

The Lover's Heart

THE following tale is recorded in the Historical Memoirs of Champagne, by Bougier. It has been a favourite narrative with the old romance writers; and the principal incident, however objectionable, has been displayed in several modern poems. It is probable that the *true* history will be acceptable, for its tender and amorous incident, to the fair reader.

I find it in some shape related by Howel, in his "Familiar Letters," in one addressed to Ben Jonson. He recommends it to him as a subject "which peradventure you may make use of in your way;" and concludes by saying, "In my opinion, which vails to yours, this is choice and rich stuff for you to put upon your loom, and make a curious web of."

The Lord De Coucy, vassal to the Count De Champagne, was one of the most accomplished youths of his time. He loved, with an excess of passion, the lady of the Lord Du Fayel, who felt a reciprocal affection. With the most poignant grief this lady heard from her lover, that he had resolved to accompany the king and the Count De Champagne to the wars of the Holy Land; but she would not oppose his wishes, because she hoped that his absence might dissipate the jealousy of her husband. The time of departure having come, these

two lovers parted with sorrows of the most lively tenderness. The lady, in quitting her lover, presented him with some rings, some diamonds, and with a string that she had woven herself of his own hair, intermixed with silk and buttons of large pearls, to serve him, according to the fashion of those days, to tie a magnificent hood which covered his helmet. This he gratefully accepted.

In Palestine, at the siege of Acre, in 1191, in gloriously ascending the ramparts, he received a wound, which was declared mortal. He employed the few moments he had to live in writing to the Lady Du Fayel; and he poured forth the fervour of his soul. He ordered his squire to embalm his heart after his death, and to convey it to his beloved mistress, with the presents he had received from her hands in quitting her.

The squire, faithful to the dying injunction of his master, returned to France, to present the heart and the presents to the lady of Du Fayel. But when he approached the castle of this lady, he concealed himself in the neighbouring wood, till he could find some favourable moment to complete his promise. He had the misfortune to be observed by the husband of this lady, who recognized him, and who immediately suspected he came in search of his wife with some message from

his master. He threatened to deprive him of his life if he did not divulge the occasion of his return. The squire assured him that his master was dead; but Du Fayel not believing it, drew his sword on him. This man, frightened at the peril in which he found himself, confessed everything; and put into his hands the heart and letter of his master. Du Fayel, prompted by the fellest revenge, ordered his cook to mince the heart; and having mixed it with meat, he caused a ragout to be made, which he knew pleased the taste of his wife, and had it served to her. The lady ate heartily of the dish. After the repast, Du Fayel inquired of his wife if she had found the ragout according to her taste: she answered him that she had found it excellent. "It is for this reason that I caused it to be served to you, for it is a kind of meat which you very much liked. You have, Madam," the savage Du Fayel continued, "eaten the heart of the Lord De Coucy." But this she would not believe, till he showed her the letter of her lover, with the string of his hair, and the diamonds she had given him. Then shuddering in the anguish of her sensations, and urged by the darkest despair, she told him—"It is true that I loved that heart, because it merited to be loved: for never could it find its superior; and since I have eaten of so noble a meat, and that my stomach is the tomb

of so precious a heart, I will take care that nothing of inferior worth shall ever be mixed with it." Grief and passion choked her utterance. She retired to her chamber: she closed the door for ever; and refusing to accept of consolation or food, the amiable victim expired on the fourth day.