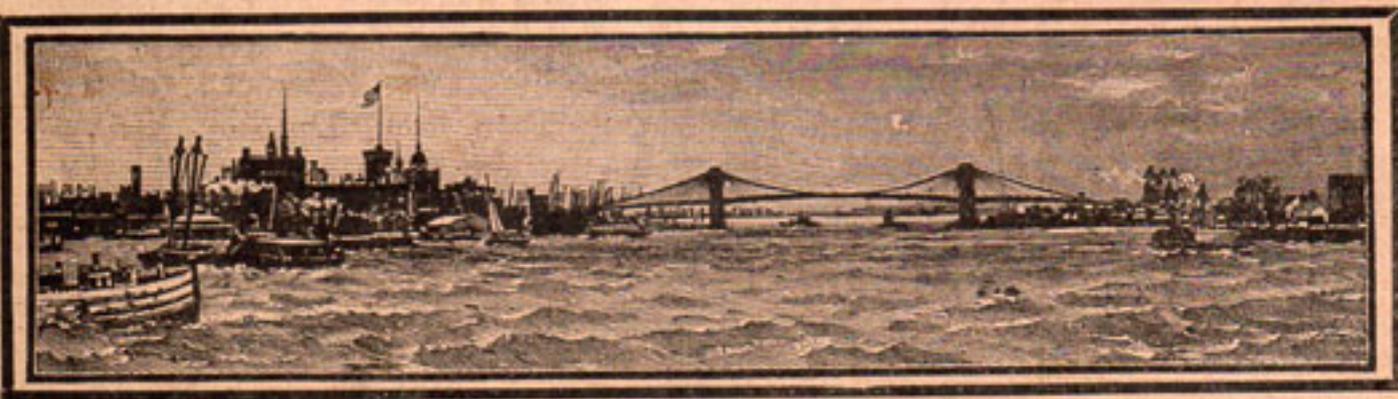


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In Ursula's Garden

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

I

HER three lovers had praised her with many canzonets and sonnets on that May morning, as they sat in the rose-garden at Longaville, and the sun-steeped leaves made a tempered, aromatic shade about them. Afterwards they had drawn grass-blades to decide who should accompany the Lady Ursula to the summer pavilion, that she might fetch her viol and sing them a song of love; and in the sylvan lottery chance had favored the Earl of Pevensey.

Left to themselves, the Marquis of Falmouth and Master Kit Mervale regarded one another irresolutely for a moment, like strange curs uncertain whether to fraternize or to fly at one another's throat. Then Master Mervale lay down in the young grass, stretched himself, twirled his thin black mustachios, and chuckled in perfect, luxurious content.

"Decidedly," said he, "your Grace is past master in the art of wooing; no university in the world would refuse you a degree."

The Marquis frowned. He was a great bluff man, with wheat-colored hair, and was somewhat slow-witted. After a little, he found the quizzical, boyish face that mocked him irresistible, and laughed, and unbent from the dignified reserve he had firmly intended to maintain. "Master Mervale," he said, "I will be frank with you, for you appear a lad of good bearing, as lads go, barring a trifle of affectation and a certain squeamishness in speech. When I seek my way to a woman's heart, I am as any other explorer venturing into a strange country; as he takes with him beads and mirrors to placate the inhabitants, so do I fetch with me sonnets and such-like gewgaws to please her fancies; only when I find a glut of them left by previous adventurers must I pay my way with pure gold. And truth, Master Mervale, is a jewel."

Master Mervale raised his eyebrows. "Truth?" he queried, gently.

"It would surely be indelicate," suggested the Marquis, "to allow even truth to appear quite unclothed in the presence of a lady?" He smiled and took a short turn on the grass. "Look you, Master Mervale," said he, narrowing his pale blue eyes to mere slits, "I have, somehow, a great disposition to confidence come upon me. Frankly, my passion for the Lady Ursula burns somewhat more mildly than that which Antony bore the Egyptian; it is less a fire whereby to consume kingdoms than a candle wherewith to light a contented home; and quite frankly, I mean to have her. The estates lie convenient, the families are of equal rank, her father is agreed, and she has a sufficiency of beauty; there are, in short, no obstacles to our union save you and my lord of Pevensey, and these, I confess, I do not fear. I can wait, Master Mervale. Oh, I am patient, Master Mervale, but, I own, I cannot brook denial. It is I, or no one. By Saint Gregory! I wear steel at my side, Master Mervale, that will serve for other purposes save that of opening oysters!" So he blustered in the spring sunlight, and frowned darkly as Master Mervale, after a hopeless attempt at gravity, lay flat upon his back and crowed like a cock in irrepressible laughter.

"Your patience shames Job the Patriarch," said he, when he had ended and wiped away his tears; "yet, it seems to me, my lord, you do not consider one thing. I grant you, his Grace of Pevensey and I are your equals neither in estate nor reputation; still, setting modesty aside, is it not possible the Lady Ursula may come, in time, to love one of us?"

"Setting common sense aside," said the Marquis, stiffly, "it is possible she may be smitten with a tertian fever. Let us hope, however, that she may escape both contagions."

"There was a cousin of the Lady Ursula's—a Mistress Katherine Beaufort—"

"Death of my life!" His Grace wheeled about, scowled, and then tapped sharply upon the palm of one hand with the nail-bitten fingers of the other. "Ay," said he, slowly, "there was."

"She loved you?" murmured Master Mervale, smiling gently.

"God help me!" groaned the Marquis; "we loved one another! I know not how you came by your information, nor do I ask. Yet 'tis ill opening an old wound. I loved her; let that suffice." With a set face, he turned away for a moment and gazed toward the slender parapets of Longaville, half hidden by pale foliage and very white against the rain-washed sky; then groaned, and glared angrily into the lad's upturned countenance. "You talk of love," he said, hoarsely; "a love compounded equally of youthful imagination, a liking for fantastic phrases and a disposition for caterwauling i' the moonlight. Ah, lad, lad!—if you but knew! That is not love; to love is to go mad like a star-struck moth, and then to strive in vain to forget, and to eat one's heart out in the loneliness, and to hunger—hunger—" The Marquis spread out his hands helplessly, and then, with a quick, impatient gesture, swept back the mass of wheat-colored hair that fell about his face. "Ah, Master Mervale," he sighed, "'tis the greatest thing in the world!"

"Yet," said Master Mervale, with courteous interest, "you did not marry?"

"Marry!" His Grace snarled toward the sun and laughed, shortly. "Look you, Master Mervale, I know not how far y'are acquainted with the business. 'Twas in Cornwall yonder years since; I was but a lad, and she a wench—ah, such a wench, with tender blue eyes, and a faint, sweet voice that could deny me nothing! God does not fashion her like every day." The Marquis paced the grass impatiently, gnawing his lip and debating with himself in a stifled, unnatural tone. "Marry? Her family was good, but their deserts outranked their fortunes; their crest was not the topmost feather in Fortune's cap, you understand; somewhat sunken i' the world, Master Mervale. And I? My father—God rest his bones!—was a cold, hard

man, and my two elder brothers—Holy Virgin, pray for them!—loved me none too well. I was the cadet then: Heaven helps them that help themselves, says my father, and I haven't a penny for you. My way was yet to make in the world; to saddle myself with a penniless wench—even a wench whose voice set a man's heart hammering at his ribs—was folly, Master Mervale. Utter, improvident, shiftless, bedlamite folly, lad!"

"H'm!" Master Mervale cleared his throat, twirled his mustachios, and smiled indolently at some unspoken thought. "Was it?" he queried, after an interval of meditation.

"Ah!" cried the Marquis, in a sudden gust of anger; "I dare say, as your smirking hints, 'twas the coward's part not to snap fingers at fate and fathers and dare all! I did not. We parted—in what fashion matters not,—and I set forth to seek my fortune. 'Twas a brave world then, Master Mervale, for all the tears that were scarce dried on my cheeks! A world where the heavens were as blue as a certain woman's eyes, and wherein a likely lad might see far countries, and beard the Mussulman in his mosque, and fetch home—though he might never love her, you understand—an Emir's daughter as his wife—

"With more gay gold about her middle
Than would buy half Northumberland."

His voice died away for a moment, and he sighed, a little wistfully; then he shrugged his shoulders. "Well!" said he; "I fought in Flanders somewhat—in Spain—what matter where? Then, at last, sickened in Amsterdam three years ago, where a messenger comes to haul me out of bed as future Marquis of Falmouth. One brother slain in a duel, Master Mervale; one killed in Wyatt's Rebellion; and my father dying of old age, and—Heaven rest his soul!—not over-anxious to meet his Maker. There you have it, Master Mervale—a right merry whimsey of Fate's—I a marquis, my own master, fit mate for any woman in the kingdom, and Kate—my Kate—vanished!"

"Vanished?" The lad echoed the word, with wide eyes.

"Vanished in the night five years ago, and no sign nor rumor of her since! Gone

to seek me abroad, no doubt, poor wench! Dead, dead, beyond question, Master Mervale!" The Marquis swallowed, and rubbed his lips with the back of his hand. "Ah, well!" said he; "'tis an old sorrow!"

The male animal shaken by some strong emotion is to his brothers an embarrassing rather than a pathetic sight. Master Mervale, lowering his eyes discreetly, rooted up several tufts of grass before he spoke. Then, "My lord, you have known of love," said he, very slowly; "have you no kindness for an unhappy lover who has been one of us? My lord of Pevensey, I think, loves the Lady Ursula, at least as much as you ever loved this Mistress Katherine; of my own adoration I do not speak, save to say I will wed no woman if it be not she. Her father favors you, for you are a match in a thousand; but you do not love her. It matters little to you, my lord, whom she may wed; to us it signifies a life's happiness. Will not the memory of that Cornish lass—the memory of moonlit nights, and of those sweet, vain aspirations and foiled day-dreams that in boyhood waked your blood even to that brave folly which now possesses us—will not the memory of these things soften you, my lord?"

But his Grace of Falmouth was by this time half regretful of his recent outburst, and somewhat inclined to regard his companion as a dangerously plausible young fellow who had very unwarrantably wormed himself into his confidence. His heavy jaw shut like a trap. "By St. Gregory!" said he; "may I fry in hell a thousand years if I do! What I have told you of is past, Master Mervale; a wise man does not cry over spilt milk."

"You are adamant?" sighed the boy.

"The nether millstone," said the Marquis, smiling grimly, "is in comparison but a pillow of down."

"Yet—yet the milk was sweet, your Grace?" the boy suggested, with a faint answering smile.

"Sweet!" The Marquis's voice shook in a deep thrill of speech.

"And if the choice lay between Ursula and Katherine?"

"Oh, fool!—oh, pink-cheeked, utter ignorant fool!" the Marquis groaned. "Said I not you knew nothing of love?"

"Heigho!" Master Mervale put aside all glum-faced discussion, with a little yawn, and sprang to his feet. "Then we can but hope that somewhere, somehow, Mistress Katherine yet lives and in her own good time may reappear. And speaking of reappearances—surely the Lady Ursula is strangely tardy in making hers?"

The Marquis's jealousy when it slumbered slept but lightly. "Let us join them," he said, shortly, and started through the gardens with quick, stiff strides.

II

They went westward through the gardens toward the summer pavilion, and came presently to a close-shaven lawn, where the summer pavilion stood beside the brook that widened into an artificial pond, spread with lily-pads and fringed with lustreless rushes. Here the Lady Ursula sat with the Earl of Pevensey beneath a burgeoning maple-tree. Such rays as sifted through into their cool retreat lay like splotches of wine upon the ground, and there the taller grass-blades turned to needles of thin silver; one palpitating beam, more daring than the rest, slanted straight toward the little head of the Lady Ursula, converting her hair into a veritable halo of misty gold that appeared strangely out of place in its present position. She seemed a Bassarid who had somehow fallen heir to an aureole; for, to speak truth, there was naught else of the saint about her. At least, there is no record of any saint in the calendar who ever looked with laughing gray-green eyes upon her lover and mocked at the fervor and trepidation of his speech. This the Lady Ursula now did; and, manifestly, enjoyed the doing of it.

After a little, the Earl of Pevensey took up the viol that lay beside them and sang to her in the clear morning. He was sunbrowned and very comely, and his great black eyes were tender as he sang.

Sang he:

"Mistress mine, the spring about us
Seems to mock at us and flout us
That so coldly do delay:
When the very birds are mating,
Prythee, why should we be waiting—
We that might be wed to-day?"

"*Life is short*, the wise men tell us;—
Even those dusty, musty fellows
That have done with life—alas!
Do the bones of Aristotle
Never hunger for a bottle,
Youth and some frank Grecian lass?

"Ah, I warrant you;—and Zeno
Would not reason, could he know
One more chance to live and love:
For, at best, the merry May-time
Is a very fleeting play-time;—
Why, then, waste an hour thereof?

"Thus, I demonstrate by reason
Youth's for love, and spring's the season
For the garnering of our bliss;
Wisdom is but long-faced folly;
Cry a fig for melancholy!
Seal the bargain with a kiss."

When he had ended, the Earl of Pevensey laughed and looked up into her face with a long, hungry gaze; and the Lady Ursula laughed likewise and spoke kindly to him, though the distance was too great for the eavesdroppers to overhear. Then, after a little, the Lady Ursula bent forward out of the shade of the maple into the sun, and the sunlight fell upon her golden head and glowed in the depths of her hair, as she kissed him, tenderly and without haste, full upon the lips.

III

The Marquis of Falmouth caught Master Mervale's arm in a grip that made the boy wince. His look was murderous, as he turned in the shadow of a white-lilac bush and spoke carefully through sharp breaths that shook his great body.

"There are," said he, "certain matters I must discuss with my lord of Pevensey shortly. I desire you, Master Mervale, to fetch him to the spot where we parted last, that we may finish our debate, quietly and undisturbed. Else— Go, lad, and fetch him!"

For a moment, the boy faced his pale, half-shut eyes that were like coals smouldering behind a veil of gray ash. Then he shrugged his shoulders, sauntered forward, and doffed his cap to the Lady Ursula. There followed much laughter among them, many explanations from Master Mervale, and yet more laughter from the lady and the Earl. The Marquis ground his big white teeth as he

listened, and wondered angrily over the cause of their mirth.

"Splendor of God!" growled the Marquis; then he heaved a sigh of relief, as the Earl of Pevensey raised his hands lightly toward heaven, laughed once more, and plunged into the thicket. His Grace of Falmouth laughed in turn, though not very pleasantly. Afterwards he loosened his sword in the scabbard and turned back to seek their rendezvous in the shadowed place where they had made sonnets to the Lady Ursula.

IV

For some ten minutes the Marquis strode proudly through the maze, pondering on his injuries and on certain thrusts that human skill could not parry. In a quarter of an hour he was lost in a wilderness of trim box-hedges that confronted him stiffly at every turn and branched off in innumerable gravelled alleys that led nowhither.

"Death of my life!" said the Marquis. He retraced his steps impatiently; cast his cap upon the ground in seething desperation; turned in a totally different direction, and in five minutes trod upon his discarded head-gear.

"Holy Gregory!" said the Marquis. He meditated for a moment, then caught up his sword close to his side and plunged into the nearest hedge. After a little he came out, with a scratched face and a scant breath, into another alley. As the crow flies, he went through the maze of Longaville, leaving in his rear desolation and snapped box-twigs. He came out of the ruin behind the white-lilac bush where he had stood and heard the Earl of Pevensey sing to the Lady Ursula and had seen what followed.

The Marquis wiped his brow. Then he looked out over the lawn and breathed heavily. The Lady Ursula still sat beneath the maple, and beside her was Master Mervale, whose arm was about her waist. Her arm was about his neck, and she listened as he talked eagerly and with many gestures. Then they both laughed and kissed one another.

"Splendor of God!" groaned the Marquis. He wiped his brow once more, with a shaking hand, as he crouched behind the white-lilac bush. "Why, 'tis a very



THEY WENT WESTWARD TOWARD THE SUMMER PAVILION

Semiramis!" he gasped. "Oh, holy Gregory! Yet I must be quiet—quiet as a sucking lamb, that I may strike as a roaring lion afterwards! Is this your innocence, Mistress Ursula, that cannot bide the spoken name of a spade? Oh, splendor of God!"

Thus he raged behind the white-lilac bush while they laughed and kissed in the sunlight. After a little, they parted. The Lady Ursula, still laughing, lifted the branches of the thicket behind them and disappeared in the path which the Earl of Pevensey had taken. Master Mervale, kissing his hand and laughing yet more loudly, lounged toward the entrance of the maze, where, as he approached it, a white-lilac bush quivered angrily, and the Marquis of Falmouth confronted him, with an ashy countenance and working lips.

V

"I have heard, Master Mervale," said the Marquis, gently, "that love is blind?"

The boy stared at the white face, that had before his eyes masked its blind, terrible rage with a crooked smile. It was as though a tiger-cat, crouched for the fatal spring, had suddenly relaxed the tension of its lithe body and had paused to trifle with its prey. "'Tis an ancient fable, my lord," said he, smiling, and made as though to pass.

"Indeed," said the Marquis, courteously, but without yielding an inch, "'tis a very reassuring one; for," he continued, meditatively, "were the eyes of all lovers suddenly opened, Master Mervale, I suspect it would prove a red hour for the world. There would be both tempers and reputations lost, Master Mervale; there would be sword-thrusts; there would be corpses, Master Mervale."

"Doubtless, my lord," said the lad, striving to jest and have done; "for the flesh is frail, and the tender heart of woman cannot abide suffering in a man. The sex is very pitiful, my lord."

"Yet, Master Mervale," pursued the Marquis, equably, but without smiling, "there be lovers in the world that have eyes?"

"Doubtless, my lord," said the boy.

"There also be women in the world, Master Mervale," suggested his Grace of Falmouth, still following out an ap-

parently absorbing train of thought, "that are but whitened sepulchres—very fair without, but worms and corruption within?"

"Doubtless, my lord."

"There also be swords in the world, Master Mervale?" purred the Marquis. He touched his own slightly, as he spoke.

"My lord—" cried the boy, with a gasp.

"Now, swords have many uses, Master Mervale," his Grace of Falmouth continued, half idly. "With a sword one may pick a cork from a bottle; with a sword one may toast cheese about the Michaelmas fire; with a sword one may spit a man, Master Mervale—ay, even an ambling, pink-faced, lipping lad that cannot boo at a goose, Master Mervale. And I have no inclination just now for either wine or toasted cheese, Master Mervale." His tone was wistfully apologetic, as one lamenting some woful deficiency in himself.

"I do not understand you, my lord," said the boy, in a thin, trembling voice.

"Indeed, I think we understand each other perfectly," said the Marquis. "For I have been very frank with you, and I have watched you from behind this bush for a half-hour."

The boy raised his hand as though to speak.

"Look you, Master Mervale," the Marquis said, frankly, "you and my lord of Pevensey and I be brave fellows; we need a wide world to bustle in. Now, the thought has come to me that this narrow continent of ours is scarce commodious enough for all three. There be purgatory and heaven, and yet another place, Master Mervale; why, then, crowd one another?"

"My lord," said the boy, dully, "I do not understand you."

"Holy Gregory!" scoffed the Marquis; "surely my meaning is plain enough! 'tis to kill you first, and my lord of Pevensey afterwards! Y'are phœnixes, Master Mervale; y'are too good for this world. Longaville is not fit to be trodden under your feet; and therefore 'tis my intent you should leave Longaville feet first. Draw, Master Mervale!" cried the Marquis, his light hair falling about his flushed, handsome face, as he laughed joyously and flashed his sword in the spring sunshine.

The boy sprang back, with an inarticu-

late cry; then gulped some dignity into himself and spoke. "My lord," said he, "I admit that from your standpoint some explanation is necessary."

"You may render it to my heir, Master Mervale," cried the Marquis, impatiently, "who will doubtless accord it such credence as it merits. For my part, having two duels on my hands to-day, I have no time to listen to romances." He placed himself on guard; but Master Mervale stood with chattering teeth and irresolute, groping hands, and made no effort to draw. "Oh, the block! the curd-faced cheat!" cried the Marquis. "Will nothing move you?" With his left hand he struck at the boy.

Thereupon Master Mervale gasped, and turning with a great sob, ran through the gardens. The Marquis laughed discordantly; then he followed him, taking big leaps as he ran and flourishing his sword. "Oh, the coward!" he shouted; "oh, the unutterable coward! Oh, you paltry rabbit!"

So they came to the bank of the artificial pond. Master Mervale swerved as the Marquis pounced upon him with a grim oath; his foot caught in the root of a great willow, and he splashed into ten feet of still water, that splurged like quicksilver in the sunlight.

"Oh, Saint Gregory!" the Marquis cried, and clasped his sides in noisy mirth; "was there no other way to cool your courage? Paddle out and be flogged, Master Hare-heels!" he called to the boy, who had come to the surface and was swimming aimlessly down the bank. "Now, I have heard," said the Marquis, as he walked beside him, "that water swells a man—"

The Marquis started as Master Mervale grounded on a shallow and rose, dripping, knee-deep among the lily-pads. "Oh, splendor of God!" cried the Marquis, in a shaking voice.

Master Mervale had risen from his bath almost clean-shaven; only one-half of his mustachios clung to his upper lip, and as he rubbed the water from his eyes, even this fell, a little sodden mass, upon a broken lily-pad.

"Oh, splendor of God!" groaned the Marquis. He splashed noisily into the pond. "Oh, Kate, Kate!" he cried, his arm about Master Mervale. "Oh, blind,

blind, blind! O heart's dearest!—O rose of all the world! Oh, my dear, my dear!" he sobbed, brokenly.

Master Mervale broke from him and waded to dry land. "My lord—" he began, demurely.

"My lady wife—" said his Grace of Falmouth, with a glad, tremulous smile. He paused suddenly and passed his hand over his brow. "And yet I do not understand," said he. "Y'are dead; y'are buried. It was a frightened boy I struck." He spread out his arms, in a quick mad gesture. "O world! O sun! O stars!" he cried; "she is come back to me from the grave! O little world! little world! I think I could crush you in my hands!"

"Meanwhile," suggested Master Mervale, after an interval, "it is I that you are crushing." He sighed—though not very deeply—and continued, with a slight hiatus: "They would have wedded me to Lucius Rossmore, and I could not—I could not—"

"That skinflint! that palsied goat!" cried the Marquis.

"He was wealthy," said Master Mervale, throwing out his hands wearily. Then he sighed once more. "There seemed only you—only you in all the world. A man might come to you in those far-off countries; a woman might not. I fled by night, my lord, by the aid of a waiting-woman; became a man by the aid of a tailor; and set out to find you by the aid of such impudence as I might muster. But I could not. I followed you through Flanders, Italy, Spain—always just too late; always finding the bird flown, the nest yet warm. Then I heard you were suddenly become Marquis of Falmouth; then I gave up the quest, my lord."

"I would suggest," said the Marquis, "that my name is Stephen;—but why?"

"Stephen Allonby, my lord," said Master Mervale, sadly, "was not Marquis of Falmouth; as Marquis of Falmouth, you might look to mate with any woman short of the Queen."

"To tell you a secret," the Marquis whispered, "I look to mate with one beside whom the Queen—not to speak treason—is but a lean-faced, yellow piece of affectation. I aim higher than royalty, heart's dearest—to her by whom empresses are but common trulls."



"OH, KATE, KATE!" HE CRIED

"And Ursula?" asked Master Mervale, gently.

"Holy Gregory!" cried the Marquis, with a gasp—"I had forgot! Poor wench, poor wench! I must withdraw my suit warily—warily, yet kindly, you understand. Poor wench!—well, after all," he suggested, hopefully, "there is yet Pevensey."

"Oh, Stephen! Stephen!" Master Mervale murmured, and then laughed as though he would never have done; "there was never any other but Pevensey! Why, Ursula knows all—knows there was never so much manhood in Master Mervale's disposition as might not be picked up on the point of a pin! Why, she is my cousin, Stephen—my cousin and good friend, to whom I came at once on reaching England, to find you, favored by her father, pestering her with your suit, and the poor girl well-nigh at her wits' end because she might not have Pevensey. So," said Master Mervale, "we put our heads together, Stephen, as you see."

"Indeed," said his Grace of Falmouth, slowly, "it would seem that you two wenches have, between you, concocted a very pleasant comedy."

"It was not all a comedy," sighed

Master Mervale—"not all a comedy, Stephen, until to-day when you told Master Mervale the story of Katherine Beaufort. For I did not know—I did not know—"

"And now?" queried his Grace of Falmouth.

"H'm!" cried Master Mervale, tossing his head. "You are very unreasonable in anger! you are a veritable Turk! you struck me!"

The Marquis rose and bowed low to his former adversary. "Master Mervale," said he, "I hereby tender you my unreserved apologies for the affront I have put upon you. I protest I was vastly mistaken in your disposition, and hold you as valorous a gentleman as was ever made by a tailor's art; and you are at liberty to bestow as many kisses and caresses upon the Lady Ursula as you may elect, reserving, however, a reasonable sufficiency for one that shall be nameless. Are we friends, Master Mervale?"

Master Mervale rested his head upon the shoulder of his Grace of Falmouth, and sighing happily, laughed a low, gentle laugh that was vibrant with content. "No; not—not exactly friends, Stephen," said Master Mervale.

The Passer-by

BY CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH WELLS

I PASSED a house one summer day,—
The busy street in sunshine lay:
I heard a song, so sweet and gay,
Like that of some bright maid at play;
I smiled as I went on my way.

And when upon that summer day,
The sombre street in shadow lay,
I heard a moan, a sob, a cry,
My soul was sad in sympathy;
I wept as I went on my way.

A smile, a tear that summer day,
And what their meaning, who shall say?
For some were bright and some were gay,
And some in darkest shadow lay;
The world, unheeding, went its way.