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THE
LEPER
OF THE
CITY OF AOSTE.
A NARRATIVE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,

BY

HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS.



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PREFACE,

BY THE TRANSLATOR.

THE following little Tale, entitled "The Leper of the City of Aoste," and which has lately appeared in Paris, is yet scarcely known to the French Public; but it has had the good fortune to fall into the hands of some distinguished literati, by whom it has been warmly admired. The Translator caught their enthusiasm, and was sufficiently affected with the narrative to feel the desire of giving it an English dress. Although

long habit may render a foreign tongue as familiar as our own, we love best to weep over sorrows recorded in that language in which our earliest emotions were felt, and our first accents were uttered. This slight performance is presented by the Translator with great diffidence to the English reader, (although in France it has obtained the suffrage of celebrated names,) since there are circumstances which may have rendered the critics too indulgent. The great interests of the revolution have led almost every eloquent writer in this country to give to politics those powers of mind, which, in calmer periods of human history, would have been devoted to more soothing meditations. When, therefore,

we chance to meet with a few pages remote from the Order of the Day, we delight, perhaps, too much in the new sensations which they excite. Sickened of the commotions of states, and almost despairing of mankind in the midst of their warring crimes and passions, we turn willingly from the turbulence of public calamity to hear the complaint of the poor LEPER, bewailing the unbroken stillness of his solitude; while we are ready to answer his regrets in the words of the Traveller, " Oh if you knew the world as I do !"

Upon the whole, we might perhaps apply to this little production the observation of Mr. Mackenzie, in his preface to the Man of Feeling. " I was a good deal affected," he

says, "with some very trifling passages in it, and had the name of a Marmontel or a Richardson been on the title-page, 'tis odds that I should have wept. But---one is ashamed to be pleased with the works of one knows not whom."

THE
LEPER
OF THE
CITY OF AOSTE.

THE Southern part of the City of Aoste is almost a desert, and appears to have been never much inhabited; cultivated fields and meadows are terminated on one side by ancient ramparts, which the Romans raised to serve as a boundary, and on the other, inclosed by garden-walls. This solitary spot may, perhaps, interest some travellers. Near the gate of the town are seen the ruins of an old castle, in which, if popular tradition may be believed, the

Count Piené di Chalans, in the fifteenth century, excited by the fury of jealousy, suffered his wife, the Princess Mencia, of Bragance, to die of hunger ; whence the name of *Bramafare*, which signifies the cry of hunger, was given to this castle by the people of the country. This record, the authenticity of which may by some be doubted, renders these ruins more interesting to persons of sensibility, who confide in its truth.

Further on, at some hundred steps distant, is a square tower, backed by an ancient wall, and built with the marble by which it was once covered ; it is called the Tower of Terror, because the people long believed it to be inhabited by ghosts. The old women of the town of Aoste remember very well to have seen a tall woman, in white, issue from thence in dark nights, with a lamp in her hand.

This tower was repaired, about fifteen years since, by order of the government, and surrounded with an enclosure, to lodge a Leper, and thus separate him from society ; procuring him, at the same time, all the comforts of which his melancholy situation was susceptible. St. Maurice's Hospital was appointed to provide for his subsistence, and some furniture was given him, as well as the tools necessary to cultivate a garden. There he long lived, seeing no one but the priest, who at times consoled him by his ministry, and the person who every week carried him provisions from the hospital. During the war of the Alps, an Officer, who was at Aoste, passing, one day, by chance, near the Leper's garden, the door of which was half open, had the curiosity to enter : he found there a man, simply clad, leaning against a tree, in profound meditation. At the noise

which the officer made in going in, the recluse, without turning or looking towards him, cried, in a mournful tone "*Who is there ; and what do you want of me ?*" " Excuse a stranger," answered the military man, " whom the agreeable aspect of your garden has, perhaps, caused to commit an indiscretion ; but who will in no way disturb you." " Come no further!" exclaimed the inhabitant of the tower, making him a repulsive sign with his hand ; " come no further ! you are near an unfortunate man attacked with the leprosy." " Whatever be your misfortune," replied the traveller, " I shall not withdraw on that account ; I have never shunned the unhappy. Nevertheless, if my presence disturbs you, I am ready to retire."

" *Be welcome then,*" said the Leper, turning suddenly round, "*and remain if you dare, after having looked at me.*" The

Officer was for some time motionless with astonishment and terror, at the aspect of this unfortunate person, whom the leprosy had totally disfigured. " I will willingly remain," said he to him, " if you approve the visit of a man, whom chance brought hither ; but who is retained by a lively interest in your sorrows."

THE LEPER.

" Interest ! I have never excited any feeling but pity."

THE OFFICER.

" I should think myself happy if I could offer you any consolation."

THE LEPER.

" It is a great one to see mankind ; to hear the sound of the human voice, that seems to shun me."

THE OFFICER.

“ Suffer me then to converse a few moments with you, and to visit your dwelling.”

THE LEPER.

“ Very readily, if it will give you pleasure.” Speaking thus, the Leper covered his head with a large beaver, the flaps of which concealed his face. “ Pass on,” added he, “ to the Southern side. I cultivate a small parterre of flowers, that may please you ; you will find some which are scarce : I have procured the grains of all those which bloom wild on the Alps ; and I endeavour to make them flower double, and to embellish them by cultivation.”

THE OFFICER.

“ There are, indeed, some flowers, the appearance of which is quite new to me.”

THE LEPER.

“ Remark this little bush of roses : this is the rose without thorns, which grows only on the higher Alps ; but it already loses this property, and brings out thorns when it is cultivated and multiplied.”

THE OFFICER.

“ This ought to be the symbol of ingratitude.”

THE LEPER.

“ If any of those flowers please you, you may take them without fear, and you incur no risk in wearing them. I have sown them, I have the pleasure of watering them ; but I never touch them.”

THE OFFICER.

“ Why so ?”

THE LEPER.

“ I should be afraid of polluting them, and I should no longer dare to offer them.”

THE OFFICER.

“ For whom are they destined ?”

THE LEPER.

“ The persons who bring me provisions from the hospital are not afraid of gathering nosegays. Sometimes, also, the children of the town come to the door of my garden ; I immediately retire to my tower, lest I should frighten, or do them mischief. I see them playing from my windows, or stealing some flowers. When they go away, they lift up their eyes towards me : ‘ *Good day, Leper !* ’ they cry, smiling ; and that diverts me !”

THE OFFICER.

“ You have a large collection of various plants ; and here are vines and fruit-trees of different sorts.”

THE LEPER.

“ The trees are still young ; I planted them myself, as well as this vine ; I have carried it up above that old wall, which is broad enough to form a little walk : it is my favourite resort. Go up those stone steps ; it is a stair-case, of which I am the architect : hold by the wall.”

THE OFFICER.

“ Charming retreat! and how well fitted for the meditations of solitude.”

THE LEPER.

“ I love it much. I see from hence the

country, and the labourers in the field ;
I see what passes in the meadow ; and I
am seen by no one."

THE OFFICER.

" I admire the tranquillity and stillness
of this spot : we are in a town, and we
may fancy ourselves in a desert."

THE LEPER.

" Solitude does not consist in being
amidst forests and rocks ; the unfortunate
are every where alone."

THE OFFICER.

" What series of events brought you
into this retreat ? is this your country ?"

THE LEPER.

" I was born near the sea, in the prin-
cipality of Orseille ; and I have resided

here only fifteen years : my history is one long and unvaried calamity.”

THE OFFICER.

“ Have you always lived alone ? ”

THE LEPER.

“ I lost in my childhood my parents, whom I never knew ; a sister remained to me : she died within these two years. I never had a friend.”

THE OFFICER.

“ Unhappy man ! ”

THE LEPER.

“ Such is the will of heaven.”

THE OFFICER.

“ What is your name ? ”

THE LEPER.

“ Alas! my name is terrible. I am called *the Leper!* the world is ignorant of the name which I hold from my family, as well as of that which religion gave me on the day of my birth. *I am the Leper!* This is my only title to the benevolence of men : may they never know who I am !”

THE OFFICER.

“ Did this sister whom you have lost live with you ?”

THE LEPER.

“ She lived five years with me in this habitation. Unfortunate like myself, she shared my sorrows, and I endeavoured to soften hers.”

THE OFFICER.

“What are now your occupations in so profound a retreat?”

THE LEPER.

“The details of the life of a solitary man like me must seem monotonous indeed to a man of the world, who finds his happiness in the activity of social life.”

THE OFFICER.

“Oh! you know but little of this world, which has never conferred happiness on me! I often fly to solitude from choice, and there is perhaps more analogy between our ideas than you may think. I confess, however, that an eternal solitude affrights me; I can scarcely conceive it.”

THE LEPER.

“ *He who cherishes his cell will there find peace!* The imitation of Jesus Christ instructs us. I begin to feel the truth of those consolatory words, ‘ The feeling of solitude is softened by labour ; the man who labours is never completely unhappy ;’ of which I am a proof. During the fine season, the culture of my garden and parterre employs me sufficiently ; during the winter I make baskets and mattresses, and work at my clothes. I dress myself the provisions brought me from the hospital, and prayer fills up the hours that are left me from labour.

“ Thus the year rolls on, and when it is gone it still seems to be short.”

THE OFFICER.

“ Why, I should think it must appear to you an age.”

THE LEPER.

“ Evils and sorrows make the hours seem long, but years roll on with the same rapidity. There is besides, at the last point of misfortune, an enjoyment which the world in general cannot know, and which may seem singular ; it is that of existing, of breathing. I have sat whole days in summer motionless on this rampart, in the enjoyment of the air, and the beauties of nature ; all my ideas are then vague, and floating ; sorrow reposes on my heart, without weighing it down ; my eyes wander over this country, and the rocks that surround it. Those various aspects are so impressed on my remembrance, that they form as it were a part of myself, and every spot is a friend, that I view with pleasure every day.”

THE OFFICER.

“ I have often felt something similar when sorrow oppresses me, and I find not in the hearts of others the sympathy I seek. The aspect of nature and of inanimate things consoles me ; I feel an affection for rocks and trees, and it seems to me that all the objects of creation are friends which God has given me.”

THE LEPER.

“ You encourage me to define my own sensations. I really love the objects which seem destined to be my companions for life, and which I see continually. Every evening before I withdraw into my tower, I come and salute the glaciers of Ruitors; the gloomy forest of St. Bernard, and the singular peaks that terminate the valley

of the Rheme. Though the power of God is as visible in the creation of an ant as in that of the whole universe, the sublime view of the mountains makes a stronger impression on my mind. I cannot see those enormous masses covered with eternal ice without feeling a religious awe; but in the vast prospect that surrounds me I have favourite spots, that I view with preference; of this number is the hermitage that you see yonder, at the top of the mountain of Charvensod. Insulated among the woods, near a desert field, it receives the last rays of the setting sun. Though I have never been there, I feel a singular pleasure in beholding it. When the day is on the decline, seated in my garden, I fix my eyes on this solitary hermitage, and there my imagination reposes: it is become for me a kind of property. I seem to have a confused remembrance

that I lived there formerly, in happier times, the memory of which is effaced. I love above all to contemplate the distant mountains, which blend their summits with the sky at the horizon. Distance, like the future, excites in me the sentiment of hope; my wearied heart believes that there exists perhaps a country far off, where I shall at last taste that happiness for which I sigh, and which a secret instinct continually presents to me as possible."

THE OFFICER.

"With a mind so ardent as yours, you must undoubtedly have made great efforts to resign yourself to your destiny without yielding to despair."

THE LEPER.

"I should deceive you did I suffer you to believe that I am always resigned to

my fate. I have not reached that point of self-denial which some anchorites have attained. For me the complete sacrifice of all human affections is not yet accomplished. My life has passed in continual agitation, and religion itself is not always capable of repressing the flight of imagination, which draws me on too often, in spite of myself, into an ocean of chimerical desires, that bring me back towards this world, of which I have no idea, and of which the fantastic image is always present for my torment."

THE OFFICER.

"If I could make you read in my soul, and give you the same idea of the world that I have, all your desires and regrets would vanish in an instant."

THE LEPER.

“ In vain have books instructed me in the perversity of men, and the evils inseparable from humanity ; my heart refuses to believe them. I am for ever picturing to myself societies of sincere and virtuous friends, of congenial hearts, united in connubial happiness, with all the gifts of health, youth, and fortune. I think I see those favoured beings wandering together under greener and fresher foliage than that which lends me its shade, enlightened by a sun more brilliant than that which shines on me ; and their destiny seems to me more happy, in proportion as mine is more miserable. In the beginning of spring, when the winds of Piedmont blow over our valley, I find myself penetrated by their vivifying heat, I feel an inexplicable desire, a confused senti-

ment of boundless felicity, which I might participate, and which is refused to me. I then fly from my cell, and stray into the country, to breathe more freely. I avoid being seen by those very men whom my heart burns to meet ; and from the top of the hill, concealed like a wild beast in the underwood, I gaze upon the town of Aoste. I see at a distance, with eyes of envy, its happy inhabitants, who know me not ; I stretch out my hands towards them, and, moaning, ask of them my portion of happiness. Shall I confess to you, that in my delirium, I have sometimes clasped in my arms the trees of the forest, praying God to animate them for me, and bestow on me a friend. But the trees are insensible ; their cold bark repels me,---it has nothing in common with my heart, which palpitates and burns. Wasted with fatigue, weary of life, I drag myself back

to my retreat, I pour out my anguish before God, and prayer restores some calm to my soul."

THE OFFICER.

"Alas! my poor unhappy friend, you suffer at once all the evils of soul and body."

THE LEPER.

"The last are not the most cruel."

THE OFFICER.

"They leave then some respite?"

THE LEPER.

"Every month they augment; and diminish with the course of the moon; when it begins to shew itself my sufferings increase; the disease diminishes afterwards, and seems to change its nature; my

skin dries and whitens, and I feel my pains no longer. They would indeed always be supportable, were it not for the frightful sleepless nights which they occasion."

THE OFFICER.

"What, does sleep abandon you?"

THE LEPER.

"Ah, sir! the sleepless, sleepless nights! you can ill conceive how long and melancholy is a night which a wretch passes without closing his wearied eyes; his thoughts fixed on the horror of his present situation, and knowing that for him the future is without hope! No, none can comprehend it. My terrors augment as the night advances; and when it is near its close, my agitation is such that I do not know what is to become of me; my ideas are confused, my heart throbs with a strange feeling, which

I never experience but in these sad moments. Sometimes an irresistible force seems to drag me into an unfathomed gulph. Sometimes I see black spots before my eyes ; but while I gaze upon them, they cross each other with the rapidity of lightning ; they increase as they approach me, and soon become mountains which crush me beneath their weight. Sometimes I see clouds rising from the earth around me, like waves that swell, heap themselves together, and threaten to swallow me in their abyss. And when I endeavour to rise, and shake off those ideas, I feel as if retained by invisible ties, which deprive me of my strength. You will think, perhaps, that these are dreams ; but, no ; I am broad awake. I see again and again the same objects, and feel a sensation of horror, which surpasses all my other evils."

THE OFFICER.

“ It is possible that you have a fever during those cruel sleepless nights, and which no doubt causes that kind of delirium.”

THE LEPER.

“ You think that this may arise from fever? Ah! I wish it were so! I have been hitherto afraid that these visions were a symptom of madness; and I own that this idea distressed me much: would to God it were only fever!”

THE OFFICER.

“ You interest me sensibly. I confess that I never conceived an idea of a situation like yours; nevertheless, I think it must have been less melancholy when your sister was alive.”

THE LEPER.

“ God himself only knows what I lost by the death of my sister ! But are you not afraid to be so near me ? Sit here on this stone ; I will place myself behind the foliage, and we will converse without seeing each other.”

THE OFFICER.

“ Why so ? no, you shall not quit me ; place yourself near me.” Speaking these words, the traveller made an involuntary motion to seize the hand of the Leper, who withdrew it hastily.

THE LEPER.

“ Imprudent man ! you were going to lay hold of my hand.”

THE OFFICER.

“ And if I had? I should have taken it with good will.”

THE LEPER.

“ It would have been for the first time that this happiness had been allowed me : my hand was never pressed by any one !”

THE OFFICER.

“ Alas ! then except this sister of whom you have spoken to me, you never had any tie, you never were cherished by any of your fellow-creatures ?”

THE LEPER.

“ Happily for humanity, I have no longer a fellow-creature on the earth.”

THE OFFICER.

“ You make me shudder.”

THE LEPER.

“ Pardon, compassionate stranger; you know that the unhappy love to dwell on their misfortunes.”

THE OFFICER.

“ Speak, speak, unhappy man! you have told me that a sister formerly lived with you, and helped you to support your sufferings.”

THE LEPER.

“ This was the last tie by which I held to the rest of mankind; it has pleased God to dissolve it, and to leave me insulated, and alone in the midst of the world. Her soul was worthy of heaven, which possesses

it, and her example supported me against the dejection which has often overwhelmed me since her death. We did not live, however, in that delicious intimacy of which I had formed to myself an idea, and which should unite unhappy friends. Our evils were of a nature that deprived us of this consolation; even when we drew near to pray to God, we mutually avoided looking at each other, lest the sight of our misery should disturb our meditations; and our eyes no longer dared to meet, but uplifted together towards heaven. After our prayers, my sister generally withdrew to her cell, or under the nut trees which terminate the garden; and we lived almost always separate."

THE OFFICER.

"Why did you impose on yourself this constraint?"

THE LEPER.

“When my sister was attacked by the contagious disease of which the whole of my family had been the victims, and she came to share my retreat, we had never beheld each other. Her terror was extreme on seeing me for the first time. The fear of distressing her, the still greater fear of increasing her disorder by approaching her, compelled me to adopt this melancholy kind of life. The leprosy had attacked only her breast, and I entertained hopes of her being cured. You see the remains of those intertwining stems which I have neglected; this was once a hedge of hops, which I carefully kept up, and which divided the garden into two parts. I had made a little path on each side, along which we could walk and converse together,

without seeing, and without approaching each other."

THE OFFICER.

"One would think that heaven took pleasure in poisoning the sad enjoyments it had left you."

THE LEPER.

"But at least I was not then alone; the presence of my sister gave life to this retreat. I heard the sound of her steps in my solitude; when I returned at break of day to pray to God under those trees, the door of the tower opened softly, and the voice of my sister mingled itself insensibly with mine. In the evening, when I watered my garden, she sometimes walked here at sun-set, on the very spot where I am speaking to you; and I saw her shadow pass and repass over my flowers.

Even when I did not see her, I found every where traces of her presence. I now no longer find in my path by chance a leafless flower or a branch of a shrub, which she has let fall in passing. I am alone ; there is no longer life or movement around me, and the path which led to her favourite bower has already disappeared under the grass. Without seeming to occupy herself about me, she studied with unwearied attention whatever could give me pleasure. Returning to my chamber, I was sometimes surprised to find pots of new flowers, or some fine fruit, which she herself had culled. I dared not render her the same services ; and I had even conjured her never to enter my chamber. But what can set bounds to a sister's affection ? One incident will suffice to give you an idea of her attachment to me. I was walking one night hastily in my cell, tormented

with horrible pains. In the middle of the night, having seated myself to repose a moment, I heard a slight rustling at the entrance of my chamber. I approach--- I listen : judge of my surprise! my sister was praying to God for me, on the threshold of my door. She had heard my complainings : her tenderness made her fear to disturb me ; but she came to be near me, and give me help in case of need. I heard her recite in a low voice the *Miserere*. I threw myself on my knees near the door, and, without interrupting her, followed her words mentally : my eyes were filled with tears. Who would not have been sensible to such affection? When I thought her prayer was finished, ‘ Adieu!’ said I to her, in a low voice ; ‘ adieu, sister! you may withdraw ; I find myself better. God bless you! and

reward you for your pity.' She withdrew silently; and her prayer no doubt was heard, for I enjoyed afterwards some hours of tranquil sleep."

THE OFFICER.

"How mournful must the first days have seemed to you which followed the death of this cherished sister!"

THE LEPER.

"I was for a long time in a state of stupor, which deprived me of the faculty of feeling the whole extent of my misfortune; but when at length I was restored to myself, and became sensible of my situation, my reason almost forsook me. That epocha will be ever doubly cruel for me, since it recalls to my memory the

greatest of my afflictions, and the crime which was nearly being its consequence.”

THE OFFICER.

“ A crime ! I cannot believe you capable.”

THE LEPER.

“ It is but too true ; and, in relating to you this event of my life, I feel that I shall lose much in your esteem ; but I will not represent myself better than I am, and perhaps you will pity while you condemn me. Even before this event, in some of my melancholy moments, the idea of quitting life voluntarily had suggested itself to my mind ; but the fear of God always restrained me, when a slight circumstance, little fitted in appearance to disturb me,

had nearly destroyed me for ever. I met with a new affliction. Some years previous to this period, a little dog had wandered hither, and given himself to my sister. We loved him, and I own that when she existed no more, this poor animal became my consolation. We were indebted no doubt to his ugliness for his choice of our abode as a refuge: rejected by every one, he was still a treasure in the dwelling of the Leper. In gratitude for the favour which heaven had granted us in giving us this friend, my sister called him *Miracle*: his name formed a whimsical contrast with his ugliness, and his extreme gaiety had often cheered our solitude. In spite of all my care, he sometimes strayed out; but I never thought he could be hurtful to any one. Some inhabitants of the town, however, took alarm,

and thought he might carry among them the germ of my disease. They made a complaint to the commander, who ordered my dog to be immediately killed. Soldiers, accompanied by several inhabitants of the town, came hither to execute this cruel order. They put a rope round his neck before me, and dragged him away. When he was at the garden gate, I could not help looking at him once more. I saw him turn his eyes towards me, as if to ask me for help, which I could no longer give him. They wished to drown him in the Loire; but the populace, who waited for him without, assailed him with stones. I heard his cries; and I went back to the tower more dead than alive; my trembling knees could scarce support me. I threw myself on my bed in a state impossible to describe. My grief did not permit me to

see in this just, but severe order, any thing but an atrocious and useless act of barbarity ; and though I am at present almost ashamed of the feelings which then overwhelmed me, I cannot yet think of this incident without emotion. It was the last living creature which had been just torn from me, and this new stroke made every wound of my heart bleed afresh.

“ Such was my situation, when the same day, towards sun-set, I came to sit on the stone where you are now seated. I reflected for some time on my unhappy lot, when yonder, near those two birch-trees which terminate the hedge, two young-married people, who had lately been united, advanced along the path across the meadow, and passed near me. That delicious tranquillity which assured happiness in-

spires, was imprinted on their fine countenances ; they walked slowly ; their arms were intertwined. Presently I saw them stop ; the young woman bent her head on the bosom of her husband, who pressed her with transport in his arms. I felt my heart sicken and grow chill within me : envy glided for the first time into my bosom. Never had the image of happiness presented itself to me with such force. I followed the lovers with my eyes to the end of the meadow, and was going to lose sight of them among the trees, when cries of joy struck my ear. It was their united families, who had come out to meet them. I heard the confused murmur of rejoicing ; I saw among the trees the brilliant colours of their garments ; and this whole group seemed encircled with happiness. I could not support

this sight; the torments of hell had entered into my heart; I turned away my looks, and precipitated myself into my cell. Oh, God! how deserted, dark, and frightful it appeared to me! 'It is here then,' said I to myself, 'that my abode is fixed for ever! It is here that, dragging on a miserable existence, I must wait the lingering period of my days! The Eternal has spread happiness every where around! He has poured it in torrents on every thing that breathes, and I---I alone! without succour, without friends, without a companion! What an horrible destiny!'

" Full of these sad thoughts, I forgot Him who gives consolation; I forgot even myself. 'Why,' said I, 'was light given unto me? why is nature unjust and niggardly to me alone? Like a disinherited child, I behold the rich patrimony of the

human family, and heaven refuses me my share!' 'No, no,' exclaimed I at last, in a fit of rage, 'there is no happiness for thee on earth! Die, unhappy wretch! die! long enough hast thou sullied the earth with thy presence; may it swallow thee up alive, and leave no trace of thy hateful existence!' My madness gradually increasing, the desire of destroying myself took possession of my soul, and fixed all my thoughts. I conceived at length the fatal resolution of setting fire to my dwelling, and of consuming every thing which could leave any remembrance of me. Agitated, furious, I walked out into the fields; I wandered for some time in the shade around my habitation. Involuntary howlings burst from my oppressed bosom, and affrighted me in the silence of the night. I flew back raging to my cham-

ber, and crying out, ‘ *Woe to thee, Leper ! woe to thee !* ’ and as if every thing would have hastened my destruction, I heard the echo, which amidst the ruins of the Castle of Bramasan, repeated distinctly, ‘ *Woe to thee !* ’ I stopped, frozen with horror, at the door of the tower, and the feeble echo of the mountain repeated long after, ‘ *Woe to thee !* ’

“ I took a lamp, and resolved to set fire to my habitation ; I went down to the lowest chamber, carrying with me some brushwood and dry branches. It was the chamber which my sister had inhabited, and I had not entered it since her death. Her arm-chair was still placed as when I had lifted her out of it for the last time. I shuddered at the sight of her veil and parts of her garments, which were scattered in the room. The last words she

had pronounced on leaving it were present to my thoughts---‘ I will not forsake you in dying,’ said she; ‘ remember that I will be present in the day of anguish.’ Placing the lamp on the table, I perceived the string of the cross which she wore around her neck, and which she had herself placed between two leaves of her bible. At this sight I stepped back full of holy awe: the depth of the abyss in which I was about to plunge presented itself on a sudden before my unsealed eyes. I tremblingly drew near the sacred book: ‘ Here, here,’ cried I, ‘ is the help she promised me!’ And as I drew the cross from the book, I found in it a sealed letter, which my kind sister had left there for me. My tears, restrained till then by desperation, now flowed in torrents. All my fatal projects vanished in a moment. I pressed

for a long time this precious letter to my bosom before I had power to read it, and throwing myself on my knees to implore the divine mercy, I opened it, and read, sobbing, these words, which will be eternally engraven on my heart---‘ *My brother, I am about to leave you ; but I will not abandon you. From heaven, where I trust I am going, I will watch over you ; I will pray God to give you courage to support life with resignation, till it pleases Him to unite us in another world ; then I may display all my affection towards you. Nothing shall longer prevent me from approaching you, and nothing shall then be able to separate us. I leave you this little cross, which I have worn my whole life ; it has often consoled me in my sorrows, and my tears have never had any other witness. Remember, when you shall see it that my last prayer was, that you should*

live and die a good Christian.' Cherished letter ! it shall never quit me ; I will bear it with me to the grave. It is this which shall open to me the gates of heaven, which my crime would have shut against me for ever. When I had finished reading it, I felt myself fainting, exhausted by all I had undergone. I saw a cloud spread itself before me, and for some time I lost at once the remembrance of my afflictions, and the sentiment of my existence. When I recovered, night was advancing. As my ideas grew more clear, I felt a sentiment of ineffable calm ; all that had passed in the evening seemed to me a dream. My first impulse was to raise my eyes to heaven in gratitude for having preserved me from the greatest of evils. Never had the firmament appeared to me so serene and beautiful ; a star shone be-

fore my window. I contemplated it for a long time with inexpressible rapture, thanking God that he granted me yet the delight of beholding it : I felt a secret consolation in thinking that one of its rays was destined for the cell of the Leper.

“ I returned to my chamber more tranquil, and employed the remainder of the night in reading the book of Job, and the holy enthusiasm which it inspired dissipated entirely the gloomy thoughts which had beset me. I had never experienced those desperate moments when my sister was living ; it was sufficient for me to know that she was near me to become more calm, and the thought of the affection she bore me was enough to console and give me courage.

“ Compassionate stranger ! God preserve you from ever being obliged to live

alone! My sister, my companion, is no more; but heaven will grant me strength to support life with fortitude; it will, I hope, since I pray for it in the sincerity of my soul."

THE OFFICER.

"How old was your sister when you lost her?"

THE LEPER.

"She was scarcely twenty-five; but her sufferings made her appear older. In spite of the disease which carried her off, and which had altered her features, she would still have been beautiful, had not a deadly paleness disfigured her; she was the image of living deadliness, and I could never see her without a sigh."

THE OFFICER.

“ You lost her very young.”

THE LEPER.

“ Her feeble and delicate frame could not resist so many accumulated evils. I had perceived for some time that her loss was inevitable, and such was her melancholy lot, that I was compelled to desire it. Seeing her in a state of languor and decline, I observed with bitter joy the approaching end of her sufferings. During a month her weakness had augmented, and frequent faintings hourly threatened her life. One evening, it was towards the beginning of August, I saw her so oppressed, that I could not quit her. She was in her arm-chair, having been unable to support the bed for some days

past. I seated myself near her, and in the most profound obscurity, we had our last conversation. My tears continued flowing; a cruel foreboding seized my heart. 'Why do you weep?' said she to me; 'why thus distress yourself? I shall not quit you in dying; I will be present with you in your agonies.'

"Some moments after, she expressed a desire of being conveyed out of the tower to repeat her prayers in her harbour of nut-trees, where she passed the greatest part of the summer-season. 'I wish to die,' said she, 'while I am looking up to heaven.' I did not think her last hour so near. I took her in my arms to lift her up; 'Support me only,' said she, 'I shall perhaps have strength to walk.' I led her slowly to the nut-trees: I formed a cushion with dry leaves which she had herself col-

lected, and having covered it with a veil, in order to keep off the dampness of the night, I placed myself near her ; but she desired to be alone in her last meditation. I withdrew, but without losing sight of her : I saw her veil lifted up at times, and her white hands spread towards heaven. As I drew near the arbour, she asked me for water. I brought some in a cup. She moistened her lips, but could not drink. ‘ I feel my end approach,’ said she, in turning away her head ; ‘ my thirst will soon be quenched for ever. Support me, my brother ! aid your sister to pass this desired, yet terrible passage ! Support me ! repeat the prayer for the dying !’--- ‘ These were the last words which she uttered. I leaned her head against my bosom ; I recited the prayer for the dying. ‘ Pass on to eternity,’ said I to her, ‘ my

dear sister ; free thyself from life---leave thy remains in my arms.'---During three hours I supported her in the last struggle with nature ; she sunk gently, and her soul detached itself, without an effort, from the earth." The Leper, at the end of this recital, covered his face with his hands, and grief deprived the stranger of his voice. After a moment's silence, the Leper arose : " Stranger," said he, " when sorrow or discontent shall approach you, think then, oh ! think of the recluse of the City of Aoste, and you will not have made him an useless visit."

They walked together towards the door of the garden. When the officer was about to depart, he put his glove on his right hand ; " You have never clasped the hand of any one," said he to the Leper, " grant me that favour ; it is the hand of

a friend, who takes a warm interest in your fate."

The Leper drew back with a kind of affright, and, lifting up his eyes to heaven, "God of mercy!" exclaimed he, "crown with thy blessings this compassionate man!"

"Grant me another favour then," resumed the traveller; "I am going to depart; we shall perhaps meet no more; could we not, with the necessary precautions, write sometimes to each other? Such a correspondence might amuse you, and would give me pleasure."

The Leper, for a while, reflected:---
 "Why," said he at last, "why should I seek to delude myself? I ought to have no other society than my own; no other friend than God! we shall see each other in him. Farewell! generous stranger! be happy. Farewell for ever!"

The traveller departed ; the Leper shut
the door, and drew the bolts.

THE END.