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SCENES AND HYMNS OF LIFE.

BY MRS HEMANS.

No. VIII.

PRISONER'S EVENING SERVICE.

A SCENE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.*

From their spheres
The stars of human glory are cast down ;
Perish the roses and the flowers of kings,
Princes and emperors, and the crown and palms
Of all the mighty, withered and consumed!
Nor is power given to lowliest Innocence
Long to protect her own.—WORDSWORTH.

Scene—Prison of the Luxembourg, in Paris, during the Reign of Terror.

D'AUBIGNE, an aged Royalist.—BLANCHE, his Daughter, a young girl.

Blanche. What was our doom, my father?—In thine arms
I lay unconsciously thro' that dread hour.
Tell me the sentence!—Could our judges look,
Without relenting, on thy silvery hair?
Was there not mercy, father?—Will they not
Hasten us to our home?

D'Aubigné. Yes, my poor child!
They send us home.

Blanche. Oh! shall we gaze again
On the bright Loire?—Will the old hamlet-spire,
And the grey turret of our own château,
Look forth to greet us thro' the dusky elms?
Will the kind voices of our villagers,
The loving laughter in their children's eyes,
Welcome us back at last?—But how is this?
—Father! thy glance is clouded—on thy brow
There sits no joy!

D'Aubigné. Upon my brow, dear girl,
There sits, I trust, such deep and solemn peace,
As may befit the Christian, who receives
And recognises, in submissive awe,
The summons of his God.

Blanche. Thou dost not mean—
—No, no! it cannot be!—Didst thou not say
They sent us home?

D'Aubigné. Where is the spirit's home?—
Oh! most of all, in these dark evil days,
Where should it be—but in that world serene,
Beyond the sword's reach, and the tempest's power—
Where, but in Heaven.

Blanche. My father!
D'Aubigné. We must die.
We must look up to God, and calmly die.
—Come to my heart, and weep there!—for awhile
Give Nature's passion way, then brightly rise
In the still courage of a woman's heart!

* The last days of two prisoners in the Luxembourg, Sillery and La Souru, so affectingly described by Helen Maria Williams, in her Letters from France, gave rise to this little scene.—These two victims had composed a little hymn, which they every night sung together in a low and restrained voice.

Do I not know thee?—Do I ask too much
From mine own noble Blanche?

Blanche (*falling on his bosom.*) Oh! clasp me fast!
Thy trembling child!—Hide, hide me in thine arms—
Father!

D'Aubigné. Alas! my flower, thou'rt young to go,
Young, and so fair!—Yet were it worse, methinks,
To leave thee where the gentle and the brave,
The loyal-hearted and the chivalrous,
And they that loved their God, have all been swept
Like the sere leaves away.—For them no hearth
Through the wide land was left inviolate,
No altar holy; therefore did they fall,
Rejoicing to depart.—The soil is steep'd
In noble blood; the temples are gone down,
The voice of prayer is hush'd, or fearfully
Mutter'd, like sounds of guilt.—Why, who would live?
Who hath not panted, as a dove, to flee,
To quit for ever the dishonour'd soil,
The burden'd air?—Our God upon the cross—
Our King upon the scaffold*—let us think
Of these—and fold endurance to our hearts,
And bravely die!

Blanche. A dark and fearful way!
An evil doom for thy dear honour'd head!
Oh! thou, the kind, the gracious!—whom all eyes
Bless'd as they look'd upon!—Speak yet again—
Say, will they part us?

D'Aubigné. No, my Blanche; in death
We shall not be divided.

Blanche. Thanks to God!
He by thy glance will aid me;—I shall see
His light before me to the last.—And when—
—Oh! pardon these weak shrinkings of thy child!—
When shall the hour befall?

D'Aubigné. Oh! swiftly now,
And suddenly, with brief dread interval,
Comes down the mortal stroke.—But of that hour
As yet I know not.—Each low throbbing pulse
Of the quick pendulum may usher in
Eternity!

Blanche (*kneeling before him.*) My father! lay thy hand
On thy poor Blanche's head, and once again
Bless her with thy deep voice of tenderness,
Thus breathing saintly courage through her soul,
Ere we are call'd.

D'Aubigné. If I may speak through tears!
—Well may I bless thee, fondly, fervently,
Child of my heart!—thou who didst look on me
With thy lost mother's angel-eyes of love!
Thou that hast been a brightness in my path,
A guest of Heaven unto my lonely soul,
A stainless lily in my widow'd house,
There springing up—with soft light round thee shed—
For immortality!—Meek child of God!
I bless thee,—He will bless thee!—In his love

* A French royalist officer, dying upon a field of battle, and hearing some one near him uttering the most plaintive lamentations, turned towards the sufferer, and thus addressed him:—"My friend, whoever you may be, remember that your God expired upon the cross—your King upon the scaffold,—and he who now speaks to you has had his limbs shot from under him.—Meet your fate as becomes a man."

He calls thee now from this rude stormy world,
To thy Redeemer's breast—And thou wilt die,
As thou hast lived,—my dutious, holy Blanche!
In trusting and serene submissiveness,
Humble, yet full of Heaven.

Blanche (rising.) Now is there strength
Infused through all my spirit.—I can rise
And say—"Thy will be done!"

D'Abigné (pointing upwards.) Seest thou, my child,
That faint light in the west? The signal-star
Of our due vesper-service, gleaming in
Through the close dungeon-grating!—Fearfully
It seems to quiver; yet shall this night pass,
This night alone, without the lifted voice
Of adoration in our narrow cell,
As if unworthy Fear or wavering Faith
Silenced the strain?—No! let it waft to Heaven
The Prayer, the Hope, of poor Mortality,
In its dark hour once more!—And we will sleep—
Yes—calmly sleep, when our last rite is closed.

(They sing together.)

PRISONERS' EVENING HYMN.

We see no more, in thy pure skies,
How soft, O God! the sunset dies;
How every coloured hill and wood
Seems melting in the golden flood:
Yet, by the precious memories won
From bright hours now for ever gone,
Father! o'er all thy works, we know,
Thou still art shedding Beauty's glow;
Still touching every cloud and tree
With glory, eloquent of Thee;
Still feeding all thy flowers with light,
Though Man hath barr'd it from our sight.
We know Thou reign'st, the Unchanging One, th' All-Just,
And bless Thee still with free and boundless trust!

We read no more, O God! thy ways
On Earth, in these wild evil days.
The rod severe in th' oppressor's hand
Is ruler of the weeping land;
Fallen are the faithful and the pure,
No shrine is spared, no hearth secure.
Yet, by the deep voice from the Past,
Which tells us, these things cannot last;
And by the Hope which finds no Ark,
Save in thy breast, when storms grow dark;
We trust Thee!—As the sailor knows
That in its place of bright repose
His pole-star burns, though mist and cloud
May veil it with a midnight shroud.
We know Thou reign'st!—All Holy One, All-Just!
And bless Thee still with Love's own boundless trust.

We feel no more that aid is nigh,
When our faint hearts within us die.
We suffer—and we know our doom
Must be one suffering till the tomb.
Yet, by the anguish of Thy Son
When his last hour came darkly on;

By his dread cry, the air which rent
In terror of abandonment;
And by his parting word, which rose
Through Faith, victorious o'er all woes;
We know that Thou mayst wound, mayst break
The spirit, but wilt ne'er forsake!
Sad suppliants whom our brethren spurn,
In our deep need to Thee we turn:
To whom but Thee?—All-Merciful, All-Just!
In Life, in Death, we yield Thee boundless trust!

KEENE, OR FUNERAL LAMENT OF AN IRISH MOTHER
OVER HER SON.

BY MRS HEMANS.

Many of these Keenes abound with touches of a wild and simple pathos. The following is not a translated one, but only an imitation of their peculiar style, which seems to bear much analogy to the characteristics of Irish music.

DARKLY the cloud of night comes rolling on—
Darker is thy repose, my fair-hair'd son!
Silent and dark!

There is blood upon the threshold
Whence thy step went forth at morn,
Like a dancer's in its fleetness,
O my bright first-born!

At the glad sound of that footstep
My heart within me smiled;—
Thou wert brought me back all silent
In thy blood, my child!

DARKLY the cloud of night comes rolling on—
Darker is thy repose, my fair-hair'd son!
Silent and dark!

I thought to see thy children
Laugh with thine own blue eyes;
But my sorrow's voice is lonely
Where my life's flower lies.

I shall go to sit beside thee
Thy kindred's graves among;
I shall hear the tall grass whisper—
I shall hear it not long!

DARKLY the cloud of night comes rolling on—
Darker is thy repose, my fair-hair'd son!
Silent and dark!

And I too shall find slumber
With my lost son in the earth;—
Let none light up the ashes
Again on our hearth!

Let the roof go down! Let silence
On the home for ever fall,
Where my boy lay cold, and heard not
His lone mother's call!

DARKLY the cloud of night comes rolling on—
Darker is thy repose, my fair-hair'd son!
Silent and dark!

THE INDIAN'S REVENGE.

But by my wrongs, and by my wrath,
To-morrow Groomok's breath
That fires yon Heaven with storms of death,
Shall guide me to the foe!
Indian Song in "Gertrude of Wyoming."

SCENE IN THE LIFE OF A MORAVIAN MISSIONARY.*

Scene—The shore of a Lake surrounded by deep woods—A solitary cabin on its banks, overshadowed by maple and sycamore trees—Herrmann, the Missionary, seated alone before the cabin—The hour is evening twilight.

Herrmann. Was that the light from some lone swift canoe
Shooting across the waters?—No, a flash
From the night's first quick fire-fly, lost again
In the deep bay of Cedars. Not a bark
Is on the wave; no rustle of a breeze
Comes through the forest. In this new, strange world,
Oh! how mysterious, how eternal, seems
The mighty melancholy of the woods!
The Desert's own great spirit, infinite!
Little they know, in mine own father-land,
Along the castled Rhine, or e'en amidst
The wild Harz mountains, or the silvan glades
Deep in the Odenwald, they little know
Of what is solitude! In hours like this,
There, from a thousand nooks, the cottage-hearths
Pour forth red light through vine-hung lattices,
To guide the peasant, singing cheerily,
On the home-path;—while round his lowly porch,
With eager eyes awaiting his return,
The clustered faces of his children shine
To the clear harvest-moon. Be still, fond thoughts!
Melting my spirit's grasp from heavenly hope
By your vain earthward yearnings. O my God!
Draw me still nearer, closer unto Thee,
Till all the hollow of these deep desires
May with thyself be filled!—Be it enough
At once to gladden and to solemnize
My lonely life, if for thine altar here
In this dread temple of the wilderness,
By prayer, and toil, and watching, I may win
The offering of one heart, one human heart,
Bleeding, repenting, loving!

Hark! a step,
An Indian tread! I know the stealthy sound—
'Tis on some quest of evil, through the grass
Gliding so serpent-like.

He comes forward and meets an Indian warrior armed.

Enonio, is it thou? I see thy form
Tower stately through the dusk; yet scarce mine eye
Discerns thy face.

Enonio. My father speaks my name.

Herrmann. Are not the hunters from the chase returned?
The night-fires lit? Why is my son abroad?

* Circumstances similar to those on which this scene is founded, are recorded in Carne's Narrative of the Moravian Missions in Greenland, and gave rise to the dramatic sketch.

Ennio. The warrior's arrow knows of nobler prey
Than elk or deer. Now let my father leave
The lone path free.

Herrmann. The forest-way is long
From the red chieftain's home. Rest thee awhile
Beneath my sycamore, and we will speak
Of these things further.

Ennio. Tell me not of rest!
My heart is sleepless, and the dark night swift,
I must begone.

Herrmann (solemnly.) No, warrior, thou must stay!
The Mighty One hath given me power to search
Thy soul with piercing words—and thou must stay,
And hear me, and give answer! If thy heart
Be grown thus restless, is it not because
Within its dark folds thou hast mantled up
Some burning thought of ill?

Ennio (with sudden impetuosity.) How should I rest?
—Last night the spirit of my brother came,
An angry shadow in the moonlight streak,
And said—"Avenge me!"—In the clouds this morn,
I saw the frowning colour of his blood—
And that, too, had a voice.—I lay at noon
Alone beside the sounding waterfall,
And thro' its thunder-music spake a tone,
—A low tone piercing all the roll of waves—
And said—"Avenge me!"—There have I raised
The tomahawk, and strung the bow again,
That I may send the shadow from my couch,
And take the strange sound from the cataract,
And sleep once more.

Herrmann. A better path, my son,
Unto the still and dewy land of sleep,
My hand in peace can guide thee—ev'n the way
Thy dying brother trode.—Say, didst thou love
That lost one well?

Ennio. Know'st thou not we grew up
Even as twin roes amidst the wilderness?
Unto the chase we journeyed in one path,
We stemmed the lake in one canoe; we lay
Beneath one oak to rest.—When fever hung
Upon my burning lips, my brother's hand
Was still beneath my head; my brother's robe
Covered my bosom from the chill night air.
Our lives were girdled by one belt of love,
Until he turned him from his fathers' gods,
And then my soul fell from him—then the grass
Grew in the way between our parted homes,
And wheresoe'er I wandered, then it seemed
That all the woods were silent.—I went forth—
I journeyed, with my lonely heart, afar,
And so returned:—and where was he?—the earth
Owned him no more.

Herrmann. But thou thyself since then
Hast turned thee from the idols of thy tribe,
And, like thy brother, bowed the suppliant knee
To the one God.

Ennio. Yes, I have learned to pray
With my white father's words, yet all the more,
My heart, that shut against my brother's love,
Hath been within me as an arrowy fire,
Burning my sleep away.—In the night-hush,
Midst the strange whispers and dim shadowy things

Of the great forests, I have called aloud
"Brother, forgive, forgive!"—he answered not—
—His deep voice, rising from the land of souls,
Cries but "*Avenge me!*"—and I go forth now
To slay his murderer, that when next his eyes
Gleam on me mournfully from that pale shore,
I may look up, and meet their glance, and say
—"I have avenged thee."

Herrmann. Oh! that human love
Should be the root of this dread bitterness,
Till Heaven through all the fevered being pours
Transmuting balsam!—Stay, Enonio, stay!
Thy brother calls thee not!—The spirit world
Where the departed go, sends back to earth
No visitants for evil.—'Tis the might
Of the strong passion, the remorseful grief
At work in thine own breast, which lends the voice
Unto the forest and the cataract,
The angry colour to the clouds of morn,
The shadow to the moonlight—Stay, my son!
Thy brother is at peace.—Beside his couch,
When of the murderer's poisoned shaft he died,
I knelt and prayed; he named his Saviour's name,
Meekly, beseechingly;—he spoke of thee
In pity and in love.

Enonio (hurriedly.) Did he not say
My arrow should avenge him?

Herrmann. His last words
Were all forgiveness.

Enonio. What! and shall the man
Who pierced him, with the shaft of treachery,
Walk fearless forth in joy?

Herrmann. Was he not once
Thy brother's friend?—Oh! trust me, not in joy
He walks the frowning forest. Did keen love,
The late repentant of its heart estranged,
Wake in *thy* haunted bosom, with its train
Of sounds and shadows—and shall *he* escape?
Enonio, dream it not!—Our God, the all-just,
Unto himself reserves this Royalty—
The secret chastening of the guilty heart,
The fiery touch, the scourge that purifies,
Leave it with Him!—Yet make it not thy *hope*—
For that strong heart of thine—oh! listen yet—
Must in its depths o'ercome the very wish
For death or fortune to the guilty one,
Ere it can sleep again.

Enonio. My father speaks
Of change, for man too mighty.

Herrmann. I but speak
Of that which hath been, and again must be,
If thou wouldst join thy brother, in the life
Of the bright country, where, I well believe,
His soul rejoices.—*He* had known such change.
He died in peace. He, whom his tribe once named
The avenging eagle, took to his meek heart,
In its last pangs, the spirit of those words
Which from the Saviour's cross went up to Heaven:
"*Forgive them, for they know not what they do,*
Father, forgive!"—And o'er the eternal bounds
Of that celestial kingdom undefiled
Where evil may not enter, He, I deem,

Hath to his Master passed.—He waits thee there—
For love, we trust, springs heavenward from the grave,
Immortal in its holiness.—He calls
His brother to the land of golden light,
And ever-living fountains—couldst thou hear
His voice o'er those bright waters, it would say,
“ My brother! oh! be pure, be merciful!
That we may meet again.”

Enonio (hesitating.) Can I return
Unto my tribe, and unavenged?

Herrmann. To Him,
To Him, return, from whom thine erring steps
Have wandered far and long!—Return, my son,
To thy Redeemer!—Died he not in love,
—The sinless, the divine, the Son of God—
Breathing forgiveness midst all agonies,
And *we*, dare *we* be ruthless?—By His aid
Shalt thou be guided to thy brother's place
Midst the pure spirits.—Oh! retrace the way
Back to thy Saviour! he rejects no heart
Ev'n with the dark stains on it, if true tears
Be o'er them showered.—Aye, weep, thou Indian Chief!
For, by the kindling moonlight, I behold
Thy proud lips working—weep, relieve thy soul!
Tears will not shame thy manhood, in the hour
Of its great conflict.

Enonio (giving up his weapons to Herrmann.) Father, take the bow,
Keep the sharp arrows, till the hunters call
Forth to the chase once more.—And let me dwell
A little while, my Father! by thy side,
That I may hear the blessed words again
—Like water-brooks amidst the summer hills—
From thy true lips flow forth. For in my heart
The music and the memory of their sound
Too long have died away.

Herrmann. Oh! welcome back,
Friend, rescued one!—Yes, thou shalt be my guest,
And we will pray beneath my sycamore
Together, morn and eve; and I will spread
Thy couch beside my fire, and sleep at last
—After the visiting of holy thoughts—
With dewy wing shall sink upon thine eyes!
—Enter my home, and welcome, welcome back,
To peace, to God, thou lost and found again!

[*They go into the cabin together*

*Herrmann (lingering for a moment on the threshold, looks up to the
starry skies.)*

Father! that from amidst yon glorious worlds
Now look'st on us, thy children! make this hour
Blessed for ever! May it see the birth
Of thine own image in the unfathomed deep
Of an immortal soul;—a thing to name
With reverential thought, a solemn word!
To Thee more precious than those thousand stars
Burning on high in thy majestic Heaven!

THOUGHTS AND RECOLLECTIONS. BY MRS HEMANS.

I.

TO A FAMILY BIBLE.

WHAT household thoughts around thee, as their shrine,
Cling reverently!—Of anxious looks beguiled,
My mother's eyes upon thy page divine
Were dally bent; her accents, gravely mild,
Breath'd out thy lore;—whilst I, a dreamy child,
On breeze-like fancies wander'd oft away,
To some lone tuft of gleaming spring-flowers wild,
Some fresh-discover'd nook for woodland play,
Some secret nest:—yet would the solemn word,
At times, with kindlings of young wonder heard,
Fall on my waken'd spirit, there to be
A seed not lost; for which, in darker years,
O Book of Heaven! I pour, with grateful tears,
Heart-blessings on the holy Dead, and Thee.

II.

ON A REMEMBERED PICTURE OF CHRIST, AN ECCE HOMO
BY LEONARDO DA VINCI.

I MET that image on a mirthful day
Of youth ; and sinking with a still'd surprise,
The pride of life, before those holy eyes,
In my quick heart died thoughtfully away,
Abash'd to mute confession of a sway
Awful, though meek :—and now, that from the strings
Of my soul's lyre, the Tempest's mighty wings
Have struck forth tones which there unawaken'd lay ;
Now, that around the deep life of my mind,
Affections, deathless as itself, have twined,
Oft doth the pale bright vision still float by ;
But more divinely sweet, and speaking now,
Of one whose pity, throned on that sad brow,
Sounded all depths of Love, Grief, Death—Humanity !

III.

MOUNTAIN SANCTUARIES.

" He went up into a mountain apart to pray."

A cotto 'midst ancient mountains I have stood,
Where the wild falcons make their lordly nest
On high:—the spirit of the solitude
Fell solemnly upon my infant breast,
Though *then* I pray'd not; but deep thoughts have press'd
Into my being since I breath'd that air;
Nor could I *now* one moment live the guest
Of such dread scenes without the springs of prayer
O'erflowing in my soul:—No minsters rise
Like them in pure communion with the skies,
Vast, silent, open unto night and day!
—So must the o'erburden'd Son of Man have felt,
When, turning where inviolate stillness dwelt,
He sought high mountains, there apart to pray.

IV.

THE LILIES OF THE FIELD.

"Consider the lilies of the field."

FLOWERS! when the Saviour's calm benignant eye
Fell on your gentle beauty; when from you
That heavenly lesson for all hearts he drew,
Eternal, universal, as the sky;
Then in the bosom of your purity
A voice He set, as in a temple-shrine,
That Life's quick travellers ne'er might pass you by,
Unwarned of that sweet oracle divine.
And tho' too oft its low celestial sound
By the harsh notes of work-day care is drowned,
And the loud steps of vain unlistening haste,
Yet the great Ocean hath no tons of power
Mightier to reach the soul, in Thought's hushed hour,
Than yours, meek Lilies! chosen thus and graced.

V.

THE BIRDS OF THE AIR.

"Behold the birds of the air."

Ye, too, the glad and fearless Birds of Air,
Were charged that hour, on missionary wing,
The same bright lesson o'er the seas to bear,
Heaven-guided wanderers with the winds of Spring.
Sing on, before the storm, and after, sing!
And call us to your echoing woods away
From worldly cares; and bid our spirits bring
Faith to imbibe deep wisdom from your lay.
So may those blessed vernal strains renew
Childhood, a childhood yet more pure and true
Ev'n than the first, within the awakened mind;
While sweetly, joyously they tell of life
That knows no doubt, no questionings, no strife,
But hangs upon its God, unconsciously resigned.

VI.

THE OLIVE-TREE.

THE Palm—the Vine—the Cedar—each hath power
To bid fair Oriental shapes glance by,
And each quick glistening of the Laurel bower
Wafts Grecian images o'er Fancy's eye.
But thou, pale Olive! in *thy* branches lie
Far deeper spells than prophet-grove of old
Might e'er enshrine:—I could not hear thee sigh
To the wind's faintest whisper, nor behold
One shiver of thy leaves' dim silvery green,
Without high thoughts and solemn, of that scene,
When in the garden the Redeemer prayed;
When pale stars looked upon his faltering head,
And Angels, ministering in silent dread,
Trembled, perchance, within *thy* trembling shade.

VII.

PLACES OF WORSHIP.

"God is a spirit."

Spirit! whose life-sustaining Presence fills
Air, Ocean, central depths, by man untried;
Thou for thy worshippers hast sanctified
All place, all time;—the silence of the hills
Breathes veneration. Founts and choral rills
Of thee are murmuring—to its inmost glads
The living forest with thy presence thrills,
And there is holiness on every shade!
—Yet must the thoughtful soul of man invest
With dearer consecration those pure fanes,
Which, sever'd from all sounds of earth's unrest,
Hear nought but suppliant or adoring strains
Rise heavenward;—ne'er may cliff or cave possess
Their claim on human hearts for solemn tenderness.

VIII.

A CHURCH IN NORTH WALES.

BLESSINGS be round it still!—that gleaming fane,
Low in its mountain-glen!—old mossy trees
Narrow the sunshine through th' untinted pane,
And oft, borne in upon some fitful breeze,
The deep sound of the ever-pealing seas,
Filling the hollows with its anthem-tone,
There meets the voice of psalms;—yet not alone
For mansions, lulling to the heart as these,
I bless thee 'midst thy rocks, grey House of Prayer!
But for their sakes that unto thee repair,
From the bill-cabins and the ocean shore:
Oh! may the fisher and the mountaineer
Words to sustain earth's toiling children hear,
Within thy lowly walls for evermore!

IX.

OLD CHURCH IN AN ENGLISH PARK.

CROWNING a flowery slope it stood alone,
In gracious sanctity;—a bright rill wound
Caressingly about the holy ground,
And warbled, with a never-dying tone,
Amidst the tombs. A hue of ages gone
Seem'd, from that ivied porch, that solemn gleam
Of tower and cross, pale quivering on the stream,
O'er all th' ancestral woodlands to be thrown,
And something yet more deep. The air was fraught
With noble memories whispering many a thought
Of England's Fathers;—awful and serene,
They who had toil'd, watch'd, struggled to secure,
Within such fabrics, worship free and pure,
Reign'd there, th' o'ershadowing spirits of the scene.