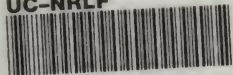


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THE DEMON

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY J. SKINNER AND CO., LTD.

THE DEMON

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN OF

LERMONTOFF

BY

ROBERT BURNESSE, B.A. (OXON.)

PETROGRAD



EDINBURGH:

DOUGLAS & FOULIS, 9 CASTLE STREET

1918

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DEDICATION.

TO THE CAUCASUS.

O H, Caucasus, to thee, majestic, wild,
I sing my lay, its faltering strains confessing—
Inspire the singer, as thou would'st thy child,
With snowy halo of paternal blessing.
'Twas thou, whose spell my youthful thoughts beguiled
With chains as strong as fate, as love caressing—
In northern lands thou knowest not—even there
My heart was thine always and everywhere.

Even as a boy I roamed, thine ardent lover,
O'er crags and beetling rocks with timorous tread,
Where thou, like Allah's worshippers, did'st cover
With misty turban thine imperial head,
Where homing eagle paused awhile to hover,
And freer winds their courses onward sped,
There on the dizzy peak my dreamland fancies
Whirled on with these through ether's broad expanses.

Since then till now long years have rolled between.
Once more among thy cliffs behold our meeting!
Kindly thy welcome to the boy has been,
Now to the exile kindly be thy greeting.
For grief thou gav'st oblivion serene
To one who sought thee, love for love entreating.
Lo! he again invokes thee here and now,
Whose thoughts are thine and all whose song art thou.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

MICHAEL LERMONTOFF was born in Moscow on the 15th October 1814. Of his father we know but little; his mother died when the poet was three years old, and he was brought up by his maternal grandmother. He was well instructed at an early age in modern languages, and among his shorter pieces there are graceful translations from French, German and English. Of his prose works the most typical is *A Hero of our Time*. Of his poetical works the most generally known is *The Demon*, which has not only been dramatised, but also set to music by Rubinstein, and is to this day one of the most popular operas on the Russian stage.

Lermontoff entered Moscow University, but he left it without taking a degree, and continued his studies in St. Petersburg. An account of his personal appearance in the early thirties describes him as plain looking, but redeemed from ugliness by his expressive eyes and intellectual forehead. Even at this early stage he was a great admirer of Byron, and he was often seen on his walks with a volume of Byron under his arm. Though capable of making himself extremely agreeable in society, he seems to have given offence at times by his sarcastic and biting wit. In the year 1834 he entered the army, and his life at this period was that of a gay and somewhat fast young officer.

But all the time he had been writing. If he had hitherto given the public few chances of admiring his

genius, it was because he was severely critical of his own work. He would never allow anything to pass out of his hands before he was thoroughly satisfied with it himself. He was a true artist at heart. "Many faultless verses of *The Demon* which might have been printed separately lay all his life in a hidden place." In the year 1837 universal attention was drawn to him for the first time. The great Russian poet Pushkin was killed in a duel, and Lermontoff wrote a poem on the event. In consequence of certain expressions used he was exiled to the Caucasus. He was recalled the following year, but was exiled a second time. A few hasty words spoken at a ball led to a duel. The poet was transferred to a regiment serving in the Caucasus. He had visited the region for the first time with his grandmother when he was ten years old. His early impressions were never effaced, and every sojourn only served to deepen them.

Pushkin, whom Lermontoff greatly admired, had shown himself in his earlier poems an admirer of Byron. But Pushkin after his thirtieth year discarded Byronism : Lermontoff remained true to it all his life. The character of the *Demon* is based on the character of "Lucifer" in Byron's *Cain*. The idea in both poems is the struggle between the two primary powers of good and evil, the overthrow of the latter, and the ultimate regeneration of mankind. The vast ideas of space and eternity expressed in the *Demon's* speeches may well be compared with Lucifer's speech to Cain, describing those beings who

"Can crowd Eternity into an hour,
Or stretch an hour into Eternity."

Lermontoff's writings are distinguished for their graceful

style and versification. He had a deep admiration for all that is beautiful in nature. The Caucasus, as he said himself, was to him something sacred. To the Caucasus *The Demon* is dedicated.

In 1841 Lermontoff was killed in a duel when in his twenty-seventh year. He died so young that it is impossible to say to what heights his genius might have risen. The rich poetic fancy is his own, his inspiration is drawn from the glorious mountains he loved so well, while the influence of Byron brought him into the tidal wave which swept at that time over the range of Western literature.

THE DEMON.

PART I.

“Evil, be thou my good.”—MILTON.

“And the sons of God beheld the daughters of men that they were fair.”—GENESIS.

ARGUMENT.

A **FALLEN ANGEL** is flying over the earth. He is weary of evil. Mankind has become corrupt and offers no opposition when he tempts. (1, 2.)

He views the noblest scenery of the Caucasus, but hatred is predominant in his heart, and he scorns whatever he sees. (3, 4.)

Gudàl, a Caucasian chief, has built a castle on a lofty hill. His daughter, Tamàra, is about to be married to the Lord of Sinodàl. She is spending the evening with her girl friends dancing and singing. She is so pure and lovely that she would arouse nobler thoughts, even in a Demon, were one to see her, and would make him long for his lost Paradise. (5, 6, 7, 8.)

The Demon sees her and loves her. (9.)

Meanwhile the Lord of Sinodàl is riding to the marriage at the head of a gay cavalcade. The Demon tempts him to ride more

swiftly through a dangerous mountain pass, where he is attacked by robbers and slain. His horse arrives at Gudàl's castle with the dead rider on its back. (10, 11, 12, 13, 14.)

The Demon appears to Tamàra in her dreams. He urges her to grieve no more, and promises her a love that is not of earth. (15, 16.)

I.

A FALLEN ANGEL once was winging
 Over a sinful earth his way,
 And memory was ever bringing
 The vision of a happier day,
 Telling an unforgotten story
 How once in realms of light and glory
 A seraph pure and bright he shone—
 How the brief comet downward fleeting
 Loved to exchange a smile of greeting
 With him, before its spark was gone.
 How 'mid the infant world's formations
 In caravans of cloud he roved
 Through worlds of scattered constellations—
 How Nature spread her lore and smiled
 Once upon him, God's happy child,
 In days when he believed and loved.

No trouble vexed his spirit then—
Now endless vistas lie between
The blessedness beyond his ken
And Him, who knew what might have been.

2.

Outcast so long—no Heaven, no home—
He wandered through earth's wildernesses—
Monotonous and wearisome,
As one age on another presses,
Or one slow minute follows minute.
The paltry world was his—but in it
His wickedness he wrought resistless,
For men on earth nowhere withstood
His wiles when he essayed—and, listless,
He loathed the evil seeds he strewed.

3.

O'er many a lofty Caucas peak
The exile's soaring pinion rose,
Below him, as with gems, Kazbèk
Sparkled with everlasting snows.
And Darial's¹ opposing sides
Showed black, as when a serpent hides
Its winding coils in some dark lair.

¹ Darial is a famous defile.

And Terek,¹ bounding from its fountain,
Like lion with wild shaggy hair,
Roared, and each mountain beast and mountain
Bird in the azure deep of air
Circled in endless panorama,
And gold-rimmed clouds from Eastern lands
Whirled with him on to northern strands,
And lofty rock and promontory,
Full of the secret of a dream,
Bent their proud heads beneath him flying,
Tracing the course of glittering stream.
And rival tower with tower vying
Scowled on the clouds that lay between ;
Till last, like sentinel stupendous,
The Caucasus shed dazzling sheen
Veiling a majesty tremendous.
All wild and wondrous was the scene
Of God's fair world ; but his proud vision
Scanned his Creator's works in vain,
Reflecting nought but calm derision,
Although that scorn was deathless pain.

4.

In front a glorious variation
Of palpitating landscape lies,
Carpets of living vegetation
Where Grusian valleys sink or rise,

¹ Terek is a river.

Glimpses of earthly Paradise,
Columns of ruined minarets,
And gently tinkling rivulets
Making the happy pebbles glisten ;
And rosy groves where nightingales
Sing their sweet loves, nor pause to listen
Till amorous mates sing answering tales.
There clothed with ivy, cool and wide,
The sycamores spread shady arches,
And in the caves when noonday parches
The timid stag comes in to hide.
Brightness and life where all rejoices,
The myriad hum of Nature's voices
All drowsy in noon's burning tide.
But in the blaze of midday heat,
Or in the night when zephyrs sweet
With fragrance of the rose were laden,
And bright as eyes of Grusian maiden
The pale-faced stars kept watch above,
Nought of magnificence could move
In that grim angel fallen from splendour
One thought of sympathy or love,
Of strength renewed or longings tender ;
And when he viewed the scene before him,
Hatred and scorn came surging o'er him.

5.

High on a cliff, with spacious halls,
 A castle stood, (the price of tears
 And toil to serfs through weary years),
 Where in the morning shadow falls
 From pine-clad hill to castle walls.
 And Prince Gudàl, so stern and gray,
 Had bade his thralls to hew a way
 Down that steep cliff's resisting side,
 Till step by step led to the water
 Where deep Aràgva's¹ currents glide,
 And oft Tamàra, his young daughter,
 Would come in veil and snow-white hood
 To fill her pitcher at its flood.

6.

From lofty cliff that castle lowered
 Grim, silent, motionless away ;
 But all is mirth and joy to-day,
 And zithers sound, and wine is poured.
 Gudàl his daughter's hand hath plighted,
 And all his clan to feast invited.
 And on the housetop, thickly strewn,²

¹ Aràgva is a river, a tributary of the Kura.

² The roofs are flat and are strewn with carpets.

The bride Tamàra, fair and young,
Is seated in a virgin throng,
'Mid song and dance and zither's tune,
While the sun's orb is sinking soon
Behind the peaks, and for their pleasure
They dance in a cleared space between
Maids clapping hands to music's measure.
And lightly her gay tambourine
Twirling with one hand round her head,
The young bride springs with fairy tread.
And lighter than a bird she flashes,
Now darting here, now breathless staying,
And all the merry girls surveying
With sparkling eyes 'neath long eye-lashes.
She guides the chorus through its mazes
'Mid rustling silk and gauzy shimmer,
And oft a dainty foot upraises,
Seeming to float, an airy swimmer.¹
And ah! that smile of childlike grace
Lighting her laughter-loving face.
Not Cynthia's quivering beams, the while
On castle wall and turret glancing,
Could match the radiance of that smile
Than youth and gladness more entrancing.

¹ This is a description of the Caucasian national dance,
"Lesginka."

7.

I swear by yon clear midnight star,
By rays that flash from east to west,
Ne'er emperor of lands afar,
Nor king, nor conqueror, nor Czar
Such lovely damsel e'er caressed.
Nor e'er did fountain's gentle storm
Lave with pellucid drops of pearl
In summer's heat so fair a girl,
Or sprinkle so divine a form.
Never did mortal hand till now
Smooth with soft fingers such a brow,
Or twine them in such waving hair.
For not since man was thrust from Eden
Had ever bloomed so sweet a maiden,
So innocent, so heavenly fair.

8.

But now, her last gay dance is over,
And dark forebodings o'er her hover,
For at the morn a stranger lover
Waits for the daughter of Gudàl.
A marriage yoke, a plighted hand,
New kinsmen, unfamiliar land.
Poor child, to be a husband's thrall !
And ofttime doubt, all unaware,
Laid on her heart a dumb distress,

But all her motions were so fair,
So full of seeming want of care,
Brimful of simple artlessness,
That had the Demon, wending by,
Beheld her then, he might have spurned
All his fell purposes, and turned
To Heaven with a repentant sigh.

9.

Lo! he beheld For one brief space,
Emotion strange, expressionless,
Swept in resistless torrent o'er him,
As if some voice of grace divine,
Across the gulf that lay before him,
Had called the outcast to the shrine
Of loveliness and heavenly strength.
And awestruck at the wondrous sight,
His thoughts in wayless labyrinth
Perplexed him, as in twinkling night,
Star points to star a chain extending
To continuity unending.
And riveted by power unseen,
New pangs increased his punishment,
Speaking in words which might have been
Erstwhile his own, "Repent, repent!"
He strove to tempt—the words came not—
Had he his ancient wiles forgot?

Nay. For were God to grant him yet
His former malice to forget,
He would but scorn the gift He sent.

10.

Spurring meanwhile his mettled steed,
The impatient bridegroom rides with speed
Where bright Aràgve's currents glide
'Twixt verdant banks on either side.
And following, far down the way,
With bells that tinkled as they strode,
Came camels faint beneath the load
Of costly gifts for marriage day,
And Sinodàl's¹ impetuous lord
Himself led this gay cavalcade.
With flashing jewels thick inlaid
Glittered his poniard and his sword,
His richly carven musket gleaming
In the sun's rays, his tunic streaming,
Fanned by the breeze that ceaseless played
Through the loose sleeves and vest confined
By fringe of lace, his saddle gay
With coloured silks of far Cathay ;
His bridle decked with every kind
Of tasselled store from farthest Ind.

¹ Sinodàl is probably the site of the present village Tsynondaly.

And his proud steed of Caucas strain,
In fierce revolt 'gainst guiding rein,
Tossing his tawny mane, and champing
The foamy bit, impatient stamping,
Pricks up his ears to glance aside
From threatening cliff to seething tide.
Narrow and dangerous the way
Along the gaping chasm lay ;
To right the angry waters hiss,
To left a frowning precipice.
The dusk has fallen, the day is gone,
The cavalcade moves faster on.

II.

There stood a chapel on the road
Wherein a saint reposed in God,
(This saint had been a prince in life,
Slain long ago in vengeful strife,)
And whosoever fared that way,
On warfare or on pleasure bent,
Passed never heedless by, but went
To the old lonely shrine to pray,
And that same prayer would guard him well
From dagger of the infidel.
But the young bridegroom, pausing not,
Rode on secure, his prayers forgot,
For, weaving dreams of fond conceit,

The crafty Fiend was at his side,
“Haste, bridegroom, haste—more fleet, more
fleet,
Else other lips will kiss thy bride.”
Sudden in front two forms appeared—
A shot rang out—the charger reared—
And on his clanging stirrups rose
The impulsive prince to face his foes,
For words of parley lingering not,
But straight with poniard gleaming, flashing,
Like eagle from its eyrie dashing,
'Mid crack of whip and pistol shot.
Loud rang the pass with musket rattle,
With cries and groans of wounded men,
As craven Grusians through the glen
Fled from the short contested battle.

12.

Huddled together in amaze
Stand the affrighted camels, eyeing
The corpses of their riders lying,
And helpless on each other gaze,
As bell to bell makes vain replying;
Plundered the gorgeous caravan,
And over every slaughtered man,
Flapping their wings, foul birds of prey.
No peaceful tomb awaits their clay

In graveyard 'neath monastic stones
Where rest their fathers' dust and bones.
No mother in bereaved despair,
No black-veiled sister will come there,
With tears and sobs and anguished prayer,
To mourn a son's, a brother's loss.
But 'neath the cliff, in uncouth ways,
Rude hands will dig a grave, and raise
Some hasty carved memorial cross.
And ivy in the summer days
Will twine around, in fond caress,
An emerald net of tenderness,
And weary traveller in the vale
Seek rest within its holy pale.

13.

Swifter than stag, the noble steed,
As though rebuked for tardy speed,
Pausing a moment's space to sniff
The breeze that flutters on the cliff,
Snorts, stamping the insensate ground
With angry hoof's metallic sound ;
Tosses his mane from side to side,
His nostrils red, distended wide
A rider motionless he bears,
With wound that gapes, with eye that stares,
Whose head is sunk on horse's mane,

Whose nerveless hand still grasps the rein,
Whose feet the stirrups press in vain,
While the dark crimson splash upon
Harness and gay caparison
Spreads to a deeper, broader stain.
Bold courser ! thou didst bear thy master
Fleeter than arrow from the fight,
But the fell bullet followed faster
From dastard ambushade that night.

14.

In Gudàl's court loud wail and din,
And eager peasants throng and press.
Whose steed is this that gallops in,
Wild-eyed and staggering in distress,
And falls within the courtyard dead ?
And who that knight in armour red,
With frowning brow and firm set lip
Telling a murderous tale of pain,
While his dead hand the horse's mane
Clutches with last convulsive grip ?
Too soon the wedding day is over,
Poor bride, behold the expected lover,
As true to plighted, princely word
He galloped to the festal board !
Hapless Tamàra, all is o'er,
And he will mount his steed no more.

15.

On happy home like thunderstone
Fell that disaster, strange and dread,
And poor Tamàra with a groan
Fell swooning on her bridal bed.
And wild spasmodic sobbing tore her,
And burning tear fell after tear.
'Twas then she listening seemed to hear
A voice unearthly whisper o'er her :

“ Ah weep not, child, thy tears are vain ;
They fall in no reviving rain
To make the unheeding dead return :
They only cloud thy face with pain,
And make thy maiden cheeks to burn.
He is so far, he will not stay
To heed thy tears, to reck thy sighs.
Caressing angels kiss away
All disappointment from his eyes.
His dreams of earth are fading dim
In that far land so still, so calm,
What are a maiden's tears to him
Who listens to the angels' psalm ?
The happiness and woes of earth,
Whate'er their transient chances be,
Nay, all creation is not worth
One momentary tear from thee.

“ In the broad ethereal ocean,
Free of rudder, free of sail,
Wandering planets in their motion
Chant a myriad-voicèd tale.
Fleecy flocks of cloud are wending
Their irrevocable flight,
Through the fields that have no ending
In the labyrinth of light.
Now they meet and now they sever,
Their’s no joy and their’s no pain.
Yesterday is gone for ever,
And to-morrow’s cares are vain.
When there comes a day of anguish,
Only think of these and say,
‘ I will neither pine nor languish,
Recking earth no more than they ! ’

“ Soon as the night her sable veil
Over the Caucasus has spread,
When charmed as by enchanter’s tale,
The busy world asleep is laid ;
Soon as the wind in mountain pass
Makes rustle in the faded grass,
Where hidden bird by sleep oppressed
Flutters contented to its nest ;
When the night flower ’neath sheltering vine
Sips nectared draughts of dew divine,

Spreading its timid petals tender,
And the pale moon with stealthy splendour
Clear of the hills her beauty flings
To gaze on thee with envy wan—
Lo! I will come on dew-dipped wings
To dwell with thee till flickering dawn,
And waft on thy silk-shaded eyes
The golden dreams of Paradise.”

16.

Silence all faded far away ;
Echo for echo, sound for sound.
She started up, looked wildly round—
Terror, astonishment, dismay,
Held in her breast alternate sway,
And at her heart strings surging, swelling,
She did not know, she could not say,
What rapturous joy, all else excelling !
Her soul had cast its bondage down
And rioted through every vein,
While diapasons could not drown
The insistence of that new refrain
In that strange voice's haunting strain.
But when at dawn her senses slept,
Prophetic fancies o'er her creeping
Told her that some dim Presence kept
Watch over her while she was sleeping.

A cloudy form was o'er her bending
Of beauty human thought transcending.
He did not speak—he did not move—
But in his eyes was speechless love.
So anguish-torn that glance fell o'er her
Whose only thought was to adore her.
'Twas not the angel God had given,
Her guardian spirit sent from Heaven ;
Halo of iridescent rays
Shone not above the impassioned gaze ;
'Twas not a Fiend from Hell's abysses
Of tortured agony—oh, nay,
He glowed with evening's lovelinesses—
Nor dark, nor light—nor night, nor day.

PART II.

“A woman wailing for her Demon lover.”—COLERIDGE.

Mephistopheles. “Sie ist gerichtet.”
Stimme von oben. “Ist gerettet.”—FAUST.

ARGUMENT.

TAMARA, fearing that she is in the power of some evil spirit, prays her father to send her to a Convent. She becomes a nun. She sees, but cannot appreciate, the wonderful scenery around her. Her new lover is but a phantom. She prays and weeps before her crucifix but receives no comfort. In all her dreams he appears before her and finally wins her complete love. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.)

The Demon, after long hesitation, ventures to enter the Convent. He is confronted by a Seraph, Tamàra's guardian angel. Angry words are exchanged, and the Seraph, believing Tamàra to be hopelessly lost, leaves her. (7, 8, 9.)

The Demon appears to Tamàra. He speaks words of passionate love. He tells her that love will restore him to the Heaven and happiness which he has forfeited. Will Tamàra, whom he has loved from eternity, love him in return? He will give her what she has never dreamed of even if both must remain in Hell. She will always have his love. All he desires is her love. (10.)

At the first kiss Tamàra dies in agony. (11.)

The sentry on duty hears a scream of pain but passes on. (12.)

A description of Tamàra's funeral. (13, 14.)

An angel is bearing her to Heaven when the Demon confronts him and claims her soul. The angel replies that God has already judged her and forgiven her because she loved and suffered.

Many years have passed since events recorded. Everywhere is ruin and only tradition remains.

I.

“OH father, father, cease upbraiding—
Thine own Tamàra do not chide :
Thou see'st the tears that I am shedding—
How many have I shed beside !
Oh father, father, tell my lovers
Thy poor Tamàra ne'er will wed ;
Him, that she loves, the cold earth covers
And in his grave her heart is dead.
For since his mangled corse we carried
To resting place beneath the hill,
A cruel Fiend my soul has harried
Breaking the barriers of my will.
He comes in dreams of hellish power,
With fantasies to speech abhorrent—
My veins throb with a fiery torrent.
I fade, I wither like a flower—
My soul is torn with anguish wild,
I suffer, father, hour by hour.
Oh, spare me, father, spare thy child,

Oh, to some holy Convent send me,
Bid thine infatuate daughter go
Where the Redeemer will defend me
And grant me solace in my woe.
Earth hath no happiness to give me,
And from the Saviour I will crave,
What time the Convent walls receive me,
To find a peace—though of the grave.

2.

To lonely Convent far from thence
Her parents led her forth, and bound
A sackcloth garb of penitence
Her guiltless maiden bosom round.
But in the cloister garb she wore,
As erst in queenly robes arrayed,
The quivering heart-strings of the maid
Throbbled with wild fancies as before.
And when the altar tapers shone,
And when the hymn of praise ascended,
Even with the words of prayer was blended
The haunting voice she once had known.
And when the filmy cloud of incense
Rose to the chapel's vaulted dome,
A consciousness would ever come
That voiceless, traceless, some dim Presence,
Still as a star, before her there
Stood beckoning her—she knew not where.

3.

Between two hills and hid from view,
The Convent stood in grateful shade,
Where sycamore and poplar grew,
And oft the flickering shadows played
On window of the cloister cell,
When at her crucifix she prayed,
And night had fallen on hill and dell.
She saw where solemn crosses rose
To mark the silent homes of peace,
Where anchorites had found repose.
By day, among the almond trees,
She heard glad birds make melodies.
Below the beetling cliff each spring
Ran to meet spring o'er stone and pebble,
Rippling with noisy, happy treble,
Glad in one stream their lymphs to fling,
And flow along the gorge together
'Tween paths of moss and flower and heather.

4

Northward the mountains rose to view,
And with the dawn a hazy blue
Curled wreathing, circling o'er the valley ;
And turning to the East his face,
Soon as the bell to prayer did rally,
Each Mussulman would stay his pace.

And when that voice of morning chime
Awoke the Convent with its clanging,
At that serene and solemn time,
With empty water-pitcher hanging,
Tripped down the hill each Grusian maiden,
And plodded back with pitcher laden.
Ah! then how grand the enduring snows,
Tinged with the sunrise lingering glows
Against pellucid azure lying ;
And when at eve the sun in dying
Cast o'er the heights a ruddy shroud,
Above all others towering far,
Piercing vain barriers of cloud,
Soars vast Kazbèk, crowned, mantled czar
Of those proud peaks, himself more proud.

5

But she, by evil powers possessed,
Feels no response within her breast
To holy joys. Her clouded sight
Sees only lurid shapes pursuing
The rays of morn or shades of night,
And all combined to her undoing.
When evening cools the slumberous air,
The dark brings fantasies appalling,
And at the Saviour's image falling
She weeps in frenzies of despair,

And every wayfarer who hears
Pauses a space and strains his ears.
And mutters when he passes near it
“Some mountain spirit moans with pain,
Striving to free himself in vain,”
And horseman, shuddering to hear it,
Urges his steed with spur and rein.

6.

Oft at her lattice meditating,
With fearful heart-strings palpitating,
Wretched Tamàra still surveys
The horizon with an anxious gaze.
Whole days she waits, for like a sigh
She hears a whisper—“He is nigh.”
No empty hopes her visions send her,
Nor had he erst appeared in vain
With words of love so strange and tender,
With eyes that burned with quenchless pain.
Yet she was sick, nor could discover
What ill her trembling soul dismayed,
Her heart had worshipped that new lover,
What time her lips to God had prayed.
Weary with strife—her senses reeling,
Whene'er she laid her down to rest,
Her pillow throbbed with fitful feeling

And she upsprang aghast, oppressed,
With aching heart and fevered breast.
“Love!”—Magic word! Her pale lips gasp it,
But the elusive vision flies,
And, when she spreads her arms to clasp it,
The kiss she felt grows cold and dies.

7.

When eve with darkening pall had covered
The peak of every Grusian hill,
The Demon round the Convent hovered,
As oft ere now—all was so still,
So sacred, that his thoughts of ill
Faltered a while, nor for a space
Dared he draw nigh that holy place,
But wandered aimless, sadly thinking
How durst he break that peace divine,
And fain would quit his fell design,
While every leaf he trod on, shrinking,
Seemed to cry out, as though affrighted.
He raised his eyes and saw the beams
Reflected from the lamp that lighted
Her cell (she waits some guest it seems);
Then in the silence that surrounded
He heard a tinkling lute that sounded,

And, rhythmical as falling tears,
The strain of lute and voice he hears :
Soft cadence rising, flowing, falling,
Music of song and lute so even,
Melting melodious, as if Heaven
From out her store one tune had given,
As if an angel's voice were calling :

“Come back, dear love, come back, for see
How I have stolen down to thee,
To sing of what was wont to be
And charm a little of thy sadness.”

Then all love's torture and love's madness
Possessed his soul—what pain to hear
The long unspoken words of love !
He strove to fly—he could not move—
And from his eye there rolled a tear,
As a memorial stands to prove :
For still beside Tamàra's cell
There stands a rock all seared and broken
By tear that scalded where it fell,
No human tear, but who can tell
What anguished eye left such a token.

8.

He came with heart attuned to love her,
And fondly thought the dreadful past

And its sad memories were over
And the new life had dawned at last,
Yet paused uncertain, for his breast
Throbbled with prophetic sense of sin.
Dumb, nameless fears his mind possessed,
Then, doubting still, the infernal guest
Crossing the threshold entered in.
And lo! there stood with flaming sword
A guardian seraph of the Lord
To bar his passage, one who smiled
Benignantly, as he would fling
Over that lovely, erring child
The shelter of his angel wing.
The effulgence from his glance that broke
Dazzled the baffled Demon's eyes,
And words of greeting, sternly spoke,
Fell from his lips in scornful wise.

9.

“ False, vicious spirit of unrest,
What brings thee here on midnight quest?
Who dwell within are none of thine.
Hell may not flaunt her presence here,
Let not thine impious tread draw near
To my dear love, to this pure shrine.
What is thy quest? ”

“Nay, she is mine !”

The Fiend replied with smile abhorrent,
And straightway jealous fury turned
All gentler thoughts back to the torrent
Of hate, wherein he late had burned.

“Thou, guardian angel, com’st too late
To filch from me my worshippers—
She’s mine—go, leave her to her fate,
For thou art not my judge—nor hers.
Proud seraph, hence—mine, mine, all mine !
See on her heart my seal’s impress.

Here is no more thy holy shrine,
For where I love, there I possess.”
The seraph with sad glance beholding
The hapless victim where she lies,
Slowly his rainbow wings unfolding,
Vanished in ether of the skies.

10.

Tamàra.

“Thy words with fearful sense are laden.
From whence art thou? from Heaven or hell?
What wilt thou here?”

Demon.

“Oh, lovely maiden—”

Tamàra.

“Speak, I adjure—who art thou, tell.”

Demon.

“ Lo ! I am he whose whispered word
At midnight spoke, strange fancies weaving,
Whose face hast seen, whose voice hast heard,
Whose spirit with thy soul conferred
In agony past thy conceiving.
Let me but glance, and at its birth
Hope shudders and is desolated.
No one can love me here on earth,
And in the heavens I am hated.
Wisdom and freedom my domain,
And years and distance without measure
Are but my slaves to work my pleasure
In that vast empire where I reign.
But lo ! God’s foe and Nature’s bane,
The bitter scourge of earthly thralls,
Before thy feet a lover falls.
Behold me here in suppliant fashion
The gift of thy dear love implore,
Behold my tears of earthly passion,
Tears I have never shed before.
Thou canst redeem me, canst restore
To empyrean everlasting,
To good, to happiness eternal,—
Ah, ’tis so easy—’tis by casting
O’er me love’s sheltering robe, and Heaven
Will welcome me to bliss supernal,
New angel, cleansed, received, forgiven.

Listen, oh listen, I implore thee,
I am thy slave, and I adore thee.
Soon as I saw thee, from that hour
I loathed my deathless state and power.
Unbidden longings 'gan to swell
Earth's puny joys with thee to share :
Life without thee I cannot bear,
For where thou art not, there is Hell.
'Twas love with sudden darting rays
That probed old wounds and woke new pangs,
Recalling pains of bygone days,
More cruel far than serpent fangs.
What without thee were deathlessness,
The infinity that I possess ?
Vain, sounding words, an empty load,
A splendid temple void of God."

Tamàra.

" False, tempting spirit, hence away—
I will not trust my deadliest foe—
' Thou God, Creator '—see my woe,
Ah me, I can no longer pray.
My soul is sick with dreadful yearning,
Thy words benumb and stupefy,
With Hell's contagious poison burning—
But stay, thou lov'st me—tell me why."

Demon.

“ ‘Why?’ lovely one I never knew,
Till, full of throes of life new born,
From off my guilty head I drew
Yesterday’s galling crown of thorn,
And cast it in the dust, and now
My Heaven, my Hell, my all, art thou.
Never can earthly love express
A fallen angel’s vast emotion—
Tumultuous torrents of excess
Bursting in mad, resistless ocean.
Since God the firmament together
Called from the Void, thy matchless face
Has sped with me through airy space—
A dreamland love in wastes of ether.
Long, long ago ’mid heavenly pæans,
Making the angels’ strains forgot,
Sounded thy name across the æons,
Thine empty name—for thou wast not.
Could I but tell (how fain I would !)
How dread God’s awful doom appears.
He lets me know both joy and tears,
Makes me in ill be unwithstood,
Nor smiles whene’er I strive for good.
Through the eternity of years
I live for self, protracting life
Through an unending field of strife,
Which neither peace nor triumph cheers.

God lets me see—but that my vision
May scorn whate'er his hands create,
And hold his creatures in derision—
He will not let me choose but hate.
For, when methought I had fulfilled
My term of penance, from that day
Nature for me grew harsh and chilled,
Love fell like ashes to decay.
Across a gulf that glimmered blue,
Bright forms I saw that once I knew
Whose heads with bridal splendour shone,¹
All thought and speech transcending far,
Like the pale beauty of a star ;
They knew me not—they all passed on.
Then in the race of fallen creatures
I sought my loneliness to ease—
Oh God ! what speech, what awful features !
Was I become as one of these ?
Then forth in agony to hide me
I rushed, but knew not wherefore, where.
My former friends had all denied me,
For me the world was void and bare,
Chill terror, fathomless despair.

¹ This is a reference to the Russian marriage ceremony where crowns are held over the heads of the bride and bridegroom.

Outcast I wandered, hither, thither,
As shattered barque, when envious gales
Have broke the helm and torn the sails,
Drifts with the tide and knows not whither.
As in the welkin after thunder
One murky cloud, lone, reft asunder,
One dark spot in the azure air,
That dares not tarry anywhere,
Flies aimless on—God only knows
From whence it came or whither goes.
And then I sought mankind to win—
An easy task to plant within
Such pliant souls a love of sin.
For good was strange, and bad was kin,
Ah, fools and knaves—an easy task
To quench the faintly burning gleam
Of faith, and make weak man blaspheme—
Could such be worth my pains? I ask.
Ofttimes o'er precipice at night,
Sudden I flashed like meteor light
That lonely traveller pressing on,
Deceived by the near light that shone,
Would urge his horse to tread in error
The gaping chasm—one cry of terror
And horse and rider both were gone.
From ledge to ledge the blood dripped after,
Telling a tale of dreadful hurt,

But suchlike pastimes could divert
My thoughts but with a moment's laughter.
Battling with tempest overpowering,
Raising the blinding dust, or clad
In lurid mist, in thunder lowering,
Ofttimes I rushed, wild, frenzied, mad,
To drown in elements around me
The undying flame that slumbered not,
To flee from thoughts that still confound me,
And to forget the unforgot.
Man's life, and all the troubles in it
Are but brief sorrow, transient care.
Some end that life and some begin it ;
Who can its sum of woe compare
To pangs that rend me every minute?
For men, poor creatures born of dust,
May sin, yet sinning still can trust,
For the Eternal Judge is just,
Who punishes, but may forgive.
Can I, accursed spirit, thrust
To black damnation, yet outlive
Anguish immortal as the soul
That sometimes sears like burning coal,
And sometimes stings like treacherous adder,
Goading to desperation madder
Than frenzy, and a tomb uprears
To perished hopes of other years?"

Tamàra.

“The dreadful tale that thou hast ended
Why tell'st thou me? Thou must atone
To God —”

Demon.

“But thee I ne'er offended —”

Tamàra.

“Hush, they may hear —”

Demon.

“Nay, we're alone —”

Tamàra.

“But God? —”

Demon.

“He's busy in His Heaven,
And reck's not earth; He does not care —”

Tamàra.

“The pains of Hell to sinners given —”

Demon.

“I shall be with thee even there.”

Tamàra.

“Who'er thou art, my guest unbidden,
That break'st my troubled peace again,
Oh sufferer, thou speak'st unchidden,
And giv'st strange solace to my pain.

But be thy purpose to deceive me,
And thy soft words unfaithful be,
Spare me, dread Spirit, leave me, leave me,
What profit were my soul to thee?
Lo! there are maidens without number,
Whose faces thou hast never seen,
(Faces as fair as mine, I ween)
Unworldly and as calm, whose slumber
As holy nun's serene repose—
Am I more dear to Heaven than those?
Nay, swear to me an oath in token
Thy promises will ne'er be broken—
Thou know'st what fears my heart appal,
The terror that thy words awaken
In this poor breast so anguish shaken—
Thou needs must pity, knowing all.
Swear thou wilt turn from thoughts of evil,
Swear me a solemn, binding vow,
Such oath as never saint nor devil
Swore from the first of time till now.”

Demon.

“ I swear by dawning of creation,
I swear by Judgment trumpet blast,
I swear by horrors of damnation,
By good triumphant at the last.
I swear by loss of Heaven for ever,

By victory's joy, defeat's regret,
By that first rapture when we met,
By that last pang when we shall sever.
I swear by kindred spirits thronging
In blank despair Hell's gloomy portal,
By sword of cherubim immortal
Who never knew desire or longing,
By bliss of Heaven, by pain of Hell,
By holiness on Earth—by thee,
By thy first tear that ever fell,
By that last look thou bend'st on me,
By that pure sigh thy lips are sighing,
By tresses of thy wavy hair,
By blessedness, by woe undying,
By my unbounded love—I swear
Of old revenge renunciation,
Of haughty thoughts which late I bore :
The flattering venom of temptation
From me shall vex mankind no more.
I long to make my peace with Heaven,
To pray, to love, to be forgiven—
I long for good, I long to cleanse
With bitter tears of penitence
My guilty brow from that dread token
Which God in anger there hath set,
And with temptation's words unspoken,
Worthy of thee, all else forget.

I, who alone have understood thee,
Find in thy heart my mercy seat,
My shrine, mine altar ; I have wooed thee,
To lay my glory at thy feet.
Give me thy love—for thee is waiting
Eternal life for earthly span,
For I in loving, as in hating,
Am great like God—not weak like man.
And I, free son of ether, take thee
To far dominions high above
The stars of Heaven, and I will make thee
Queen of the world, my deathless love.
Regretless, thou shalt stand surveying
This earth, as she beneath thee flies,
Where joyance ever is decaying,
And Beauty ever fading dies.
Where crime abounds and doom prevails,
And only sluggish passions move,
For would man love or hate, he fails
Through craven fear to hate or love.
Nay, what is human love?—a stirring
Of youthful blood to quicker flow,
But love grows chiller, as recurring
Days, years and decades come and go.
Canst joy when dearest ones have parted?
Resist when charms of beauty lure?
Canst sink in sorrow, broken-hearted

'Gainst thine own fancies all secure?
Thee hath a kinder fate forbidden
To fade in silence day by day,
Thy bright imagination hidden
In narrow bounds of dust and clay,
'Mid beings cold, unsympathizing,
False, seeming friends, dissembling foes,
'Mid barren hopes, ne'er realizing
Harvest of joys, but aye of woes.
Even here by convent walls surrounded,
Thou canst not die, ere thou hast loved,
Thy prayers were only words that sounded,
From God, from man alike removed.
Nay, child of beauty, thou art fated
To no such common lot as this—
To other pangs predestinated,
To fulness of another bliss.
Cast from thee human, frail emotion,
And let poor, feeble mortals go,
And Knowledge fathomless as Ocean
In rich exchange will I bestow.
And troops of spirits, light and airy,
Shall be thy slaves, my lovely bride,
And dainty elf and lissom fairy
Attend obedient at thy side.
And from the eastern star at even,
For thee I'll snatch a garland down

Of golden beams, and dews of Heaven
Shall be the gems to deck thy crown.
With ray of sunset's burning glory
I'll gird thee, as with jewelled zone,
That fragrant winds shall tell the story,
And waft thy name in amorous tone.
I'll build for thee a splendid chamber
To lull thine ear with strains divine,
Chamber of turquoise and of amber—
Stores from the ocean and the mine.
Deep as the sea her depth can measure,
High as the stars their courses move,
I'll soar or dive to seek thee treasure—
Oh, love me —”

II.

And with words of love
He kissed her trembling mouth with burning
Lips, and the impact of that fire
Thrilled her, as answering all her yearning,
Kindling temptation and desire.
Compelling eyes her vision searing
Scorched her like basilisks, appearing
As glittering daggers raised to smite,
Mocking the dark with lurid light—
Oh! Hell—her soul is thine to-night!
For straight with venom of damnation

That kiss corroded to her heart,
And all the midnight echoes start
With a wild shriek of consternation—
A shriek that told a tale heartbreaking
Where love and agony were blended,
From youth a passionate leave taking,
And that young life in terror ended.

12.

What time the lonely midnight sentry
Paced his slow round with iron gong,
The old man paused before the entry
Of one nun's cell and halted long
('Twas the young novice's)—his fingers
Felt for his gong to sound the alarm,
(His watch is done, but still he lingers
Irresolute)—a sense of harm
Stayed him, for by the breezes driven,
Something unwonted sounded nigh
A kiss, he thought, received and given,
A shriek, and then a strangled cry.
Misgiving, sudden and distressful,
Pierced his old heart to the core ;

¹ In lonely districts of Russia it is customary for a night watchman to go round the house with a gong or rattle as a precaution against thieves.

But in a moment all was peaceful
And still, as it had been before.
'Twas but the wind that passing o'er
The rustling foliage gave a greeting—
'Twas nought but that the answering shore
With stream exchanged a kiss in meeting.
What thoughts ! In him there sure must tarry
The Evil One's late influence,
He needs must read his breviary
To drive such sinful fancies hence ;
He crossed himself with shaking fingers
Paused a brief moment there to pray—
Then near the spot no longer lingers
But hastens on his lonely way.

13.

Like peri fair that slumbereth
Whiter she lay than shroud that bound her,
Purer than all the white around her
Upon her brow the hues of death.
Regardless now of joy and sorrow
Those lovely eyes are closed alway—
Oh God ! who seeing them would say
That lover's kiss or dawning day
Would not uplift those lids to-morrow ?
In vain the golden sunrise flashes
Its beams on those fast closed lashes,

In vain her ancient father's grief
Seeks in sad kisses for relief :
For where grim Death hath set his token
No mortal hand the seal hath broken.
Never when guests were wont to rally,
Had she shone forth so rich, so gay
Even on happiest holiday.
The blossoms culled from native valley
By ancient custom decked her bed,
And aromatic petals shed
Perfumes on her, no more awaking
To greet the sun when day is breaking.
And on that pallid, silent face
No sign of passion left, no trace
Of that last ecstasy of fear ;
Nay, every lineament expresses
Marble's mysterious lovelinesses—
So still she lay upon her bier,
As she had changed her mortal breath
To learn the secret lore of Death.
A smile, so passing strange, was curving
Her lips, as it had frozen cold,
Which to attentive eyes observing
A painful story might have told.
Scornful it seemed, as if in dying
The spirit spurned its mortal cell,
Like some last thought of summer sighing

To earth a soundless, sad "Farewell."
That smile, like phantom of her being,
Appeared more dead, more void of hope,
Than even the maiden's eyes unseeing—
Eyes nevermore their lids to ope,
Like afterglow of sunset mellow,
When melts in hues of red and yellow
Day's fiery car, and Caucas snows
Shine for a moment's space, retaining
The dying crimson of the rose
On high Kazbek's proud top remaining—
But that dead glow no light reveals
Upon the desert's barren ways,
And lonely traveller never feels
A comfort from those far off rays.

14.

From far and near her kin assemble
To follow her to that last rest,
And old Gudàl with hands that tremble
Rends his grey hair and beats his breast,
On milk-white steed with solemn pace.
And the procession, sad and slow,
Moves on, three days and nights to go
Until they reach the burial place.
For long ago Gudàl's forefather,
Robber of many a caravan,

Fell sick, and felt Death's terrors gather,
And, full of fear, the godless man,
In hope of Heaven by expiating
His crimes, had vowed on mountain height
To build a fane on lonely site,
Where blizzards hurtled unabating,
And only vultures winged their flight.
Anon a lonely shrine had risen
On that vast mountain top a speck,
A human body to imprison
In virgin whiteness of Kazbek—
Birthright by God to cloudland given
Into a burial place transformed
For man! as though his corpse were warmed
By being a little nearer Heaven!
As though the farther moved from men,
The calmer sleeps the soul departed!
Who, on that pilgrimage once started,
Dreams of earth's joy or care again?

15.

Through broad expanse of blue dominions,
Far as infinity extending,
A shining angel spread his pinions,
Bearing a soul to bliss unending;
And with kind word and warm embrace

He strove to soothe her doubts and fears,
And wash from her all suffering's trace
With flood of penitential tears.
Afar they heard Heaven's anthem sounding,
Whose strains the enraptured echoes bore
Through the ambrosial air surrounding—
When in the space that lay before,
Boisterous as whirlwind from abysses,
Blazing as lightning shaft, malign
As furious Hell, the Demon hisses
Defiant, "Leave her, she is mine!"
She, dumb with dread, in wild endeavour
To clasp that angel form defending,
Prays agonized, and waits impending
Verdict of bliss or woe for ever,
Meanwhile before her looms her foe,
And who that knew him erst, would know
Him now?—he glared a fiend—a Devil
Of hate malignant to the last,
And from his visage, like a blast
That froze the breeze with humours evil
As charnel house, a chill air passed.

"Avaunt, dark fiend of unrepentance,"
Sounded the seraph's clarion voice,
"No more let powers of Hell rejoice,
For merciful the Heavenly sentence."

The Judge her future hath declared :
He might have doomed, but He hath spared.
Her days of trial all are past,
Her earthly dross to earth is cast,
Her chains are broke which long oppressed—
She comes ! our long expected guest.
Her soul was one that sought in vain
For happiness, and found but sorrow—
To-day God let her suffer pain,
To give her boundless joy to-morrow.
From finer essence God hath blended
His purest creatures at their birth—
Think not, proud Spirit, He intended
This earth for her—nor her for earth.
Below a debt of pain she borrowed
To pay the price she owed above,
She is redeemed ! she loved and sorrowed,
And Heaven is open wide for love !”
He spake, and on the Tempter bending
The stern reproach of those clear eyes,
Spread his glad pinions reascending
Into the Ocean of the skies.
With gnashing teeth the Demon rages,
Cursing the hopes his fancy wove,
Alone ! alone ! through all the ages !
No gleam of hope—no hope of love !

On ridges of the steepest hill
Above the valley óf Kishàour,
The wayfarer beholdeth still
The ruins of an ancient tower ;
And children tremble when their ears
Catch dreadful stories that Tradition
Tells of that pile (Mute Apparition
Risen from the dust of other years)
Grim 'mid the trees, forbidding, darkling
It looms, but in the vale below
Lies a fair land with plenty sparkling
And hum of men is hushed, and low.
The noisy caravan is rumbling
And tinkling on its distant way,
The happy stream o'er pebbles tumbling
Scatters its smiles of glistening spray,
Like wanton child, that thinketh never
Of eld or sorrow, young for ever.
Ah ! Nature is so fair a thing,
Clad with the Sunshine and the Spring !

Gloomy that castle now, its story
Hid in the annals of the past,
Like some old man, enfeebled, hoary,
Doomed all his dear ones to outlast.
By day its denizens are hidden,
But when the moonbeam glads the night
They hum, and creep, and fly unhidden,

And take their freedom and delight.
Grey hermit spiders there are weaving
Their webs for silly flies' deceiving,
And sportively the lizards green
Play on the ruined roof unheeding,
And wily snake from hole unseen
Crawls down the crumbling staircase leading
To where a lofty hall had been,
Slow wriggling o'er the steps between
Garret and basement, or extended
With long striped body stretched outright,
Like sword, abandoned after fight
By warrior slain, whose wars are ended.
—Nowhere a shadow to remind
Of those dim years so far behind,
Erased by Time's slow busy fingers,
And all is lonely now and wild.
No memory of Gudàl still lingers
Nor of Tamàra, his dear child.
But on the dizzy peak remaineth
That lonely chapel where their bones
Were laid, and some Good Power sustaineth
A semblance of those pillared stones.
Silent, immutable and stern,
On endless duty 'fore the entry
Black, granite guardians stand on sentry,
In white cuirass that seems to burn

With dazzling gleams of ice eterne.
And massive icebergs without number
Tower sombre frowning over all,
As if the frost had charmed to slumber
A vast cascade in headlong fall.
And there the blizzard never weary
Whirls snow, like dust, from those gray walls,
Or, howling dirges long and dreary,
The ice-bound guards to duty calls.
Soon as that summons calls to rally
That lonely temple's worshippers,
From bleakest east continually
Cloudland with hurricane concurs.
None venture here with fearful tread
To mourn Gudàl, Tamàra dead.
Kazbèk's grim barrier guards for ever
The secret of its icy breast,
And busy hum of men may never
Break through their everlasting rest.

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