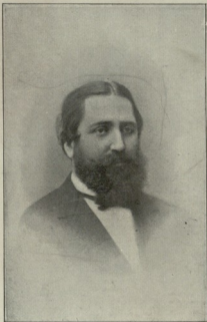


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THE HERMIT



PRINCE ILIA CHAVCHAVADZE.

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THE HERMIT

A LEGEND

By PRINCE ILIA CHAVCHAVADZE

TRANSLATED FROM THE GEORGIAN

By MARJORY WARDROP

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BERNARD QUARITCH

15 PICCADILLY
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P R E F A C E

WHILE most English readers are, to some extent, acquainted with the literature of Persia, there are but few who are aware of the existence of Georgian literature. Yet Georgia is well worthy of attention. *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, by Rust'haveli, the great epic poet of the XIIth century, loses nothing by comparison with Firdausi's *Shah Nameh*; but what modern Persian can be placed beside Barat'hashvili or Chavchavadze?

Endowed by nature with exceptional gifts, assimilating alike the culture of the East and West, the Christian kingdom of the Caucasus achieved a high degree of refinement and enlightenment at a very early date; and, despite the fierce blasts of war that have swept ceaselessly over the land, the light of literature has been kept alive.

Prince Ilia Chavchavadze was born in 1837. His family has produced many remarkable men, including the poet Alexander Chavchavadze (1786-1846), who was much influenced by the writings of Byron. Prince Ilia received his education in the Tiflis grammar-school and the University of St. Petersburg.

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In 1863 he published a journal, *Sakart'hvelos Moambe*, which had a great influence on his countrymen. In the same year he wrote his novel, "*Is that a Man?*" in which he drew a picture of the aimless life of the average country squire. This tale raised a storm of ill-will, but it achieved the object of its author: the landed gentry saw their faults mercilessly mirrored forth; first of all they were angry, then ashamed, finally awakened to self-improvement.

Chavchavadze's literary activity extends over a period of well-nigh forty years, and falls into three divisions. In the first, he is critical and satirical, endeavouring to rouse men from the lethargy in which they lay. In the second, he encourages them to lead a nobler life, by reminding them of the glorious past of their country, and by depicting the heroic deeds of patriots. Finally, he has passed into a phase which may be described as almost purely æsthetic.

To this last division belongs *The Hermit*, written in 1883. Based upon a legend, the poem has, in my opinion, a symbolic meaning added. Is not the hermit meant, perhaps, to represent mediævalism, and the shepherd girl, so bewitching and bright, the Renaissance, which has come so much later in Georgia than in the West? Before her beauty and

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gladness the old life cannot be lived, and must either share in her joy or die. From ancient Buddhist legend to modern French romance, many stories have been written on the temptation of holy recluses. *The Hermit* differs from all these in its wonderful simplicity. Here, we have no theatrical machinery, no dazzling wealth, no dreams of power to tempt the monk from his solitude, poverty and suffering; no vision of Cleopatra or Semiramis to wile him from the path of duty, but only a simple maiden, innocent and lovely, who tells him of the pure loves of mankind and of the joyousness of life. Yet, we feel that the temptation is all the more subtle and strong for its very simplicity. In the original the style is dignified and harmonious, and the descriptions are full of poetry, and tender sympathy with nature in all her moods.

It is not as a poet and novelist alone that Prince Ilia is distinguished. He is the Editor of a daily paper, *Iveria*, published in Tiflis, managing director of the Land Bank of the Nobility (an institution which devotes all its profits to educational and other philanthropic work), an eloquent orator, and in all the social life of the nation the most prominent figure.

I regret that my translation is so far from doing

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justice to the original. The difficulty of learning a tongue hitherto unknown in the West, and of rendering an idiom unallied to any known family of languages may be pleaded as some excuse for my shortcomings.

MARJORY WARDROP.

KERTCH, CRIMEA,

October 1895.

THE HERMIT



I

There, where Mount Kazbek rears his noble brow,
Where eagle cannot soar, nor vulture fly,
Where, never melted by the sun's warm rays,
The frozen rain and snow eternal lie ;
Far from the world's wild uproar set apart,
There, in the awful solitude and calm,
Where thunder's mighty roar rules o'er these realms,
Where frost doth dwell and winds sing forth their
psalm ;
There stood, in former days, a house of God,
Built by devout and holy men, the fame
Of that old temple still the folk hold dear,
And Bethlehem is still, to-day, its name.
The ice-bound wall of that secluded shrine
Was hollowed out from craggy, massive block,
And, like an eagle's eyrie on the cliff,
The door stood carved in the solid rock.
Straight downward from this gate unto the path
There hung descending a rough iron chain,
And save by that strange ladder's aid alone
Man could in no wise thereto entrance gain.

The Hermit



11

In days of old, monks left this world of woe,
And there they dwelt, devoted unto God,
In that wild wilderness they sang their songs
Of praise, and in the path of saints they trod.
There they withdrew to seek God's solitude,
There they abandoned all earth's vanity,
And, in that everlasting dwelling, sought
To fit themselves for God's eternity.
Those holy fathers sacrificed this world,
And, for the pain they suffered in that shrine,
The mountaineers revered them, and they sang
The praise of good deeds, and of grace divine.
And by the people still that place is held
So holy, even now, that in the chase
A refuge there the wounded beast may seek,
For there no huntsman dares to leave his trace ;
None save the man whose life is given to God
Can rest within that ruin's sacred shade,
And he who breaks this law must perish there
By swift, avenging lightning's trenchant blade.

The Hermit



III

And there, in yon forsaken hermitage,
 An anchorite took up his lone abode,
He left the fleeting world and, set apart,
 Gave up the present for the life with God.
Far from the dwelling of the sinful man,
 Far from the realm where wickedness holds sway,
Where e'en the just man scarcely can escape
 From Satan's tempting power; where, night and day,
Man is pursued by evil, like a thief
 Which tries to seize upon him unaware;
Where, e'en if right be known by its true name,
 The hand of sin will still all evil dare;
Where faithlessness, corruption, rapine dwell,
 And brother for his brother's blood doth lust,
Where discord turns the purest love of friends,
 By scandal's breath, to hatred and mistrust . . .
He left that fleeting world where every gift
 Is as a snare, and beauty but a lure;
The devil uses even virtues there
 To wile th'unwary, and his prey secure.

The Hermit



IV

Alone the hermit dwelt, amid this ice,
A solitary anchorite, his mind
He troubled not henceforth with painful thoughts
Of all the sinful cares of human kind.
He banished from his heart each worldly grief,
Each thought, concern and wish that was profane,
That he might stand before the judgment seat
Of God, with spirit pure and free from stain.
Both day and night, with lamentation, prayer,
And scourging martyred he, for his soul's sake,
His flesh, and, like a vessel washed clean,
With tears he strove his spirit pure to make ;
Both day and night, with sighing and complaint,
The icy rocks re-echoed forth his groans,
And his fast-flowing, suppliant tears ceased not
In that lone home of weeping and of moans,
Far from this transitory earth apart,
His spirit like a flower there did bloom ;
Each worldly wish was calmed and laid to rest,
And all desire was buried in the tomb.

The Hermit



v

He was not old—upon his saint-like face
His soul's nobility was pictured fair,
It could be seen his spirit was the home
Of other thoughts than those of worldly care.
His features melancholy, thin and sad,
Yet beamed with loveliness of grace divine,
Which from his deeply wrinkled, lofty brow,
Like bright encircling halo, forth did shine.
So gentle and so sweet was the deep thought
Expressed in his clear, meditative eyes,
It seemed as if in them was mirrored forth
Virtue herself, arrayed in modest guise ;
As if, with gentle gladness, they rejoiced
At Paradise's open entrance gate,
Together with his soul, to meet their Lord,
And hastened on, with faith secure, elate.
In fasting and in prayer, with body weak,
He lived like holy martyrs who attain,
By many roads of suffering and of woe,
To glory, conquering heroes over pain.

The Hermit



VI

His witness was accepted of the Lord,

Who hearkened to his humble servant's sighs
And, as a token of His grace, vouchsafed
A miracle in answer to his cries.

In the dark cell wherein the monk did pray

The window faced the dawning day's first gleam,
And downward, in a flood of lustrous light,

The rays of sun and moon did through it stream.
And o'er yon solitary mountain peak

When rose the sun's glad rays of morning light,
Through that small window in his lonely cell

The beam shone down, a column broad and bright.
Lo! when the hermit prayed, it was ordained

That on the ray his book of prayers should stand,
And on that solid sunbeam did it rest

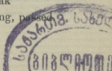
Secure and safe, by God's divine command . . .
Thus passed his days, and thus rolled on the years,
And, as a sign that God approved the way
Wherein he walked, thus pure and without sin,
This wonder was performed day by day.

The Hermit



VII

One evening, from long vigils weary, worn,
Forth through the door he dragged his limbs, and
fixed
His meditative gaze upon the plain
Stretched, verdant-carpeted, the hills betwixt.
The setting sun had not yet sunk to rest,
Behind the mountain's summit still he beamed,
And round the peak, like fan of flaming fire,
The heav'ns with a broad-stretching glory gleamed.
Like to a brazier, burned the bright blue sky,
And sparks of yellow, and deep crimson-hued,
Glittered among the clouds; bent back by them,
They trembled with a thousand tints imbued.
The hermit was entranced, and raptured gazed—
So wondrous fair, so glorious was the sight—
Upon the splendour of the glowing sun
As on a living picture of God's might . . .
But suddenly the wind arose; o'er rocks,
Ravines and caverns blew the stormy blast,
And, like a serpent, over Kazbek's peak
A darkly low'ring cloud, swift gliding, passed



The Hermit



VIII

It crept along, tyrannical, immense,
And stretched across the heav'ns' expansive vault,
Then burst the thunderclap, and roared with rage,
As one who doth his deadly foe assault.
The heaven and earth were straight with trembling
seized

At that loud noise, that terrible uproar—
Then sudden darkness overspread the sky,
And hissing hail forth from the clouds did pour.
Upon the earth, all intermingled, burst,
With furious din, the thunder, lightning, hail,
The raging wind blew fiercely 'mong the rocks,
With angry whirl, a wild, strong, howling gale;
All these together strove, so that it seemed

As if God oped his vials of wrath, and hurled
An awful judgment down from heaven that day

As retribution on His erring world . . .
But now the monk took refuge in his cell,

He prayed, with fervently upraised hand,
Before the Virgin's image, that the Lord

From sin and ruin would redeem the land.

The Hermit



IX

Then suddenly, he heard a human voice,

And, startled at this unaccustomed sound,

Again he listened, and he heard beneath

As if one called from out the mirk profound.

Quickly unto the door the hermit ran,

Against the ladder saw a bending form,

And lo! a childish voice cried out aloud

And begged a shelt'ring roof in that wild storm.

Say, can it be a son of man who roams

In this fierce deluge, on this awesome night?

The wild beasts e'en lie cow'ring in their lairs,

In fear they flee the fury of God's sight!

"Who art thou?" said the monk, "Art thou a man?

"Or evil sprite sent by the devil here?"

"Human am I—I pray thee shelter me!

"For God's love, save me now from death's dire fear!

"Dost thou not see that heaven is well-nigh rent

"And, overwhelming, on the earth doth press?

"Is this a time for words! Oh, pity me!

"Refuse me not a refuge in distress!"

The Hermit



8

“ Thou sayest well. If thou be son of man
“ 'Twere sin to leave thee to the storm a prey ;
“ If thou be spirit ill, then God must wish
“ To make a trial of His poor monk this day.
“ Come up whoe'er thou art ! God's will be done !
“ Hold fast this iron chain, and have no fear,
“ It is a ladder safe, footholds there are
“ By which a man can mount securely here ! ”
At last he reached the monastery door,
Climbing the steep ascent of that rough chain.
The hermit met him . . . “ What or who is this ? ”
In the deep gloom he asked himself in vain.
“ Come in, whoe'er thou art, I'll shelter thee,
“ Let us communion take, kneel down and pray,
“ This is my cell, and lo ! it is God's house ;
“ Here many a knee hath bent before this day.”
He led the way ; into the cell they came ;
Here was the darkness deeper, e'en despite
The ashes of the almost burnt-out fire
Which in the gloom gleamed with a feeble light.

The Hermit



XI

Now, when God's Mother let this new-come guest
 Into the cell, and showed of wrath no sign,
The monk said in his heart: "'Tis son of man,
 " And not a spirit harmful and malign ! "
The stranger sank down quickly, numbed and wet,
 And stirred the cinders, then recumbent lay
Upon the hearth, with both cold hands outstretched,
 Over the dying embers' fading ray.
" How cold it is ! " exclaimed the shiv'ring guest,
 " Ugh ! Ugh ! I'm almost frozen into stone ! "
The hermit started at the sound, 'twas like
 A maiden's voice, he trembled at her moan.
Could it then be that fate had hither sent
 This shape in woman's guise to be a test !
And, like a flash of lightning, came this thought
 Into the horror-stricken hermit's breast.
But e'en if fate had sent this for a trial,
 It must have been by God's own self designed ;
Therefore he took it from the Lord in faith,
 In confidence and peace of heart resigned.

The Hermit



XII

“Hast thou no firewood?” asked the visitor,

“Go, bring some here and light a fire! A load

“Upon my back, to-morrow, will I fetch;

“But let me warm myself, for love of God!”

The hermit, from the corner, brought some wood

To light the fire anew; the blaze that beamed

When it was kindled, fast dispersed the gloom,

And through the darksome cell it brightly streamed.

But when the ray, cast from the lighted fire,

Upon the stranger guest, there seated, glowed,

A picture of enchanting loveliness

Unto the hermit's wond'ring eyes it showed.

Full of bewitching beauty, full of life,

A youthful maiden by the fire reclined,

Of noble mien, yet meek, she seemed; her neck

Was bare, and graceful as the timid hind.

The beauty shed abroad from her black eyes

Disputed with the warmth cast by the glow

Of firelight, and beneath that conquering gaze

It yielded up to her, and flickered low.

The Hermit



XIII

The grace of Love herself, if she desired
 To picture forth the beauties of her mind,
And if she dwelt incarnate on the earth,
 A fairer semblance could not wish to find.
One could not say if grace adorned her form
 Or if her form was ornament to grace ;
E'en envy, hatred's self, could naught descry—
 In that fair maid, of fault there was no trace.
Who would not tremble 'fore her glorious eyes,
 Her brilliant cheeks, and bosom heaving high ?
Look at her lips ! . . . It seems that Love has left
 A kiss imprinted on them tenderly . . .
Who is not drawn and captivated held
 By mighty Beauty's all-enchanting power ? . . .
'Tis said that by its influence subdued
 The savage beasts are tamed, and gentle cower.
And e'en that hermit stern, severe and sad,
 Grew gentler and more mild, by beauty swayed ;
With sorrow in his guileless heart, he gazed,
 His eye held captive by the lovely maid.

The Hermit



XIV

At length he asked her : " Who art thou, my child ?

" What can have brought thee to this desert drear,

" In this rough weather, when the tempest wild

" Has almost flooded earth, afar and near ? "

" A shepherd lass am I . . . Down in the lap

" Of Kazbek's mount my father's flocks I fed ;

" Deceived were the sheep by the fresh grass,

" I followed them, and on they still were led.

" Fair was the evening, when the setting sun

" Was glowing, and upon the sky I gazed

" Until I could see naught but heaven's vault,

" For in its brilliant light my eyes were dazed.

" The great sun shone, surrounded with bright rays,

" Behind the mountain peak, and heart and eye

" Were ravished with the beauty of the sight—

" 'Twas like God's face that beamed so fair on high.

" I quite forgot to heed my father's words :

" ' My child, trust ne'er yon mountain, for I've seen

" ' The stormy blast sweep suddenly from heav'n,

" ' Although the sun rose glorious and serene.'

The Hermit



XV

- “ ‘ It matters naught ! Come,’ said my eager heart,
“ ‘ Dost thou not wish this wondrous scene to view ? ’
“ Intent I gazed . . . but Kazbek suddenly
“ Frowned fierce, and clouds o’erspread the heavens’
blue.
“ In one brief moment all was darkness drear,
“ And from the mountain blew a chilly wind.
“ I wish’d to take the sheep home e’er nightfall,
“ But ’twas too late, the way I could not find.
“ For suddenly the storm came sweeping on,
“ Like drops of lead the hail began to shower ;
“ I trembled for the sheep, but could do naught—
“ In that deep gloom fear robbed me of all power.
“ Indeed this mountain treacherous is, and false ;
“ For sudden darkness had obscured the day,
“ The smiling heaven had changed to sudden hell,
“ And all my joy was turned into dismay.
“ Ah ! why did I not heed my father’s words !
“ What will befall me ! Woe is me ! . . . They say,
“ I’ve heard it oft, that those who disobey
“ Their father ne’er can prosper in their way.

The Hermit



XVI

- “ I, disobedient to my father’s words,
“ Had lost the sheep. I only was to blame.
“ But (canst thou tell me ?) how can one avoid
“ The law that fate inex’rable doth frame ?
“ It was not for the flocks I grieved alone,
“ Twas that my father dear would be alarmed—
“ I am his only child, he loves me much—
“ Ah ! sorely would he grieve if I were harmed.
“ The sheep were gone—they were his sole support,
“ His only means of livelihood and gain—
“ Yet, were I only safe at home once more
“ He would not frown, lest he should cause me pain.
“ I stood in that wild storm on yon hillside ;
“ Upon the land, from heaven, the deluge poured,
“ The mountain shook and trembled to its base
“ Beneath my feet, while loud the thunder roared.—
“ What could I do ! Where could I hope to find
“ A shelter from the tempest’s raging blast ?
“ Shall I be bold, and strive to reach my home,
“ Or trust to fate until the storm be past ?

The Hermit



XVII

- “ But if I stay—who knows if I am safe
 “ From this dark night’s impending, awful doom!
“ If I go forth—in some deep, rocky glen
 “ I may be dashed to pieces in the gloom . . .
“ Yet I resolved to take the homeward path ;
 “ And said : Whatever comes to pass is good ! . . .
“ Nor canst thou say that I mistook my way,
 “ For here in safety presently I stood.
“ I felt the chain, and then I knew that this
 “ Must be Mount Kazbek’s far-famed, saintly shrine ;
“ Full often had I from my father heard
 “ That here a monk lived for the life divine.
“ With joy I called aloud, and called again ;
 “ My voice was powerless ’gainst the raging wind.
“ ‘ Woe unto me,’ I cried, ‘ if none can hear,
 “ ‘ If on this night no shelter I shall find ! ’
“ But God had mercy on me, and at last
 “ My cry He carried through the storm to thee—
“ I need not tell thee more—thou know’st the rest—
 “ May God save thee, e’en as thou hast saved me.’”

The Hermit



XVIII

- “ Thanks are not due to me that thou art safe,
“ For God alone can save the child He made ;
“ He ever stretches forth a helping hand
“ That He may all His chosen creatures aid . . . ”
“ It seems thou thoughtest me a spirit ill ! ”
“ Be not amazed nor troubled in thy mind.
“ What being in the world would visit me,
“ A lonely monk forgotten by mankind ! ”
“ Hast thou no ties upon the earth, no friend,
“ No brother, sister, kin dear to thy heart ? ”
“ These had I once ; to all I said farewell.
“ To serve the Lord, from yon world did I part.”
“ Hast thou lived here for long ? ” “ I cannot tell.”
“ Thou canst not tell ! ” “ My child, from all the fears
“ Of yon fast-fleeting world apart I dwell.
“ What reck I of the flight of passing years ? ”
“ And dost thou live without a human friend ? ”
“ To me God’s holy will was thus revealed.”
“ But why should God desire that man should stay
“ Alone amid these icy rocks concealed ?

The Hermit



XIX

- “ May God not be displeased, nor thou, O monk !
“ For I am very ignorant in speech . . .
- “ When in yon vale below I watched my flocks,
“ And looked up here, as far as sight could reach,
“ I often pondered o'er my father's words :
“ ‘ That there a monk dwelt, in those realms of ice,
“ ‘ Who for his soul's sake suffered solitude,
“ ‘ And of his body made a sacrifice. ’
- “ This tale surprised me, for I could not think
“ How this should be a pleasing deed to God ;
“ He surely could not be displeased that man
“ Should love the world where He Himself had trod !
- “ I said within myself : ‘ How can this be ?
“ ‘ Why did God deck the earth and make it fair
“ ‘ If man should look upon it as a curse,
“ ‘ And leave the world and all its beauties rare ?
“ ‘ Should I abandon all, all earthly ties ?
“ ‘ From all my friends, and home, should I depart ?
“ ‘ O God, forgive me ! 'tis too hard a task !
“ ‘ I could not with such ease crush my poor heart ! ’

The Hermit



XX

- “ How canst thou bear to leave the world of joy ?
“ Its pleasures sweet thou surely knowest well !
“ Death sways all here, but there is gladsome life :
“ Here grief abides, but there delight doth dwell.
“ Hast thou from thy crushed heart torn ev'ry tie ?
“ Does love no longer linger in thy breast ?
“ Hast thou not brought grief hither with thee too ?
“ Do care and sorrow ne'er disturb thy rest ?
“ Do dreams of home ne'er haunt the weary hours ?
“ Dost thou ne'er for thy friends and parents pine ?
“ Was there no heart to make thee happy there—
“ No heart which throbbed in harmony with thine ?
“ How couldst thou leave all love ? . . . ” “ Hear
me, my child !
“ The soul is dearer than all vain delight ;
“ It is a captive in yon fleeting world,
“ These joys are chains that stay its upward flight.”
“ Are all who dwell within the world then doomed ?
“ Must we all hopes of safety then forego ? ”
“ Salvation's road lies open unto all ;
“ This is life's way for me—a way of woe ! ”

The Hermit



XXI

“ A way of woe ! ” These words he scarce had said
When chilling horror seized the hermit's heart,
Such words betokened bitter discontent—
How could complaint in his calm life find part ?
“ A way of woe ! ” ’Twas cry of suff'ring soul
Sunk 'neath the load of sadness and distress—
'Twas like a sobbing sigh, a mournful moan
For joy departed and lost happiness . . .
What had he lost ? Should he not gladsome feel
That from the weary world he had withdrawn,
And all its fleeting fancies flung aside
That for his soul a day of rest might dawn ?
It cannot be that still he casts behind
A longing look on life and its delights,
When upward, e'en to God's most holy throne,
Sweet immortality his soul invites.
What had come o'er him ? What had moved him thus ?
It could not be that now he mourned his fate,
And felt regret that he had yielded all
To Him, who every being did create !

The Hermit



XXII

He dares not own himself displeas'd with God ;
The soul that trusts Him He will never leave.

Was not God's blessing generously given ?

He could not wish for more—why did he grieve ?

Yea ! Yea ! His grace was all he could desire . . .

Then, whence had come those words of deep despair ?

Around his cell he glanced, oppress'd by fear,

As if perchance some lurking fiend hid there.

But none was there . . . none save the wearied maid,

Who, sunk in slumbers soft, in silence lay,

While lovingly on her the firelight glowed

And flicker'd o'er her fair face, glad and gay.

Bewitching was she as she lay asleep,

Adorn'd in beauty and all charms of love,

As if, seeking to make her fair and good,

Both love and happiness together strove.

Beauty divine seem'd to have shed on her

All the rich treasures of its boundless store,

And, as the nightingale's upon the rose,

So beauty's soul upon her cheek did pour.

The Hermit



XXIII

And when the hermit gazed upon that face
The stormy waves that tossed his heart were still.
Surely some secret force held him enslaved
That he must look on her against his will!
What power is this that o'er him casts its spell?
Is it delight, or sorcery's fell snare?
His eyes were traitors to his mind's command;
He tried to turn away, but still stood there.
Long time he looked . . . then into his cold heart
At last there streamed a ray, so tender, warm—
He trembled, yet he felt the trembling sweet . . .
What gave it such a strange and subtle charm?
His agitated heart heaved with quick throbs,
Ne'er had he felt it thus before this day,
He heard the melody of silver strings;
As on a lyre, love on his heart did play.
What meant this sweetness hitherto unknown?
He could not tell this tender feeling's name;
If it was sinful, why was it so like
Immortal life, his soul's incessant aim?

The Hermit



XXIV

A step he took—himself he knew not why—

Calm and serene still slept the wearied maid,
And pleasing thoughts pursued her in her dreams,

While round her parted lips a proud smile played.
And that seducing smile so sweetly lured

Th' enchanted gazer to a fatal kiss,
None could deny those soul-enticing lips,

Not e'en an angel fresh from realms of bliss.
Now, lo! the unhappy monk bent down his head

To kiss her face . . . but seized with swift alarm
He started back . . . 'Twas death's delusive snare

That sought to draw him by the maiden's charm.
He was not vanquished? Nay, it could not be

That now his faith had lost its former power—
The thirst for holiness that filled his soul

Would surely last until life's latest hour!
He could not cast away God's holy gifts,

The welfare of his soul, and grace divine,
To change them for this earth's harassing cares!

For passing worldly pleasures dared he pine?

The Hermit



XXV

But who is this that calls reproachfully,
 “Hast thou not fallen into fatal fault !”
Who cries, triumphant o'er his wounded heart :
 “Art thou not vanquished by my first assault ?”
Whence comes this sound of noisy, mocking laugh ?
 What merriment is this that greets his ear ?
No one was there ; and yet, it could not be
 That this loud laugh was born of naught but fear !
And tremblingly, with terror, looked he round ;
 He was alone . . . still slept the unconscious maid.
In haste he rose, and, filled with wild alarm,
 Before the Holy Virgin bent and prayed.
Is there no help ? E'en looking on that face
 The same dismay the hermit's heart assails,
'Gainst that curst laughter, fraught with deep reproach,
 His erstwhile potent prayér naught avails !
His soul entreats his erring heart to pray,
 But all its earnest efforts are in vain ;
E'en kneeling 'neath the Virgin's sheltering gaze
 He cannot his rebellious will restrain !

The Hermit



XXVI

He looks upon the holy Virgin's face,
His supplicating eyes entreat her aid—
But, woe ! her gracious smile beams not on him,
Before him still he sees the shepherd maid.
What brings that form again before his eyes ?
Is it of flesh, or but a phantom pale ?
Or has the image of God's Mother changed
Into the likeness of a mortal frail ?
Since he has fall'n, does God not deem him fit
To look upon the Virgin's holy face ?
Has He performed a miracle divine
To bring His erring servant back to grace ?
He tries to cross himself, but lo ! his hands
Refuse to move ; he seeks to breathe a prayer,
His tongue is mute ; he, thirsting for God's smile,
Can see naught save the curséd maiden there.
“ Now, canst thou still resist ? ” and in his cell
The mocking laughter echoed forth once more.
No longer could the unhappy monk remain ;
But, like a madman, rushed forth thro' the door. . .

The Hermit



XXVII

. . . The day was dawning, fair the morning broke,
And from the heav'ns the clouds were chased away,
While o'er the tranquil earth a zephyr breathed
And everywhere peace held her potent sway . . .
But who is this with wildly waving hair
That runs among the rocks with trembling dread ?
It cannot be the monk ! . . . 'Tis he indeed !
O'er his pale face a death-like hue is spread,
See how he stands upon the very brink,
And gazes longingly on yonder peaks,
As if he on those lofty mountain heights
His last and only consolation seeks.
He watches for the sun's first rising ray ;
Why doth it tarry ? Why doth it delay ?
Until this day e'en Time itself was naught,
Why doth a moment now cause him dismay ?
—The sun arose ! Into his cell in haste
The monk returned, by dawning hope consoled ;
For through his window streamed the sun's bright beam,
And stood there like a pillar, massy gold.

The Hermit



XXVIII

His heart was calmed. . . Once more with timid trust,
His eyes he turned towards the Blesséd Maid ;
Once more the image smiled upon the monk,
Looking with favour on him as he prayed.
“ O God ! Thine anger then is turned away ! ”
And thankful tears forth from his eyes did well.
He laid his book of prayers upon the ray ;
But, woe ! the unhappy man ! alas ! . . it fell.
Before the hermit's eyes the light grew dim ;
Fear seized his fainting heart, and hopeless dread ;
With a wild, wailing shriek of woe he fell,
In that bright beam, from earth his spirit fled.

* * * *

And there where saints once sang there grateful hymns,
And glorified God's wondrous works and ways,
There where they offered daily sacrifice
Of lamentation, love, and prayer, and praise,
There, midst the landslips and the broken stones,
Only the wind moves to and fro, and sighs.
While, fearful of the mighty thunder-clap,
Within its lonesome lair the wild beast cries.

Written in 1895. Translated in 1896.

