

THE MARBLE FAUN.

("Il semblait grelotter.")

[XXXVI., December, 1837.]

He seemed to shiver, for the wind was keen.
'Twas a poor statue underneath a mass
Of leafless branches, with a blackened back
And a green foot--an isolated Faun
In old deserted park, who, bending forward,
Half-merged himself in the entangled boughs,
Half in his marble settings. He was there,
Pensive, and bound to earth; and, as all things
Devoid of movement, he was there--forgotten.

Trees were around him, whipped by icy blasts--
Gigantic chestnuts, without leaf or bird,
And, like himself, grown old in that same place.
Through the dark network of their undergrowth,
Pallid his aspect; and the earth was brown.
Starless and moonless, a rough winter's night
Was letting down her lappets o'er the mist.
This--nothing more: old Faun, dull sky, dark wood.

Poor, helpless marble, how I've pitied it!
Less often man--the harder of the two.

So, then, without a word that might offend
His ear deformed--for well the marble hears
The voice of thought--I said to him: "You hail
From the gay amorous age. O Faun, what saw you
When you were happy? Were you of the Court?"

"Speak to me, comely Faun, as you would speak
To tree, or zephyr, or untrodden grass.
Have you, O Greek, O mocker of old days,
Have you not sometimes with that oblique eye
Winked at the Farnese Hercules?--Alone,
Have you, O Faun, considerately turned
From side to side when counsel-seekers came,
And now advised as shepherd, now as satyr?--
Have you sometimes, upon this very bench,
Seen, at mid-day, Vincent de Paul instilling
Grace into Gondi?--Have you ever thrown
That searching glance on Louis with Fontange,
On Anne with Buckingham; and did they not
Start, with flushed cheeks, to hear your laugh ring forth
From corner of the wood?--Was your advice
As to the thyrsis or the ivy asked,
When, in grand ballet of fantastic form,

God Phoebus, or God Pan, and all his court,
Turned the fair head of the proud Montespan,
Calling her Amaryllis?--La Fontaine,
Flying the courtiers' ears of stone, came he,
Tears on his eyelids, to reveal to you
The sorrows of his nymphs of Vaux?--What said
Boileau to you--to you--O lettered Faun,
Who once with Virgil, in the Eclogue, held
That charming dialogue?--Say, have you seen
Young beauties sporting on the sward?--Have you
Been honored with a sight of Molière
In dreamy mood?--Has he perchance, at eve,
When here the thinker homeward went, has he,
Who--seeing souls all naked--could not fear
Your nudity, in his inquiring mind,
Confronted you with Man?"

Under the thickly-tangled branches, thus
Did I speak to him; he no answer gave.

I shook my head, and moved myself away;
Then, from the copses, and from secret caves
Hid in the wood, methought a ghostly voice
Came forth and woke an echo in my souls
As in the hollow of an amphora.

"Imprudent poet," thus it seemed to say,
"What dost thou here? Leave the forsaken Fauns
In peace beneath their trees! Dost thou not know,
Poet, that ever it is impious deemed,
In desert spots where drowsy shades repose--
Though love itself might prompt thee--to shake down
The moss that hangs from ruined centuries,
And, with the vain noise of throe ill-timed words,
To mar the recollections of the dead?"

Then to the gardens all enwrapped in mist
I hurried, dreaming of the vanished days,
And still behind me--hieroglyph obscure
Of antique alphabet--the lonely Faun
Held to his laughter, through the falling night.

I went my way; but yet--in saddened spirit
Pondering on all that had my vision crossed,
Leaves of old summers, fair ones of old time--
Through all, at distance, would my fancy see,
In the woods, statues; shadows in the past!

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