

The Monk

By

Matthew Lewis

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Preface

Imitation Of Horace Ep. 20.--B. 1.

Methinks, Oh! vain ill-judging Book,
I see thee cast a wishful look,
Where reputations won and lost are
In famous row called Paternoster.
Incensed to find your precious olio
Buried in unexplored port-folio,
You scorn the prudent lock and key,
And pant well bound and gilt to see
Your Volume in the window set
Of Stockdale, Hookham, or Debrett.

Go then, and pass that dangerous bourn

Whence never Book can back return:
And when you find, condemned, despised,
Neglected, blamed, and criticised,
Abuse from All who read you fall,
(If haply you be read at all
Sorely will you your folly sigh at,
And wish for me, and home, and quiet.

Assuming now a conjuror's office, I
Thus on your future Fortune prophesy:--
Soon as your novelty is o'er,
And you are young and new no more,
In some dark dirty corner thrown,
Mouldy with damp, with cobwebs strown,
Your leaves shall be the Book-worm's prey;
Or sent to Chandler-Shop away,
And doomed to suffer public scandal,
Shall line the trunk, or wrap the candle!

But should you meet with approbation,
And some one find an inclination
To ask, by natural transition
Respecting me and my condition;
That I am one, the enquirer teach,
Nor very poor, nor very rich;
Of passions strong, of hasty nature,
Of graceless form and dwarfish stature;
By few approved, and few approving;
Extreme in hating and in loving;

Abhorring all whom I dislike,
Adoring who my fancy strike;
In forming judgements never long,
And for the most part judging wrong;
In friendship firm, but still believing
Others are treacherous and deceiving,
And thinking in the present aera
That Friendship is a pure chimaera:
More passionate no creature living,
Proud, obstinate, and unforgiving,
But yet for those who kindness show,
Ready through fire and smoke to go.

Again, should it be asked your page,
'Pray, what may be the author's age?'

Your faults, no doubt, will make it clear,
I scarce have seen my twentieth year,
Which passed, kind Reader, on my word,
While England's Throne held George the Third.

Now then your venturous course pursue:
Go, my delight! Dear Book, adieu!

Hague,
Oct. 28, 1794. M. G. L.

Advertisement

The first idea of this Romance was suggested by the story of the Santon Barsisa, related in The Guardian.--The Bleeding Nun is a tradition still credited in many parts of Germany; and I have been told that the ruins of the Castle of Lauenstein, which She is supposed to haunt, may yet be seen upon the borders of Thuringia.--The Water-King, from the third to the twelfth stanza, is the fragment of an original Danish Ballad--And Belerma and Durandarte is translated from some stanzas to be found in a collection of old Spanish poetry, which contains also the popular song of Gayferos and Melesindra, mentioned in Don Quixote.--I have now made a full avowal of all the plagiarisms of which I am aware myself; but I doubt not, many more may be found, of which I am at present totally unconscious.

'Holy Virgin!' exclaimed the old Woman in a tone of disappointment, while She threw a glance of enquiry round her; 'Holy Virgin! What heat! What a Crowd! I wonder what can be the meaning of all this. I believe we must return: There is no such thing as a seat to be had, and nobody seems kind enough to accommodate us with theirs.'

This broad hint attracted the notice of two Cavaliers, who occupied stools on the right hand, and were leaning their backs against the seventh column from the Pulpit. Both were young, and richly habited. Hearing this appeal to their politeness pronounced in a female voice, they interrupted their conversation to look at the speaker. She had thrown up her veil in order to take a clearer look round the Cathedral. Her hair was red, and She squinted. The Cavaliers turned round, and renewed their conversation.

'By all means,' replied the old Woman's companion; 'By all means, Leonella, let us return home immediately; The heat is excessive, and I am terrified at such a crowd.'

These words were pronounced in a tone of unexampled sweetness. The Cavaliers again broke off their discourse, but for this time they were not contented with looking up: Both started involuntarily from their seats, and turned themselves towards the Speaker.

The voice came from a female, the delicacy and elegance of whose figure inspired the Youths with the most lively curiosity to view the face to which it belonged. This satisfaction was denied them. Her features were hidden by a thick veil; But struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus. It was of the most dazzling whiteness, and received additional charms from being shaded by the tresses of her long fair hair, which descended in ringlets to her waist. Her figure was rather below than above the middle size: It was light and airy as that of an Hamadryad. Her bosom was carefully veiled. Her dress was white; it was fastened by a blue sash, and just permitted to peep out from under it a little foot of the most delicate proportions. A chaplet of large grains hung upon her arm, and her face was covered with a veil of thick black gauze. Such was the female, to whom the youngest of the Cavaliers now offered his seat, while the other thought it necessary to pay the same attention to her companion.

The old Lady with many expressions of gratitude, but without much difficulty, accepted the offer, and seated herself: The young one followed her example, but made no other compliment than a simple and graceful reverence. Don Lorenzo (such was the Cavalier's name, whose seat She had accepted) placed himself near her; But first He whispered a few words in his Friend's ear, who immediately took the hint, and endeavoured to draw off the old Woman's attention from her lovely charge.

'You are doubtless lately arrived at Madrid,' said Lorenzo to his fair Neighbour; 'It is impossible that such charms should have long remained unobserved; and had not this been your first public appearance, the envy of the Women and adoration of the Men would have rendered you already sufficiently remarkable.'

He paused, in expectation of an answer. As his speech did not absolutely require one, the Lady did not open her lips: After a few moments He resumed his discourse:

'Am I wrong in supposing you to be a Stranger to Madrid?'

The Lady hesitated; and at last, in so low a voice as to be scarcely intelligible, She made shift to answer,-- 'No, Segnor.'

'Do you intend making a stay of any length?'

'Yes, Segnor.'

'I should esteem myself fortunate, were it in my power to contribute to making your abode agreeable. I am well known at Madrid, and my Family has some interest at Court. If I can be of any service, you cannot honour or oblige me more than by permitting me to be of use to you.'--'Surely,' said He to himself, 'She cannot answer that by a monosyllable; now She must say something to me.'

Lorenzo was deceived, for the Lady answered only by a bow.

By this time He had discovered that his Neighbour was not very conversible; But whether her silence proceeded from pride, discretion, timidity, or idiotism, He was still unable to decide.

After a pause of some minutes--'It is certainly from your being a Stranger,' said He, 'and as yet unacquainted with our customs, that you continue to wear your veil. Permit me to remove it.'

At the same time He advanced his hand towards the Gauze: The Lady raised hers to prevent him.

'I never unveil in public, Segnor.'

'And where is the harm, I pray you?' interrupted her Companion somewhat sharply; 'Do not you see that the other Ladies have all laid their veils aside, to do honour no doubt to the holy place in which we are? I have taken off mine already; and surely if I expose my features to general observation, you have no cause to put yourself in such a wonderful alarm! Blessed Maria! Here is a fuss and a bustle about a chit's face! Come, come, Child! Uncover it; I warrant you that nobody will run away with it from you--'

'Dear aunt, it is not the custom in Murcia.'

'Murcia, indeed! Holy St. Barbara, what does that signify? You are always putting me in mind of that villainous Province. If it is the custom in Madrid, that is all that we ought to

mind, and therefore I desire you to take off your veil immediately. Obey me this moment Antonia, for you know that I cannot bear contradiction--'

Her niece was silent, but made no further opposition to Don Lorenzo's efforts, who, armed with the Aunt's sanction hastened to remove the Gauze. What a Seraph's head presented itself to his admiration! Yet it was rather bewitching than beautiful; It was not so lovely from regularity of features as from sweetness and sensibility of Countenance. The several parts of her face considered separately, many of them were far from handsome; but when examined together, the whole was adorable. Her skin though fair was not entirely without freckles; Her eyes were not very large, nor their lashes particularly long. But then her lips were of the most rosy freshness; Her fair and undulating hair, confined by a simple ribband, poured itself below her waist in a profusion of ringlets; Her throat was full and beautiful in the extreme; Her hand and arm were formed with the most perfect symmetry; Her mild blue eyes seemed an heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved sparkled with all the brilliance of Diamonds: She appeared to be scarcely fifteen; An arch smile, playing round her mouth, declared her to be possessed of liveliness, which excess of timidity at present repress; She looked round her with a bashful glance; and whenever her eyes accidentally met Lorenzo's, She dropt them hastily upon her Rosary; Her cheek was immediately suffused with blushes, and She began to tell her beads; though her manner evidently showed that She knew not what She was about.

Lorenzo gazed upon her with mingled surprise and admiration; but the Aunt thought it necessary to apologize for Antonia's mauvaise honte.

' 'Tis a young Creature,' said She, 'who is totally ignorant of the world. She has been brought up in an old Castle in Murcia; with no other Society than her Mother's, who, God help her! has no more sense, good Soul, than is necessary to carry her Soup to her mouth. Yet She is my own Sister, both by Father and Mother.'

'And has so little sense?' said Don Christoval with feigned astonishment; 'How very Extraordinary!'

'Very true, Segnor; Is it not strange? However, such is the fact; and yet only to see the luck of some people! A young Nobleman, of the very first quality, took it into his head that Elvira had some pretensions to Beauty--As to pretensions, in truth, She had always enough of THEM; But as to Beauty. . . ! If I had only taken half the pains to set myself off which She did. . . ! But this is neither here nor there. As I was saying, Segnor, a young Nobleman fell in love with her, and married her unknown to his Father. Their union remained a secret near three years, But at last it came to the ears of the old Marquis, who, as you may well suppose, was not much pleased with the intelligence. Away He posted in all haste to Cordova, determined to seize Elvira, and send her away to some place or other, where She would never be heard of more. Holy St. Paul! How He stormed on finding that She had escaped him, had joined her Husband, and that they had embarked together for the Indies. He swore at us all, as if the Evil Spirit had possessed him; He threw my Father into prison, as honest a painstaking Shoe-maker as any in

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