

ODES.--1818-28.

KING LOUIS XVII.

("En ce temps-là du ciel les portes.")

[Bk. I. v., December, 1822.]

The golden gates were opened wide that day,
All through the unveiled heaven there seemed to play
 Out of the Holiest of Holy, light;
And the elect beheld, crowd immortal,
 A young soul, led up by young angels bright,
Stand in the starry portal.

A fair child fleeing from the world's fierce hate,
In his blue eye the shade of sorrow sate,
 His golden hair hung all dishevelled down,
On wasted cheeks that told a mournful story,
 And angels twined him with the innocent's crown,
The martyr's palm of glory.

The virgin souls that to the Lamb are near,

Called through the clouds with voices heavenly clear,
God hath prepared a glory for thy brow,
Rest in his arms, and all ye hosts that sing
His praises ever on untired string,
Chant, for a mortal comes among ye now;
Do homage--"Tis a king."

And the pale shadow saith to God in heaven:
"I am an orphan and no king at all;
I was a weary prisoner yestereven,
My father's murderers fed my soul with gall.
Not me, O Lord, the regal name beseems.
Last night I fell asleep in dungeon drear,
But then I saw my mother in my dreams,
Say, shall I find her here?"

The angels said: "Thy Saviour bids thee come,
Out of an impure world He calls thee home,
From the mad earth, where horrid murder waves
Over the broken cross her impure wings,
And regicides go down among the graves,
Scenting the blood of kings."

He cries: "Then have I finished my long life?
Are all its evils over, all its strife,
And will no cruel jailer evermore

Wake me to pain, this blissful vision o'er?
Is it no dream that nothing else remains
Of all my torments but this answered cry,
And have I had, O God, amid my chains,
The happiness to die?

"For none can tell what cause I had to pine,
What pangs, what miseries, each day were mine;
And when I wept there was no mother near
To soothe my cries, and smile away my tear.
Poor victim of a punishment unending,
Torn like a sapling from its mother earth,
So young, I could not tell what crime impending
Had stained me from my birth.

"Yet far off in dim memory it seems,
With all its horror mingled happy dreams,
Strange cries of glory rocked my sleeping head,
And a glad people watched beside my bed.
One day into mysterious darkness thrown,
I saw the promise of my future close;
I was a little child, left all alone,
Alas! and I had foes.

"They cast me living in a dreary tomb,
Never mine eyes saw sunlight pierce the gloom,

Only ye, brother angels, used to sweep
Down from your heaven, and visit me in sleep.
'Neath blood-red hands my young life withered there.

Dear Lord, the bad are miserable all,
Be not Thou deaf, like them, unto my prayer,
It is for them I call."

The angels sang: "See heaven's high arch unfold,
Come, we will crown thee with the stars above,
Will give thee cherub-wings of blue and gold,
And thou shalt learn our ministry of love,
Shalt rock the cradle where some mother's tears
Are dropping o'er her restless little one,
Or, with thy luminous breath, in distant spheres,
Shalt kindle some cold sun."

Ceased the full choir, all heaven was hushed to hear,
Bowed the fair face, still wet with many a tear,
In depths of space, the rolling worlds were stayed,
Whilst the Eternal in the infinite said:

"O king, I kept thee far from human state,
Who hadst a dungeon only for thy throne,
O son, rejoice, and bless thy bitter fate,
The slavery of kings thou hast not known,
What if thy wasted arms are bleeding yet,

And wounded with the fetter's cruel trace,
No earthly diadem has ever set
A stain upon thy face.

"Child, life and hope were with thee at thy birth,
But life soon bowed thy tender form to earth,
And hope forsook thee in thy hour of need.
Come, for thy Saviour had His pains divine;
Come, for His brow was crowned with thorns like thine,
His sceptre was a reed."

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