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THE PALACE OF THE MAREMMA.

BY MRS. HEMANS.

[THE history of Desdemona has a parallel in the following passage of Dante. Nello della Pietra had espoused a lady of noble family at Sienna, named Madonna Pia. Her beauty was the admiration of Tuscany, and excited in the heart of her husband a jealousy, which, exasperated by false reports and groundless suspicions, at length drove him to the desperate resolution of Othello. It is difficult to decide whether the lady was quite innocent, but so Dante represents her. Her husband brought her into the Maremma, which then, as now, was a district destructive to health. He never told his unfortunate wife the reason of her banishment to so dangerous a country. He did not deign to utter complaint or accusation. He lived with her alone, in cold silence, without answering her questions, or listening to her remonstrances. He patiently waited till the pestilential air should destroy the health of this young lady. In a few months she died. Some chroniclers, indeed, tell us, that Nello used the dagger to hasten her death. It is certain that he survived her, plunged in sadness and perpetual silence. Dante had, in this incident, all the materials of an ample and very poetical narrative. But he bestows on it only four verses. He meets in Purgatory three spirits; one was a captain, who fell fighting on the same side with him in the battle of Campaldino; the second, a gentleman assassinated by the treachery of the house of Este; the third was a woman unknown to the poet, and who, after the others had spoken, turned towards him with these words:—

“ Ricordati di me ; che son la Pia ;
Sienna mi fé, disfecemi Maremma.
Salsi colui che inannellata pria
Disposando m' avea con la sua gemma.”

Edinburgh Review, No. LVIII.]

Mais elle était du monde, où les plus belles choses
Ont le pire destin ;
Et Rose elle à vécu ce que vivent les roses,
L'espace d'un matin.

Malherbe.

THESE are bright scenes beneath Italian skies,
 Where glowing suns their purest light diffuse,
 Uncultured flowers in wild profusion rise,
 And nature lavishes her warmest hues ;
 But trust thou not her smiles, her balmy breath,
 Away ! her charms are but the pomp of death !
 He in the vine-clad bowers unseen is dwelling,
 Where the cool shade its freshness round thee throws ;
 His voice, in every perfumed zephyr swelling,
 With gentlest whisper lures thee to repose ;
 And the soft sounds that through the foliage sigh,
 But woo thee still to slumber and to die.
 Mysterious danger lurks, a Syren, there,—
 Not robed in terrors, or announced in gloom,—
 But stealing o'er thee in the scented air,
 And veiled in flowers, that smile to deck thy tomb :
 How may we deem, amidst their bright array,
 That heaven and earth but flatter to betray ?
 Sunshine and bloom, and verdure ! can it be,
 That *these* but charm us with destructive wiles ?
 Where shall we turn, O Nature ! if in *these*
 Danger is masked in beauty—death in smiles ?
 Oh ! still the Circe of that fatal shore,
 Where she, the Sun's bright daughter, dwelt of yore !
 There, year by year, that secret peril spreads,
 Disguised in loveliness, its baleful reign,
 And viewless blights o'er many a landscape sheds ;—
 Gay with the riches of the south, in vain,
 O'er fairy towers, and palaces of state,
 Passing unseen, to leave them desolate.
 And pillared halls, whose airy colonnades
 Were formed to echo music's choral tones,
 Are silent now, amidst deserted shades *,
 Peopled by sculpture's graceful forms alone ;—
 And fountains dash, unheard, by lone alcoves,
 Neglected temples, and forsaken groves.
 And there, where marble nymphs, in beauty gleaming,
 Midst the deep shades of plane and cypress rise,
 By wave or grot, might Fancy linger, dreaming
 Of old Arcadia's woodland deities.
 Wild visions !—there no sylvan powers convene,—
 Death reigns the genius of the Elysian scene.
 Ye too, illustrious hills of Rome, that bear
 Traces of mightier beings on your brow,
 O'er you that subtle spirit of the air
 Extends the desert of his empire now ;—
 Broods o'er the wrecks of altar, fane, and dome,
 And makes the Cæsars' halls his ruined home.
 Youth, valour, beauty, oft have felt his power,
 His crowned and chosen victims—o'er their lot
 Hath fond affection wept—each blighted flower
 In turn was loved and mourned, and is forgot.

* See Madame de Staël's fine description, in her 'Corinne,' of the Villa Borghese, deserted on account of the malaria.

But one who perished, left a tale of woe,
 Meet for as deep a sigh as pity can bestow.
 A voice of music, from Sienna's walls,
 Is floating joyous on the summer air;—
 And there are banquets in her stately halls,—
 And graceful revels of the gay and fair,—
 And brilliant wreaths the altar have arrayed,
 Where meet her noblest youth, and loveliest maid.
 To that young bride each grace hath Nature given,
 Which glows on Art's divinest dream,—her eye
 Hath a pure sunbeam of her native heaven—
 Her cheek a tinge of morning's richest dye;
 Fair as that daughter of the south, whose form
 Still breathes and charms, in Vinci's colours warm*.
 But is she blest?—for sometimes o'er her smile
 A soft, sweet shade of pensiveness is cast;
 And in her liquid glance there seems awhile
 To dwell some thought whose soul is with the past.
 Yet soon it flies—a cloud that leaves no trace
 On the sky's azure, of its dwelling-place.
 Perchance, at times, within her heart may rise
 Remembrance of some early love or woe,
 Faded, yet scarce forgotten,—in her eyes
 Wakening the half-formed tear that may not flow:
 Yet radiant seems her lot as aught on earth,
 Where still some pining thought comes darkly o'er our mirth.
 The world before her smiles,—its changeful gaze
 She hath not proved as yet,—her path seems gay
 With flowers and sunshine, and the voice of praise
 Is still the joyous herald of her way;
 And beauty's light around her dwells, to throw
 O'er every scene its own resplendent glow.
 Such is the young Bianca, graced with all
 That nature, fortune, youth at once can give.
 Pure in their loveliness, her looks recal
 Such dreams as ne'er life's early bloom survive;
 And when she speaks, each thrilling tone is fraught
 With sweetness, born of high and heavenly thought.
 And he to whom are breathed her vows of faith
 Is brave and noble. Child of high descent,
 He hath stood fearless in the ranks of death,
 Mid slaughtered heaps, the warrior's monument;
 And proudly marshalled his *carroccio's* way†
 Amidst the wildest wreck of war's array.
 And his the chivalrous, commanding mien,
 Where high-born grandeur blends with courtly grace;
 Yet may a lightning glance at times be seen,
 Of fiery passions, darting o'er his face,
 And fierce the spirit kindling in his eye!—
 But e'en while yet we gaze, its quick, wild flashes die.

* An allusion to Leonardo da Vinci's picture of his wife Mona Lisa, supposed to be the most perfect imitation of Nature ever exhibited in painting.—See Vasari in his *Lives of the Painters*.

† See the description of this sort of consecrated war-chariot in Sismondi's *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes*, &c., vol. i., p. 394.

And calmly can Pietra smile—concealing,
As if forgotten, vengeance, hate, remorse,—
And veil the workings of each darker feeling,
Deep in his soul concentrating its force;
But yet *he loves!*—Oh! who hath loved, nor known
Affection's power exalt the bosom all its own?

The days roll on, and still Bianca's lot
Seems as a path of Eden. Thou might'st deem
That grief, the mighty chastener, had forgot
To wake her soul from life's enchanted dream;
And if her brow a moment's sadness wear,
It sheds but grace more intellectual there.

A few short years, and all is changed; her fate
Seems with some deep mysterious cloud o'ercast.
Have jealous doubts transformed to wrath and hate
The love whose glow expression's power surpassed?
Lo! on Pietra's brow a sullen gloom
Is gathering day by day, prophetic of her doom!

Oh! can he meet that eye of light serene,
Whence the pure spirit looks in radiance forth,—
And view that bright intelligence of mien,
Formed to express but thoughts of loftiest worth—
Yet deem that vice could desecrate such fane?—
How shall he e'er confide in aught on earth again?

In silence oft, with strange, vindictive gaze,
Transient, yet filled with meaning stern and wild,
Her features, calm in beauty, he surveys;
Then turns away, and fixes on her child
So dark a glance, as thrills a mother's mind
With some vague fear, scarce owned, and undefined.

There stands a lonely dwelling by the wave
Of the blue deep which bathes Italia's shore,
Far from all sounds but rippling seas, that lave
Grey rocks, with foliage richly shadowed o'er,
And sighing winds that murmur through the wood
Fringing the beach of that Hesperian flood.

Fair is that house of solitude, and fair
The green Maremma far around it spread—
A sun-bright waste of beauty; yet an air
Of brooding sadness o'er the scene is shed.
No human footstep tracks the lone domain;
The desert of luxuriance glows in vain.

And silent are the marble halls that rise
Mid founts, and cypress-walks, and olive-groves:
All sleeps in sunshine 'neath cerulean skies,
And still around the sea-breeze lightly roves;
Yet every trace of man reveals alone
That there life once had flourished—and is gone.

There,—till around them slowly, softly stealing,
The summer air, deceit in every sigh,
Came fraught with death, its power no sign revealing.—
Thy sires, Pietra, dwelt, in days gone by;
And strains of mirth and melody have flowed
Where stands, all voiceless now, the still abode.

And thither doth her lord, remorseless, bear
Bianca with her child—his altered eye
And brow a stern and fearful calmness wear,
While his dark spirit seals their doom—to die ;
And the deep bodings of his victim's heart
Tell her from fruitless hope at once to part.

It is the summer's glorious prime—and blending
Its blue transparence with the skies, the deep,
Each tint of heaven upon its breast descending,
Scarce murmurs as it heaves, in glassy sleep,
And on its wave reflects, more softly bright,
That lovely shore of solitude and light.

Fragrance in each warm southern gale is breathing ;
Decked with young flowers the rich Maremma glows ;
Neglected vines the trees are wildly wreathing,
And the fresh myrtle in exuberance blows ;
And far around, a deep and sunny bloom
Mantles the scene, as garlands robe the tomb.

Yes ! 'tis *thy* tomb, Bianca ! fairest flower !
The voice that calls thee speaks in every gale,
Which, o'er thee breathing with insidious power,
Bids the young roses of thy cheek turn pale,
And, fatal in its softness, day by day,
Steals from that eye some trembling spark away.

But sink not yet—for there are darker woes,
Daughter of beauty ! in thy spring-morn fading !
Sufferings more keen for thee reserved than those
Of lingering death, which thus thine eye are shading !
Nerve, then, thy heart to meet that bitter lot,
'Tis agony—but soon to be forgot !

What deeper pangs maternal hearts can wring,
Than hourly to behold the spoiler's breath
Shedding, as mildews on the bloom of spring,
O'er infancy's fair cheek the blight of death ?
To gaze and shrink, as gathering shades o'ercast
The pale, smooth brow, yet watch it to the last !

Such pangs were thine, young mother ! Thou didst bend
O'er thy fair boy, and raise his drooping head,
And, faint and hopeless, far from every friend,
Keep thy sad midnight-vigils near his bed,
And watch his patient, supplicating eye,
Fixed upon thee—on thee !—who couldst no aid supply.

There was no voice to cheer thy lonely woe
Through those dark hours ;—to thee the wind's low sigh,
And the faint murmur of the ocean's flow,
Came like some spirit whispering—“ He must die ! ”
And thou didst vainly clasp him to the breast
His young and sunny smile so oft with hope had blest.

'Tis past—that fearful trial—he is gone !
But thou, devoted ! hast not long to weep ;
The hour of Nature's chartered peace comes on,
And thou shalt share thine infant's holy sleep.
A few short sufferings yet, and death shall be
As a bright messenger from heaven to thee.

But ask not, hope not, one relenting thought
From him who doomed thee thus to waste away ;
Whose heart, with sullen, speechless vengeance fraught,
Broods in dark triumph o'er thy slow decay,
And coldly, sternly, silently can trace
The gradual withering of each youthful grace.

And yet the day of vain remorse shall come,
When thou, bright victim ! on his dreams shalt rise
As an accusing angel—and thy tomb,
A martyr's shrine, be hallowed in his eyes !
Then shall thine innocence his bosom wring,
More than thy fancied guilt with jealous pangs could sting.

Lift thy meek eyes to heaven—for all on earth,
Young sufferer ! fades before thee. Thou art lone—
Hope, fortune, love, smiled brightly on thy birth,
Thine hour of death is all affliction's own !
It is our task to suffer, and our fate
To learn that mighty lesson—soon or late.

The season's glory fades—the vintage-lay
Through joyous Italy resounds no more ;
But mortal loveliness hath passed away,
Fairer than aught in summer's glowing store,
Beauty and youth are gone ; behold them such
As death hath made them with his blighting touch ! *

The summer's breath came o'er them—and they died !
Softly it came, to give luxuriance birth ;
Called forth young Nature in her festal pride,
And bore to them their summons from the earth !
Again shall blow that mild, delicious breeze,
And wake to life and light all flowers but these.

No sculptured urn, nor verse thy virtues telling,
O lost and loveliest one ! adorns thy grave,
But o'er that humble cypress-shaded dwelling
The dew-drops glisten, and the wild flowers wave—
Emblems more meet, in transient light and bloom,
For thee who thus did'st pass in brightness to the tomb ! †

* "*La voilà, telle que la mort nous l'a faite !*"
Bossuet's Funeral Oration on the Princess Henrietta.

† This poem was written several years since, and intended for immediate publication, but withheld, on account of a coincidence of subject between its story and one chosen about the same time by a popular writer.

RECORDS OF PASSING THOUGHT.

A SERIES OF SONNETS, BY MRS. HEMANS.

I.

A VERNAL THOUGHT.

O FESTAL Spring! midst thy victorious glow,
Far spreading o'er the awaken'd woods and plains,
And streams that bound to meet thee from their chains,
Well might there lurk the shadow of a woe
For human hearts; and in the exulting flow
Of thy rich songs a melancholy tone,
Were we of mould all earthly; *we* alone,
Sever'd from thy great spell, and doom'd to go
Farther, still farther, from our sunny time,
Never to feel the breathings of our prime,—
Never to flower again!—But *we*, O Spring!
Cheer'd by deep spirit-whispers not of earth,
Press to the regions of thy heavenly birth,
As here thy birds and flowers press on to bloom and sing.

II.

TO THE SKY.

Far from the rustlings of the poplar-bough,
Which o'er my opening life wild music made,—
Far from the green hills with their heathery glow
And flashing streams, whereby my childhood play'd;—
In the dim city, midst the sounding flow
Of restless life, to *thee* in love I turn,
O thou rich Sky! and from *thy* splendours learn
How song-birds come and part, flowers wane and blow.
With thee all shapes of glory find their home;
And thou hast taught me well, majestic dome!
By stars, by sunsets, by soft clouds which rove
Thy blue expanse, or sleep in silvery rest,
That Nature's God hath left *no* spot unblest
With founts of beauty for the eye of love!

III.

ON THE MEMORIALS OF IMMATURE GENIUS.

*Written after reading some unpublished Fragments by the late
Mrs. Tighe.*

Oh! judge in thoughtful tenderness of those
Who, richly dower'd for life, are call'd to die
Ere the soul's flame through storms hath won repose
In Truth's pure ether, unperturb'd and high.
Let their mind's relics claim a trustful sigh!
Deem them but sad sweet fragments of a strain,
First notes of some yet struggling harmony,
By the strong rush, the crowding joy and pain
Of many inspirations met, and held
From its true sphere. Oh! soon it might have swell'd
Majestically forth!—Nor doubt that He,
Whose touch mysterious may on earth dissolve
Those links of music, elsewhere will evolve
Their grand consummate hymn, from passion-gusts made free.

IV.

ON WATCHING THE FLIGHT OF A SKYLARK.

Upward and upward still! In pearly light
The clouds are steep'd; the vernal spirit sighs
With bliss in every wind; and crystal skies
Woo thee, O Bird! to thy celestial height.
Bird, piercing heaven with music, thy free flight
Hath meaning for all bosoms,—most of all
For those wherein the rapture and the might
Of Poesy lie deep, and strive and burn
For their high place. Oh, heirs of Genius! learn
From the sky's bird your way!—no joy may fill
Your hearts,—no gift of holy strength be won
To bless *your* songs, ye Children of the Sun,
Save by the unswerving flight—upward and upward still!

V.

A THOUGHT OF THE SEA.

My earliest memories to thy shores are bound—
Thy solemn shores—thou ever-chanting Main!
The first rich sunsets, kindling thought profound
In my lone being, made thy restless plain
As the vast shining floor of some dread fane,
All paved with glass and fire! Yet oh, blue Deep!
Thou that no trace of human hearts dost keep,
Never to thee did Love, with silvery chain,
Draw my soul's dream, which through all nature sought
What waves deny,—some bower for *steadfast* bliss;
A *home* to twine with fancy, feeling, thought,
As with sweet flowers. But chasten'd Hope for this
Now turns from Earth's green vallies, as from thee,
To that sole, changeless World where "there is no more sea."

VI.

DISTANT SOUND OF THE SEA AT EVENING.

Yet, rolling far up some green mountain-dale,
Oft let me hear, as oftimes I have heard,
Thy swell, thou Deep! when eve calls home the bird,
And stills the wood; when summer tints grow pale,
Seen through the gathering of a dewy veil;
And peasant-steps are hastening to repose;
And gleaming flocks lie down, and flower-cups close,
To the last whisper of the falling gale.
Then, midst the dying of all other sound,
When the soul hears thy distant voice profound
Lone worshipping, and knows that through the night
"Twill worship still, *then* most its anthem-tone
Speaks to our being of the Eternal One
Who girds tired Nature with unslumbering might!

VII.

TO THE RIVER CLWYD, IN NORTH WALES.

O Cambrian River! with slow music gliding
By pastoral hills, old woods, and ruin'd towers;
Now midst thy reeds and golden willows hiding,
Now gleaming forth by some rich bank of flowers;—
Long flow'd the current of my life's clear hours
Onward with thine, whose voice yet haunts my dream,
Though time, and change, and other mightier powers,
Far from thy side have borne me. Thou, smooth stream,
Art winding still thy sunny meads along,
Murmuring to cottage and gray hall thy song—
Low, sweet, unchanged. *My* being's tide hath pass'd
Through rocks and storms; yet will I not complain,
If thus wrought free and pure from earthly stain,
Brightly its waves may reach their parent-deep at last.

VIII.

ORCHARD BLOSSOMS.

Doth thy heart stir within thee at the sight
Of orchard blooms upon the mossy bough?
Doth their sweet household smile walt back the glow
Of childhood's morn?—the marvel, the delight
In earth's new colouring, then all strangely bright—
A joy of fairy-land? Doth some old nook,
Haunted by visions of thy first loved book,
Rise on thy soul, with faint-streak'd blossoms white
Shower'd o'er the turf, and the lone primrose-knot,
And robin's nest, still faithful to the spot,
And the bee's dreamy chime?—Oh, gentle friend!
The *World's* cold breath, not *Time's*, this life bereaves
Of vernal gifts;—*Time* hallows what he leaves,
And will for *us* endear spring-memories to the end.

IX.

TO A DISTANT SCENE.

(A Woody Dingle in North Wales.)

Still are the cowslips from thy bosom springing,
O far-off grassy dell ! And dost thou see,
When southern winds first wake the vernal singing,
The star-gleam of the wood-anemone ?
Doth the shy ring-dove haunt thee still ?—the bee
Hang on thy flowers, as when I breathed farewell
To their wild blooms ?—and round my beechen tree
Still, in rich softness, doth the moss-bank swell ?—
Oh, strange illusion, by the fond heart wrought,
Whose own warm life suffuses Nature's face !
My being's tide of many-coloured thought
Hath pass'd from thee ; and now, green, flowery place,
I paint thee oft, scarce consciously, a scene
Silent, forsaken, dim—shadow'd by what hath been.