims Erilda’s hand, and even now is on the road to Rhuddlan, to lead her to the bridal altar.”

“And will Erilda yield her honour, then, at the sordid entreaties of avarice and pride? Will she prostitute herself, embittering the remainder of her days, to gratify another’s passion?”

“Wertwrold! you—”

“Oh, lady! The fond affection glowing in my bosom has heaped a world of ruin on my heart—I see the gulph yawning at my feet—I see what tortures are preparing for me, and fly to meet my doom.—It Erilda is who hurls me to destruction—it is Erilda who mocks my sighs, and points me to the spot where angry demons wait to glut them on my blood. But these inflictions I can brave—for, she I love proves false—she who deceitfully sighed, ‘I am your’s, and your’s alone.’”

“You amaze and terrify me: what tortures[,] what inflictions are those you dread? Oh Wertwrold! Do not keep me in suspense—tell me who, or what are you?”

“Who I am, lady, must remain a secret—what I am, my warm sighs, my great affliction have revealed—your lover. Oh, Erilda! I am man, with half his fortitude—man, with all his weaknesses: love animates and distracts my bosom; and she whom I wed, must wed me for myself alone.”

“Fond Wertwrold! I question you no more—and oh! How shall I convince you that my heart is your’s—doomed as I am to misery and Morven.”

She fixed her languishing eyes upon his countenance—Wertwrold paused.

Erilda’s chamber looked into the castle garden; the woodbine and honeysuckle climbed above her window, and a rose-tree entwined itself with the odorous branches of the honeysuckle—some sprigs hung pendant near the sashes of the casement, where the flower blowed and scented the air with its refreshing sweets.

Wertwrold eagerly slipped a spray that boasted a full blown flower and a ripening bud, which he presented to Erilda.

“Look you,” he cried; “look on these flowers—the beauty of the one withers, while the other ripens. Here we see a rich bloom upon the cheek of youth; what a glowing fragrance does its breath impart! How sweet is the dew that hangs upon the expanding leaf! How rich! How luxuriant! How captivating to the senses! Would it not be cruel to pluck this early bud, ere it hath tasted of that dew which now sparkles on its lip—and, at the moment when it is about to enjoy those sweets [273] which are prepared for early life?—Lady, this new plucked bud, in an hour shall perish—life shall fly its newly created bosom—the hand of man hath deprived it of its succours, and, ere it ceased to charm, it dies, unpitied, unrespected.[”] Then turning to the other— “This full-blown rose, whose shrivelled leaf betrays a speedy dissolution, having tasted of all the pleasures life affords, and enjoyed them in their full sense, prepares to die. The morning sun, instead of cheering, shall wither its juiceless fibres—the flavour of its breath is fled—and the falling dew animates it not—the airs are cold and freezing that play around it—and plucked, it would not perish sooner than were it left to wither upon the spray.”

“I do not understand you.”

“Lady, if one of these flowers must be torn from the branch of life, which would you sacrifice?”

“The full-blown.”

“Then live, Erilda—life to enjoy the tide of pleasure and of happiness.”

“Wertwrold, your words convey a horrible meaning; my soul shudders at the thought.”

“What thought, Erida?—I ask you but to live—is the thought mercenary? I ask you but to taste of those pleasures, which he for whom you would sacrifice your happiness and person, cannot enjoy. Sir Rhyswick has nearly numbered his years—and dissolution betrays its approach upon his cheek: his infirm limbs—his shrivelled form—his silvery beard—and aged eye, like the full-blown rose, confirms a speedy termination of his life.”

Erida fainted upon his bosom—his arms encircled her waist—hers were entwined round his neck: the colour of returning life soon crimsoned her cheek: her lips were pressed to his; the kiss was exchanged that imparted a mutual glow to the heart, and filled it with voluptuous thoughts.

“Erida is mine, eternally,” cried the Knight.

“I am your’s, for ever,” sighed the maid with half fainting voice.— “To-morrow she will leave Rhuddlan for my arms?”

“To-morrow, I am your’s.”

They parted—each transported with the warmth of passion; and the ensuing eve was to see Erida preparing her flight from her paternal home.

The next morning, Morven and his numerous retinue were heard upon their march across the mountain: the martial clang of their warlike instruments was heard at a great distance; and some messengers preceding, brought the early news of his approach and presents for the bride. The castle gates were thrown open to receive them—white flags waved upon the walls, that were thronged with armed soldiers, who owned Rhuddlan’s powerful lord for their chieftain; and bards and harpers raised high their voices in praise of the fair Erida.

Morven entered the castle, amidst the acclamations of the generous people, who loudly testified their joy at his approach, and whose loud shouts rent the air. Sir Rhyswick received him with every demonstration of pleasure, and instantly conducted him to the presence of his daughter.

Erida, habited in robes of virgin white, that flowed adown her taper limbs, in the midst of her maidens, welcomed him with a smile. She looked beautiful—her cheeks were flushed with the ripe tincture of the rose—her blue eyes beamed with expression—her hair was tastefully disposed upon her forehead—and silver beads flowed down her fine-shaped bosom.

Morven saluted her with affability. For a while the young Prince was transfixed with wonder and admiration; her beauty far exceeded, in his estimation, the report that had reached his ear; and he looked with impatience for the moment that was to make her his bride.

The day was spent in merry pastimes; but Erida was depressed with fears; she trembled at the promise she had made to Wertwrold, and more than once resolved to break it. The evening [274] fast approached, and she grew more and more alarmed; at length the last rays of the declining sun were reflected upon the lake—the tinkling bell of the goatherds caught her ear—the much dreaded time was arrived—her heart fluttered in her bosom—and wild and unknowing what she did, she sought the harbour²⁹ where she had promised to meet the unknown.

Wertwrold was already there; with eagerness he clasped her to his bosom—with unallayed passion pressed her lips to his.

²⁹ Misprint for *arbour*.

“Oh, Erilda!” he sighed, “do I hold you in my arms, and shall my present bliss be equalled by the future? Come,” he continued, “let us hasten our departure; a coracle waits us on the Clwyd, to waft us to the opposite shore.”

“Wertwrold!” exclaimed the affrighted maid; “I dare not—do not tempt me—I must remain—and—be the bride of Morven.”

“Perjured Erilda! false fleeting woman—is this your truth—is this your constancy? Then farewell for ever.”

“Yet stay,” she cried, one moment: “Oh, Wertwrold! Do not leave me a prey to my own thoughts.”

“Will Erilda be mine?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Voluntarily mine?”

“Oh, yes!” exclaimed the maid; unconscious of what she said, observing lights at the further end of the walk, and fearful lest they should discover her with the unknown.

“Erilda will fly her paternal roof for Wertwrold?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Regardless of a father’s tears and remonstrances?”

“I am Wertwrold’s, and Wertwrold’s alone!” she exclaimed, more alarmed by the nearer approach of the lights; “and no power on earth shall separate me from his arms.”

The Knight of the Blood-red Plume smiled—it was the smile of satisfaction; and he placed in her hand a dagger.

“Use it,” he cried, “in self-defence alone. Where is Sir Rhyswick.”

At this moment, a number of torches were seen flaming down the walks—Sir Rhyswick was at the head of a party of servants, whose countenances were expressive of fear.

“See!” cried Erilda, “they bend their steps this way; we shall be discovered.”

“Take this dagger,” returned the Knight, thrusting it into her hand.

“How am I to use it?” exclaimed the maid in terror.

“Sir Rhyswick advances; ‘tis him alone we have to fear.—Plunge it in his bosom.”

“In the bosom of my father?” cried she, with horror. “Wertwrold—Merciful heavens! do not my ears deceive me? Horror! horror! In the bosom of my father!—Away, monster,”

“Come to my arms, Erilda,” exclaimed the Knight, “I have proved your virtue, and you are doubly dear to me.” He pressed the trembling maid to his bosom.

At this moment, Sir Rhyswick entered the arbour.

“This way—this way!” cried Wertwrold: and hurrying through a small outlet, that led to the river; footsteps pursued them. Still Erilda held the dagger in her hand, and the pale moonbeams silvering the path, betrayed the shadow of a person in pursuit, wrapped in a long cloak.

“We are betrayed,” cried Wertwrold; “our pursuer must die.”

“I see the coracle; it is at shore,” said Erilda. And, at this moment, some one seized her white robe behind.

“Plunge your dagger in his heart,” cried Wertwrold.

“Hold your impious hand!” returned a hollow voice.

“Strike!” demanded the Knight.

“Stay, murderess!” uttered the voice.

“Our safety pleads for his death,” rejoined Wertwrold.

“The hand of the pursuer now clasped Erilda’s shoulder; who, disentangling herself, and rendered frantic, turned hastily round, and plunged the dagger in her assailant’s breast.

The wounded man dropped upon the ground. “Cruel Erilda!” escaped his lips, and he instantly expired.

“Hence God-abandoned murderers;”³⁰ muttered the voice that had before arrested the arm of Erilda. “Fly to meet thy doom.”

“Hark!” cried the maid; “heard you nothing?—What voice was that?”

Terror sat on her brow—her lips were pale with fear—her eyes looked wild and fiery.

“I heard nothing but the winds sighing along the strand.”

“Do you hear nothing,” exclaimed she. “Merciful God! What have I done?—‘Murderess!’—Oh, let me look on him I have slain.”

She approached the corse, spite of the entreaties of Wertwrold; and discovered, wrapped in a long cloak, the bleeding body of Sir Rhyswick! A crimson stream flowed from the fresh-made wound—his eyes were filmed and closed in death—his cheek was wan—his mouth wide and distended.

“Oh, God! My father!” exclaimed Erilda,—“Murdered by my hands!” And fell fainting upon his bleeding breast.

Wertwrold endeavoured to recal [sic] her to recollection; but, for a long time, vain were his attempts. At length, recovering, “Leave me,” she cried; “leave me to die with my murdered father.—Away! Anguish gnaws my breast.—Abandoned by Heaven, leave me to die, and receive the punishment of my guilt.”

“You rave, Erilda!—See, the vassals of the Baron draw near!—Hark now their voices are heard—their torches gleam in the walks; we shall be discovered, Erilda, let me arouse you from this torpor—let us fly, Erilda, and save ourselves from an ignominious death.”

“Away!” cried the distracted maid; “I am a wretch unfit to live—more unfit to die: yet I will expiate the foul offence by submitting to those tortures that await me—which exceed not the agonies of my own bosom. Oh! My much loved father!” she exclaimed, “your daughter—your own daughter, is your murderer.”

She fell upon his bosom; and still the Blood-plumed Knight urged her to fly.

“Erilda!” he returned, “what false notions occupy your breast! Rather by penitence expiate the crime; the foul offence is not to be atoned by death. Heaven in its wrath has doomed your soul to everlasting torments; live then, and, by penitence, seek to appease its vengeance.”

“What mercy can the wretched murderer of her parent hope for?—Leave me, Wertwrold; distraction rages through my brain.—I am lost—for ever lost—God-abandoned—doomed to everlasting torments.”

“Oh, Erilda! Think on your spotless fame to be blasted by the scandalizing tongue of futurity—think on the curses each peasant slave will mutter on her who was once her country’s boast; the name of Erilda shall be shuddered at by those who judge not of the motive but the act—children shall be rocked to their slumbers with the frightful relation of her guilt, and she shall live for ever in the detestation and abhorrence even of the criminal.—The pilgrim shall hear and

³⁰ Misprint for *murderess*.

tremble at her tale—the monk shall cross himself, and tell his beads, when he passes Rhuddlan’s blood-stained towers—all nature shall be shocked with her enormities; and not a pitying sigh shall be heaved to her memory. Come, Erilda, let us fly; penitence shall soon restore peace to your bosom, and your crime shall be forgotten.”

“Oh, no! I will remain and sigh out my last breath on the cold bosom of my father.”

“See, Erilda, the torches advance, Prince Morven is at their head; this way he bends his steps—he has his eye upon us—Distraction!—we are lost.”

[276] “Ah! Morven! Comes he hither to witness my shame?” exclaimed the maid; “I cannot stand the inquiring glance of his penetrating eye.”

“Then hasten to the coracle, Erilda, which now awaits us on the shore.—Haste, Erilda, hear you not their voices?—They approach—they are at our heels.”

At this moment, a number of voices exclaimed, “This way!”

“Oh! Hide me—hide me from them; they come—they come;” cried Erilda. And clasping the hand of Wertwrold, she flew to the strand where the coracle was anchored.

The footsteps approached; and numberless torches lined the strand. Sir Rhyswick was discovered by the vassals of Rhuddlan, wrapped up in his cloak, and bathed in his blood. His heart was cold in his bosom—no signs of life animated his cheek, that was pale and deathlike. His silvery beard was distained and clotted with gore;—the last breath had issued from his mouth.

Morven had the corse borne to the castle, where it lay in state for three days; when it was deposited in the earth, and five hundred masses were sung for his eternal repose.

In the mean time, the despairing Erilda having set her foot on board the vessel, was borne over the thin wave with the rapidity of lightning. Torches still lined the stand;³¹ and their glaring light was reflected to the opposite shore, breaking through the horrible darkness that clouded the earth.

“Vain is your flight, murderess!” whispered a voice in the breeze.—“Mountains cannot conceal your guilt, or cover you from the wrath of the great avenger.—To the furthest corner of the world, the retributive sword of justice shall pursue you.”

“Hark!” cried Erilda, clinging to the bosom of her seducer, while horror distorted her countenance. “Hark; heard you not a voice? Oh, heard you not a voice? Oh, Wertwrold!—hide me—hide me.”

She buried her face in her cloak, while the warrior Knight maintained a contemptuous silence; at length, gazing upon her with satisfaction, he exclaimed:

“And is Erilda mine—do I now press her in arms—do I now hold her to my heart, beyond the power of man to tear her from me? Why, this, indeed, is triumph—she is mine, voluntarily mine—she has fled her paternal roof for me, an unknown—she has rejected Morven, the heir apparent to the crown of Wales, who came to her with a heart full of love, and proffered the wealth of his country at her feet, to share her smiles, for me an unknown! She has renounced her claim to virtue, embraced infamy for a spotless name, has preferred the blast of scandal to the mild breath of praise, and all this for me, an UNKNOWN!”

A horrible smile, as he concluded, played upon his cheek.—Erilda started from his bosom.

“Wertwrold?” she exclaimed;— “Do you upbraid me?”

³¹ Misprint for *strand*.

“Enamoured beauty, no! To ME, this guilt is pleasure: had you deluged the world in a sea of blood, or brought another chaos on the earth—Wertwrold would have smiled.”

“For Heaven’s sake,” cried the almost expiring criminal; “tell me, who are you?”

“*The Warrior Knight of the Blood-red Plume*: but,” he continued, “Erilda is beyond the reach of mercy—is inevitably mine—and I will reveal myself in all my glowing colours. I am an agent of the great infernal—my residence is in the bosom of the Clwyd—my occupation is to aggravate the crimes on earth, and be the great instigator³² of war and rapine: in my bosom spring those seeds of faction, which I scatter in the breasts of princes, urging them to raise the sword against each other’s life, and plunge each other’s nation in a torrent of destructive war: but this had ceased—Morven’s father had restored Wales to prosperity and peace—and I, in the bosom of my na[277]tive stream, was doomed to sleep and brood new broils, in painful inactivity. While thus my mind was occupied with thought, an incubus approached my oozy bed, and breathed Erilda’s fame into my ear: I was aroused with the sweet image my fancy drew; and, on beholding the enchanting object, found her sweeter than my imagination had painted her—and, from that moment, I resolved to make her mine. I heard of her many virtues—of her piety—and what a feeling heart she boasted; this news instructed me what shape to assume; and the Warrior Knight of the Blood-red Plume answered every purpose. Erilda was easily ensnared: she pitied me, because she thought me unfortunate—pity instantly begat love—love the glowing fire of all-consuming passion. I had no power to deceive, but speciously—”

“Monster!” exclaimed the frantic wretch, “you were all deception.”

“There Erilda wrongs me,” cried the fiend; “she deceived herself—she though[t] me what her heart hoped I was—I did not need much art to gain her—she readily entered into all my views—embraced my projects as fast as they were uttered.”

Erilda threw herself upon her knees.

“Nay, prayer is vain,” continued the fiend; “you are lost to Heaven—you scrupled to commit an immediate murder, yet planned a lingering death for the parent who had nurtured you—you would not stab, but preferred planting daggers in your father’s bosom.—Murderess! You bid him who gave you life, live for a time in agony, to reflect on his daughter’s infamy.”

Erilda shrunk with horror and affright from the hideous monster, who now resumed his original shape, amidst the yell of demons, who rose from the sandy deep, upon the curling wave, to greet their chief. The eyes of the sanguinary fiend emitting a sulphureous flame, were fixed upon the pale countenance of the guilty maid, whom he grasped round the waist in malignant triumph. Green scales covered his body; from his mouth and nostrils he breathed the white frothen³³ waters—and various animals, fostered by the liquid element, trailed their pestiferous slime across his carcase. In his right hand he held a trident, which he raised on high to plunge in the bosom of his victim, who, screaming, burst from his embrace, and falling upon her knees, implored of Heaven protection. Loud thunders shook the sky—terrific lightning flashed in her eyes—and the furious winds bursting through the mountains, swelled the agitated river beyond its bounds. The fiend, with malignant yell, pursued Erilda—the trident entered her bosom—and crimson torrents of her virgin blood gushed from the yawning wound—in agony she fell—the demon, twining his hand in her fair locks, hurled her to the deep, and, sated with triumph,

³² Misprint for *instigator*.

³³ Made-up archaism for *frothing*.

vanished with his coracle.

Long time did the white-browed waves bear up Erida: in her last moments, she beheld the pale spectre of Sir Rhyswick, who advanced upon the rolling waters, that seemed to shrink from his feet, placing his fore-finger to the deep wound in his breast. More dreadful were her screams—and billow succeeding billow, bore her near the shore. Struggling for life, she clung to a loose rock to save herself, which yielding to her grasp, came rolling down, and crashed her to pieces.

The hermit paused.—

Since then has Rhuddlan's castle been the seat of anarchy.—Monarchs, indeed, have made it their residence; but, each night, Erida's screams are heard, and the Warrior of the Blood-red Plume is seen pursuing her through the ruined courts.

Such is the tale of Rhuddlan's ruined towers. Pilgrim, go thy way, stop not within its blasted walls, foul fiends ride upon the misty air, and the demons of the angry Clwyd claim it as their right.

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