

EARLY POEMS.

MOSES ON THE NILE.

("Mes soeurs, l'onde est plus fraiche.")

[TO THE FLORAL GAMES, Toulouse, Feb. 10, 1820.]

"Sisters! the wave is freshest in the ray  
Of the young morning; the reapers are asleep;  
The river bank is lonely: come away!  
The early murmurs of old Memphis creep  
Faint on my ear; and here unseen we stray,--  
Deep in the covert of the grove withdrawn,  
Save by the dewy eye-glance of the dawn.

"Within my father's palace, fair to see,  
Shine all the Arts, but oh! this river side,  
Pranked with gay flowers, is dearer far to me  
Than gold and porphyry vases bright and wide;  
How glad in heaven the song-bird carols free!  
Sweeter these zephyrs float than all the showers  
Of costly odors in our royal bowers.

"The sky is pure, the sparkling stream is clear:  
Unloose your zones, my maidens! and fling down  
To float awhile upon these bushes near  
Your blue transparent robes: take off my crown,  
And take away my jealous veil; for here  
To-day we shall be joyous while we lave  
Our limbs amid the murmur of the wave.

"Hasten; but through the fleecy mists of morn,  
What do I see? Look ye along the stream!  
Nay, timid maidens--we must not return!  
Coursing along the current, it would seem  
An ancient palm-tree to the deep sea borne,  
That from the distant wilderness proceeds,  
Downwards, to view our wondrous Pyramids.

"But stay! if I may surely trust mine eye,--  
It is the bark of Hermes, or the shell  
Of Iris, wafted gently to the sighs  
Of the light breeze along the rippling swell;  
But no: it is a skiff where sweetly lies  
An infant slumbering, and his peaceful rest  
Looks as if pillowed on his mother's breast.

"He sleeps--oh, see! his little floating bed

Swims on the mighty river's fickle flow,  
A white dove's nest; and there at hazard led  
By the faint winds, and wandering to and fro,  
The cot comes down; beneath his quiet head  
The gulfs are moving, and each threatening wave  
Appears to rock the child upon a grave.

"He wakes--ah, maids of Memphis! haste, oh, haste!

He cries! alas!--What mother could confide  
Her offspring to the wild and watery waste?  
He stretches out his arms, the rippling tide  
Murmurs around him, where all rudely placed,  
He rests but with a few frail reeds beneath,  
Between such helpless innocence and death.

"Oh! take him up! Perchance he is of those  
Dark sons of Israel whom my sire proscribes;  
Ah! cruel was the mandate that arose  
Against most guiltless of the stranger tribes!  
Poor child! my heart is yearning for his woes,  
I would I were his mother; but I'll give  
If not his birth, at least the claim to live."

Thus Iphis spoke; the royal hope and pride  
Of a great monarch; while her damsels nigh,  
Wandered along the Nile's meandering side;

And these diminished beauties, standing by  
The trembling mother; watching with eyes wide  
Their graceful mistress, admired her as stood,  
More lovely than the genius of the flood!

The waters broken by her delicate feet  
Receive the eager wader, as alone  
By gentlest pity led, she strives to meet  
The wakened babe; and, see, the prize is won!  
She holds the weeping burden with a sweet  
And virgin glow of pride upon her brow,  
That knew no flush save modesty's till now.

Opening with cautious hands the reedy couch,  
She brought the rescued infant slowly out  
Beyond the humid sands; at her approach  
Her curious maidens hurried round about  
To kiss the new-born brow with gentlest touch;  
Greeting the child with smiles, and bending nigh  
Their faces o'er his large, astonished eye!

Haste thou who, from afar, in doubt and fear,  
Dost watch, with straining eyes, the fated boy--  
The loved of heaven! come like a stranger near,  
And clasp young Moses with maternal joy;  
Nor fear the speechless transport and the tear

Will e'er betray thy fond and hidden claim,  
For Iphis knows not yet a mother's name!

With a glad heart, and a triumphal face,  
The princess to the haughty Pharaoh led  
The humble infant of a hated race,  
Bathed with the bitter tears a parent shed;  
While loudly pealing round the holy place  
Of Heaven's white Throne, the voice of angel choirs  
Intoned the theme of their undying lyres!

"No longer mourn thy pilgrimage below--  
O Jacob! let thy tears no longer swell  
The torrent of the Egyptian river: Lo!  
Soon on the Jordan's banks thy tents shall dwell;  
And Goshen shall behold thy people go  
Despite the power of Egypt's law and brand,  
From their sad thrall to Canaan's promised land.

"The King of Plagues, the Chosen of Sinai,  
Is he that, o'er the rushing waters driven,  
A vigorous hand hath rescued for the sky;  
Ye whose proud hearts disown the ways of heaven!  
Attend, be humble! for its power is nigh  
Israel! a cradle shall redeem thy worth--  
A Cradle yet shall save the widespread earth!"

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