

PERSEPOLIS.

A FRAGMENT.

METHOUGHT that I was wandering amid the stupendous ruins of Persepolis. I stood surrounded with what seemed the remains of another world, and the spirit of former ages came over me.

Enormous masses of fallen stone lay around, and innumerable columns in every stage of decay; some prostrated on the marble pavement, others still rearing their majestic heads, comparatively unscathed by time or tempest, but all were clad in the mantle of moss and ivy, which told of desolation and the lapse of centuries.

And silence was here, deep and unbroken,—yet it was that unearthly silence which appeared to speak with the whisper of unseen beings. The moon slept on altar, and temple, and frieze; her clear light making all distinctly visible, even the long colonnades which swept away in endless succession to the very verge of the horizon,—but the extreme brightness of her beams brought out the shadows in that depth and darkness which invests them as it were with reality and mystery.

Something like fear came over me—what could produce it? I well knew no human being was within many miles of me, and supernatural dread I never had. But I felt not alone; it seemed as if I was surrounded with beings which gazed on me with a solemn yet unceasing look. It had been perfectly calm, but as I looked up at the wan and unclouded moon, I saw a lonely plant in the clear relief of her beams waving slowly in the rising breeze. Ah, thought I, is thy slender stalk and unheeded flower the only banner which waves o'er the place of the mighty! I wished to call up visions of the beings who once peopled this now deserted plain, but, though my memory ranged through the stores of history and tradition, yet I could not conjure up a single image in the mind's eye.

I was sitting on the broken step of what had been the grand entrance to a temple; by the hieroglyphics engraved on the still remaining columns, probably that dedicated to the sun. I contemplated with awe the vast expanse of pavement, which, though now chiefly covered with fallen stones and long grass, still indicated the extent of the interior area of the temple. At the eastern extremity were a few steps ascending to an elevated stone platform. It was the spot where the altar had stood—the moonbeams straggling between the opposite columns, showed the broad and low step on which the worshippers had knelt while offering their sacrifice. I sighed as I gazed, and a distant murmuring seemed to echo to my thoughts. It was but the wind rushing past, its melancholy sound harmonizing fitly with the scene around.

There was a time, thought I, when this "City of the Dead" stood in all the freshness of a new creation, and in the magnificence of prosperity, when her marble palaces and mighty temples were thronged with the multitude of her dwellers, and when the barren desert around was covered with vegetation and greenness. Where are now her princes and warriors, her priests, the sages, and lawgivers of the East; and where the crowds of artisans and peasants,—if such indeed there were in this place of palaces? Alas! my musings all resolved themselves into the conviction of the mutability and nothingness of all things human. Whilst thus wrapt in meditation, methought the scene became gradually changed. The walls of the temple, scarce perceptible before, now rose up in pure and dazzling whiteness, the low mouldering pillars reared their encrusted capitals as high as those which were still erect, and the entablatures appeared, surmounted with the lofty pediment, and adorned with rich and grotesque friezes.

I looked towards the altar, and it appeared high,

large, and square; galleries, arches, colonnades, and roof rose up rapidly and magnificently. All appeared distinct as in the blaze of noonday. Hundreds of statues stood in niches, or lined the sides of the walls, and every part seemed finished with the utmost perfection of design and execution. Small time now had I for wonderment. The sighing of the wind was changed to the sound of distant music, which, as it neared, was deadened by the trampling of multitudes. My heart beat—the footsteps approached nearer and nearer, they were on the steps. I gazed ardently towards the entrance, fear was swallowed up in expectation,—another moment, and my eyes would open on beings who breathed thousands of years gone by. The tread passed over the threshold, and onwards to the altar. I could see *nothing*;—but the swell of the harp came deep and near—I could hear rustling, as of banners and the sweep of long garments over the marble pavement. The steps were stayed before the altar, and I looked earnestly on the shrine; a small light smoke shot up, wreathing its top in eddying curls to the roof; and when the first clouds were dispersed throughout the expanse, a clear, bright, though slender flame appeared in its place. In a moment, the temple resounded with the warlike music of innumerable trumpets. It swelled louder and louder, till at length it ceased suddenly, as though under the influence of a single performer; but it was some time ere the wave of harmony subsided among the extensive and lofty colonnades. No sooner had the last swell died away in the distance, than again music was heard, but it was soft, plaintive, and melancholy. At first it appeared to descend from the heavens, but as it gradually increased to its full cadence, I found it was a choir of female voices proceeding from one of the many galleries which were hung, as it were, midway between the roof and the floor of the temple. It breathed peace, but it produced solemn and mournful sensations. I could distinguish articulations, but the language was unknown—it seemed, however, soft and melodious, and from the alternate piano of a single voice, followed by the deep melody of the chorus, it was evidently a hymn. I became as it were entranced—the statues, the pillars, the altar, and even the temple itself faded from my sight, and I felt as though lifted from earth towards the skies. Again was I brought back to a knowledge of this wondrous scene by the voice of multitudes, which now joined in the chaunt of the chorus.—It rose like the roar of a torrent, and the lofty area of the temple seemed too small to contain the harmony.

There was something inexpressibly beautiful in this music. I could distinguish the full manly voice of the warrior, the low deep chaunt of the priest, the shrill voice of youth, and the silver tone of woman. Their hallelujahs grew louder and louder, they became the voices of giants, the firm pavement trembled under the influence of the sound, and I could observe the tapered shafts of the pillars acquire a tremulous motion. Still it swelled, the roar of a deity descended from the sky to join them, my ears could no longer drink in the stupendous sounds.—It became one mighty peal of harmonious thunder—and, in vain struggling under a combination of hurried and excited sensations, I sunk overpowered on the pavement. * * * *

All was silent, I looked up, the moon again gazed sadly down, I looked around—the huge capital lay by the side of its apparent pillar, the altar had dwindled to its original slight elevation, the long grass, gently agitated by the fitful breeze, threw its dancing shadow on the ground, and the wind itself murmured softly and sadly among the distant ruins.