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Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson

being poems found amongst the papers of that noted
female who attempted the life of the king in 1786

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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1810

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1810

To blot thee from my memory ;
 But which might never, never be.
 Oh ! I appeal to that blest day
 When passion's wildest ecstasy
 Was coldness to the joys I knew,
 When every sorrow sunk away.
 Oh ! I had never liv'd before,
 But now those blisses are no more.
 And now I cease to live again,
 I do not blame thee love ; ah no !
 The breast that feels this anguish'd woe
 Throbs for thy happiness alone.
 Two years of speechless bliss are gone,
 I thank thee dearest for the dream.
 'Tis night — what faint and distant scream
 Comes on the wild and fitful blast ?
 It moans for pleasures that are past,
 It moans for days that are gone by.
 Oh ! lagging hours how slow you fly !
 I see a dark and lengthen'd vale,
 The black view closes with the tomb ;
 But darker is the lowering gloom
 That shades the intervening dale.
 In visioned slumber for awhile
 I seem again to share thy smile,
 I seem to hang upon thy tone.
 Again you say, " confide in me,
 " For I am thine, and thine alone,
 " And thine must ever, ever he."
 But oh ! awak'ning still anew,
 Athwart my enanguish'd senses flew
 A fiercer, deadlier agony !
 FINIS.

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MELODY TO A SCENE OF FORMER TIMES

ART thou indeed for ever gone,
For ever, ever, lost to me ?
Must this poor bosom beat alone,
Or beat at all, if not for thee ?
Ah ! why was love to mortals given,
To lift them to the height of heaven,
Or dash them to the depths of hell ?
Yet I do not reproach thee dear !
Ah ! no, the agonies that swell
This panting breast, this frenzied brain
Might wake my 's slumb'ring tear.
Oh ! heaven is witness I did love,
And heaven does know I love thee still,
Does know the fruitless sick'ning thrill,
When reason's judgment vainly strove

And howls in the midst of the leafless wood.
 Yet when the fierce swell of the tempest is raving,
 And the whirlwinds howl in the caves of Inisfallen,
 Still secure 'mid the wildest war of the sky,
 The phantom courser scours the waste,
 And his rider howls in the thunder's roar.
 O'er him the fierce bolts of avenging heaven
 Pause, as in fear, to strike his head.
 The meteors of midnight recoil from his figure,
 Tet the wildered peasant that oft passes by,
 With wonder beholds the blue flash thro' his form :
 And his voice, though faint as the sighs of the dead,
 The startled passenger shudders to hear,
 More distinct than the thunder's wildest roar.
 Then does the dragon, who chain'd in the caverns
 To eternity, curses the champion of Erin,
 Moan and yell loud at the lone hour of midnight,
 And twine his vast wreathes round the forms of the demons ;
 Then in agony roll his death-swimming eye-balls,
 Though wilder' d by death, yet never to die !
 Then he shakes from his skeleton folds the nightmares,
 Who, shrieking in agony, seek the couch
 Of some fevered wretch who courts sleep in vain ;
 Then the tombless ghosts of the guilty dead
 In horror pause on the fitful gale.
 They float on the swell of the eddying tempest,
 And scared seek the caves of gigantic * *
 Where their thin forms pour unearthly sounds
 On the blast that sweeps the breast of the lake,
 And mingles its swell with the moonlight air.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE energy and native genius of these Fragments, must be the only apology which the Editor can make for thus intruding them on the Public Notice. The first I found with no title, and have left it so. It is intimately connected with the dearest interests of universal happiness; and much as we may deplore the fatal and enthusiastic tendency which the ideas of this poor female had acquired, we cannot fail to pay the tribute of unequivocal regret to the departed memory of genius, which, had it been rightly organized, would have made that intellect, which had since become the victim of phrenzy and despair, a most brilliant ornament to society.

In case the sale of these Fragments evinces that the Public have any curiosity to be presented with a more copious collection of my unfortunate Aunt's Poem*, I have other papers in my possession, which shall, in that case, be subjected to their notice. It may be supposed they require much arrangement ; but I send the following to the press in the same state in which they came into my possession.

J. R

POSTHUMOUS FRAGMENTS.

AMBITION, power, and avarice, now have hurl'd
 Death, fate, and ruin, on a bleeding world.
 See ! on yon heath what countless victims lie,
 Hark ! what loud shrieks ascend thro' yonder sky ;
 Tell then the cause, 'tis sure the avenger's rage
 Has swept these myriads from life's crowded stage :
 Hark to that groan, an anguish' d hero dies,
 He shudders in death's latest agonies ;
 Yet does a fleeting hectic flush his cheek,
 Yet does his parting breath essay to speak —

" Oh God I my wife, my children — Monarch thou
 " For whose support this fainting frame lies low ;
 " For whose support in distant lands I bleed,
 * Let his friends' welfare be the warrior's meed.
 " He hears me not — ah ! no — kings cannot hear,
 " For passion's voice has dull'd their listless ear.
 " To thee, then, mighty God, I lift my moan,
 " Thou wilt not scorn a suppliant's anguish' d groan.
 " Oh ! now I die — but still is death's fierce pain —
 " God hears my prayer— we meet, we meet again. "
 He spake, reclin'd him on death's bloody bed,
 And with a parting groan his spirit fled.

Opressors of mankind to you we owe
 The baleful streams from whence these miseries flow ;
 For you how many a mother weeps her son,
 Snatch'd from life's course ere half his race was run I
 For you how many a widow drops a tear,
 In silent anguish, on her husband's bier !

« Is it then thine, Almighty Power," she cries,
 '« Whence tears of endless sorrow dim these eyes ?
 " Is this the system which thy powerful sway,
 • Which else in shapeless chaos sleeping lay,
 " Form'd and approv'd ? — it cannot be — but oh I
 " Forgive me Heaven, my brain is warp'd by woe."

Tis not — he never bade the war-note swell,
 He nerer triumph'd in the work of hell —
 Monarchs of earth ! thine is the baleful deed,
 Thine are the crimes for which thy subjects bleed.
 Ah ! when will come the sacred fated time,
 When man unsullied by his leaders' crime,
 Despising wealth, ambition, pomp, and pride,
 Will stretch him fearless by his foemen's side ?
 Ah ! when will come the time, when o'er the plain
 No more shall death and desolation reign ?

THE SPECTRAL HORSEMAN.

WHAT was the shriek that struck fancy's ear
 As it sate on the ruins of time that is past ?
 Hark ! it floats on the fitful blast of the wind,
 And breathes to the pale moon a funeral sigh.
 It is the Benshie's moan on the storm,
 Or a shivering fiend that thirsting for sin,
 Seeks murder and guilt when virtue sleeps,
 Wing'd with the power of some ruthless king,
 And sweeps o'er the breast of the prostrate plain.
 It was not a fiend from the regions of hell
 That poured its low moan on the stillness of night ;
 It was not a ghost of the guilty dead,
 Nor a yelling vampire reeking with gore ;
 But aye at the close of seven years' end,
 That voice is mixed with the swell of the storm
 And aye at the close of seven years' end,
 A shapeless shadow that sleeps on the hill
 Awakens and floats on the mist of the heath.
 It is not the shade of a murdered man,
 Who has rushed uncalled to the throne of his God,
 And howls in the pause of the eddying storm.
 This voice is low, cold, hollow, and chill,
 'Tis not heard by the ear, but is felt in the soul.
 'Tis more frightful far than the death- demon's scream,
 Or the laughter of fiends when they howl o'er the corpse
 Of a man who has sold his soul to hell.
 It tells the approach of a mystic form,
 A white courser bears the shadowy sprite ;
 More thin they are than the mists of the mountain,
 When the clear moonlight sleeps on the waveless lake.
 More pale his cheek than the snows of Nithona
 When winter rides on the northern blast,

FRAGMENT.

YES ! all is past — swift time has fled away,
Yet its swell pauses on my sickening mind ;
How long will horror nerve this frame of clay ?
I'm dead, and lingers yet my soul behind.
Oh ! powerful fate, revoke thy deadly spell,
And yet that may not ever, ever be,
Heaven will not smile upon the work of hell ;
Ah ! no, for heaven cannot smile on me ;
Fate, envious fate, has seal'd my wayward destiny.
I sought the cold brink of the midnight surge,
I sigh'd beneath its wave to hide my woes,
The rising tempest sung a funeral dirge,
And on the blast a frightful yell arose.
Wild flew the meteors o'er the madden'd main,
Wilder did grief athwart my bosom glare ;
Still'd was the unearthly howling, and a strain,
Swell'd 'mid the tumult of the battling air,
Twas like a spirit's song, but yet more soft and fair.
I met a maniac, like he was to me,
I said — " Poor victim wherefore dost thou roam ?
" And canst thou not contend with agony,
" That thus at midnight thou dost quit thine home ? "
" Ah there she sleeps : cold is her bloodless form,
" And I will go to slumber in her grave ;
" And then our ghosts, whilst raves the madden'd storm,
" Will sweep at midnight o'er the wilder'd wave ;
" Wilt thou our lowly beds with tears of pity lave ? "
" Ah ! no, I cannot shed the pitying tear,
" This breast is cold, this heart can feel no more ;
" But I can rest me on thy chilling bier,
" Can shriek in horror to the tempest's roar."

When will the sun smile on the bloodless field,
And the stern warrior's arm the sickle wield ?
Not whilst some King, in cold ambition's dreams,
Plans for the field of death his plodding schemes ;
Not whilst for private pique the public fall,
And one frail mortal's mandate governs all.
Swell'd with command and mad with dizzying sway ;
Who sees unmov'd his myriads fade away.
Careless who lives or dies — so that he gains
Some trivial point for which he took the pains.
What then are Kings ? — I see the trembling crowd,
I hear their fulsome clamours echoed loud ;
Their stern oppressor pleas'd appears awhile,
But April's sunshine is a Monarch's smile —
Kings are but dust — the last eventful day
Will level all and make them lose their sway ;
Will dash the sceptre from the Monarch's hand,
And from the warrior's grasp wrest the ensanguin'd brand.

Oh ! Peace, soft peace, art thou for ever gone,
 Is thy fair form indeed for ever flown ?
 And love and concord hast thou swept away,
 As if incongruous with thy parted sway ?
 Alas I fear thou hast, for none appear.
 Now o'er the palsied earth stalks giant Tear,
 With War, and Woe, and Terror, in his train ;
 List'ning he pauses on the embattled plain,
 Then speeding swiftly o'er the ensanguin'd heath,
 Has left the frightful work to hell and death.
 See ! gory Ruin yokes his blood-stain'd car,
 He scents the battle's carnage from afar ;
 Hell and destruction mark his mad career,
 He tracks the rapid step of hurrying Fear ;
 Whilst ruin'd towns and smoking cities tell,
 That thy work, Monarch, is the work of hell.
 It is thy work ! I hear a voice repeat,
 Shakes the broad basis of thy blood-stained seat ;
 And at the orphan's sigh, the widow's moan,
 Totters the fabric of thy guilt-stained throne —
 " It is thy work, O Monarch ; " now the sound
 Fainter and fainter yet is borne around,
 Yet to enthusiast ears the murmurs tell
 That heaven, indignant at the work of hell,
 Will soon the cause, the hated cause remove,
 Which tears from earth peace, innocence, and love.

**FRAGMENT. SUPPOSED TO BE AN
 EPITHALAMIUM OF FRANCIS RAVAILLAC
 AND CHARLOTTE CORDE.**

'Tis midnight now — athwart the murky air,

Whilst throbs the tempest of my breast so high ?
 Can the fierce night-fiends rest on yonder hill,
 And, in the eternal mansions of the sky,
 Can the directors of the storm in powerless silence lie ?
 Hark ! I hear music on the zephyr's wing,
 Louder it floats along the unruffled sky ;
 Some fairy sure has touch'd the viewless string —
 Now faint in distant air the murmurs die,
 Awhile it stills the tide of agony.
 Now — now it loftier swells — again stern woe
 Arises with the awakening melody.
 Again fierce torments, such as demons know,
 In hitter, feller tide, on this torn bosom flow.
 Arise ye sightless spirits of the storm,
 Ye unseen minstrels of the aerial sons,
 Pour the fierce tide around this lonely form,
 And roll the tempests wildest swell along.
 Dart the red lightning, wing the forked flash,
 Pour from thy cloud-form'd hills the thunder's roar ;
 Arouse the whirlwind — and let ocean dash
 In fiercest tumult on the rocking shore,
 Destroy this life or let earth's fabric be no more.
 Yes ! every tie that links me here is dead ;
 Mysterious fate thy mandate I obey,
 Since hope and peace, and joy, for aye are fled,
 I come, terrific power, I come away.
 Then o'er this ruin'd soul let spirits of hell,
 In triumph, laughing wildly, mock its pain ;
 And though with direst pangs mine heart-strings swell,
 I'll echo back their deadly yells again,
 Cursing the power that ne'er made ought in vain.

CHARLOTTE.

" Oh ! yes I will kiss thine eyes so fair,
" And I will clasp thy form ;
" Serene is the breath of the balmy air,
" But I think, love, thou feelest me warm.
" And I will recline on thy marble neck
" Till I mingle into thee.
" And I will kiss the rose on thy cheek,
" And thou shalt give kisses to me.
" Por here is no morn to flout our delight,
• ' Oh ! dost thou not joy at this ?
" And here we may lye an endless night,
"A long, long night of bliss."
Spirits ! when raptures move,
Say what it is to love,
When passion's tear stands on the cheek,
When bursts the unconscious sigh ;
And the tremulous lips dare not speak
What is told by the soul- felt eye.
But wat is sweeter to revenge's ear
Than the fell tyrant's last expiring yell?
Yes ! than love's sweetest blisses 'tis more dear
To drink the floatings of a despot's knell.
I wake — 'tis done — 'tis o'er. *
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DESPAIR.

AND can'st thou mock mine agony, thus calm
In cloudless radiance, Queen of silver night ?
Can you, ye flowerets, spread your perfumed balm
'Mid pearly gems of dew that shine so bright r
And you wild winds, thus can you sleep so still

Dank lurid meteors shoot a livid gleam ;
From the dark storm-clouds flashes a fearful glare,
It shews the bending oak, the roaring stream.
I ponder'd on the woes of lost mankind,
I ponder'd on the ceaseless rage of Kings ;
My rapt soul dwelt upon the ties that bind
The mazy volume of commingling things,
When fell and wild misrule to man stern sorrow brings.
I heard a yell — it was not the knell,
When the blasts on the wild lake sleep,
That floats on the pause of the summer gale's swell,
O'er the breast of the waveless deep.
I thought it had been death's accents cold
That bade me recline on the shore ;
I laid mine hot head on the surge-beaten mould,
And thought to breathe no more.
But a heavenly sleep
That did suddenly steep
In balm my bosom's pain,
Pervaded my soul,
And free from control,
Did mine intellect range again.
Methought enthron'd upon a silvery cloud,
Which floated 'mid a strange and brilliant light ;
My form upborne by viewless aether rode,
And spurn'd the lessening realms of earthly night.
What heavenly notes burst on my ravish'd ears,
What beauteous spirits met my dazzled eye I
Hark ! louder swells the music of the spheres,
More clear the forms of speechless bliss float by,
And heavenly gestures suit sethereal melody.
But fairer than the spirits of the air,
More graceful than the Sylph of symmetry,
Than the enthusiast's fancied love more fair,

Were the bright forms that swept the azure sky.
 Enthron'd in roseate light, a heavenly band
 Strew'd flowers of bliss that never fade away ;
 They welcome virtue to its native land,
 And songs of triumph greet the joyous day
 When endless bliss the woes of fleeting life repay.
 Congenial minds will seek their kindred soul,
 E'en though the tide of time has roll'd between ;
 They mock weak matter's impotent control,
 And seek of endless life the eternal scene.
 At death's vain summons this will never die,
 In nature's chaos this will not decay —
 These are the bands which closely, warmly, tie
 Thy soul, O Charlotte, 'yond this chain of clay,
 To him who thine must be till time shall fade away.
 Yes Francis ! thine was the dear knife that tore
 A tyrant's heart-strings from his guilty breast,
 Thine was the daring at a tyrant's gore,
 To smile in triumph, to condemn the rest ;
 And thine, lov'd glory of thy sex ! to tear
 From its base shrine a despot's haughty soul,
 To laugh at sorrow in secure despair,
 To mock, with smiles, life's lingering control,
 And triumph 'mid the griefs that round thy fate did roll.
 Yes ! the fierce spirits of the avenging deep
 With endless tortures goad their guilty shades.
 I see the lank and ghastly spectres sweep
 Along the burning length of yon arcades ;
 And I see Satan stalk athwart the plain ;
 He hastes along the burning soil of hell.
 " Welcome thou despots to my dark domain,
 " With maddening joy mine anguish' d senses swell
 " To welcome to their home the friends I love so well."

 Hark ! to those notes, how sweet, how thrilling sweet
 They echo to the sound of angels feet.

 Oh haste to the bower where roses are spread,
 For there is prepared thy nuptial bed.
 Oh haste — hark ! hark ! — they're gone.

CHORUS OF SPIRITS.

STAY ye days of contentment and joy,
 Whilst love every care is erasing,
 Stay ye pleasures that never can cloy,
 And ye spirits that can never cease pleasing.
 And if any soft passion be near,
 Which mortals, frail mortals, can know,
 Let love shed on the bosom a tear,
 And dissolve the chill ice-drop of woe.

SYMPHONY.

FRANCIS.

" SOFT, my dearest angel stay,
 " Oh ! you suck my soul away ;
 " Suck on, suck on, I glow, I glow !
 " Tides of maddening passion roll,
 " And streams of rapture drown my soul.
 " Now give me one more billing kiss,
 " Let your lips now repeat the bliss,
 " Endless kisses steal my breath,
 " No life can equal such a death."