

THE FIELDS OF FANCY[88]

It was in Rome--the Queen of the World that I suffered a misfortune that reduced me to misery & despair[89]--The bright sun & deep azure sky were oppressive but nought was so hateful as the voice of Man--I loved to walk by the shores of the Tiber which were solitary & if the sirocco blew to see the swift clouds pass over St. Peters and the many domes of Rome or if the sun shone I turned my eyes from the sky whose light was too dazzling & gay to be reflected in my tearful eyes I turned them to the river whose swift course was as the speedy departure of happiness and whose turbid colour was gloomy as grief--

Whether I slept I know not or whether it was in one of those many hours which I spent seated on the ground my mind a chaos of despair & my eyes for ever wet by tears but I was here visited by a lovely spirit whom I have ever worshiped & who tried to repay my adoration by diverting my mind from the hideous memories that racked it. At first indeed this wanton spirit played a false part & appearing with sable wings & gloomy countenance seemed to take a pleasure in exaggerating all my miseries--and as small hopes arose to snatch them from me & give me in their place gigantic fears which under her fairy hand appeared close, impending & unavoidable--sometimes she would cruelly leave me while I was thus on the verge of madness and without consoling me leave me nought but heavy leaden sleep--but at other times she would wily link less unpleasing thoughts to these most

dreadful ones & before I was aware place hopes before me--futile but
consoling[90]--

One day this lovely spirit--whose name as she told me was Fantasia
came to me in one of her consolatory moods--her wings which seemed
coloured by her tone of mind were not gay but beautiful like that of
the partridge & her lovely eyes although they ever burned with an
unquenchable fire were shaded & softened by her heavy lids & the black
long fringe of her eye lashes--She thus addressed me--You mourn for
the loss of those you love. They are gone for ever & great as my power
is I cannot recall them to you--if indeed I wave my wand over you you
will fancy that you feel their gentle spirits in the soft air that
steals over your cheeks & the distant sound of winds & waters may
image to you their voices which will bid you rejoice for that they
live--This will not take away your grief but you will shed sweeter
tears than those which full of anguish & hopelessness now start from
your eyes--This I can do & also can I take you to see many of my
provinces my fairy lands which you have not yet visited and whose
beauty will while away the heavy time--I have many lovely spots under
my command which poets of old have visited and have seen those sights
the relation of which has been as a revelation to the world--many
spots I have still in keeping of lovely fields or horrid rocks peopled
by the beautiful or the tremendous which I keep in reserve for my
future worshippers--to one of those whose grim terrors frightened
sleep from the eye I formerly led you[91] but you now need more
pleasing images & although I will not promise you to shew you any new

scenes yet if I lead you to one often visited by my followers you will at least see new combinations that will sooth if they do not delight you--Follow me--

Alas! I replied--when have you found me slow to obey your voice--some times indeed I have called you & you have not come--but when before have I not followed your slightest sign and have left what was either of joy or sorrow in our world to dwell with you in yours till you have dismissed me ever unwilling to depart--But now the weight of grief that oppresses me takes from me that lightness which is necessary to follow your quick & winged motions alas in the midst of my course one thought would make me droop to the ground while you would outspeed me to your Kingdom of Glory & leave me here darkling

Ungrateful! replied the Spirit Do I not tell you that I will sustain & console you My wings shall aid your heavy steps & I will command my winds to disperse the mist that over casts you--I will lead you to a place where you will not hear laughter that disturbs you or see the sun that dazzles you--We will choose some of the most sombre walks of the Elysian fields--

The Elysian fields--I exclaimed with a quick scream--shall I then see? I gasped & could not ask that which I longed to know--the friendly spirit replied more gravely--I have told you that you will not see those whom you mourn--But I must away--follow me or I must leave you weeping deserted by the spirit that now checks your tears--

Go--I replied I cannot follow--I can only sit here & grieve--& long to see those who are gone for ever for to nought but what has relation to them can I listen--

The spirit left me to groan & weep to wish the sun quenched in eternal darkness--to accuse the air the waters all--all the universe of my utter & irremediable misery--Fantasia came again and ever when she came tempted me to follow her but as to follow her was to leave for a while the thought of those loved ones whose memories were my all although they were my torment I dared not go--Stay with me I cried & help me to clothe my bitter thoughts in lovelier colours give me hope although fallacious & images of what has been although it never will be again--diversion I cannot take cruel fairy do you leave me alas all my joy fades at thy departure but I may not follow thee--

One day after one of these combats when the spirit had left me I wandered on along the banks of the river to try to disperse the excessive misery that I felt until overcome by fatigue--my eyes weighed down by tears--I lay down under the shade of trees & fell asleep--I slept long and when I awoke I knew not where I was--I did not see the river or the distant city--but I lay beside a lovely fountain shadowed over by willows & surrounded by blooming myrtles--at a short distance the air seemed pierced by the spiry pines & cypresses and the ground was covered by short moss & sweet smelling heath--the sky was blue but not dazzling like that of Rome and on every side I

saw long allies--clusters of trees with intervening lawns & gently stealing rivers--Where am I? [I] exclaimed--& looking around me I beheld Fantasia--She smiled & as she smiled all the enchanting scene appeared lovelier--rainbows played in the fountain & the heath flowers at our feet appeared as if just refreshed by dew--I have seized you, said she--as you slept and will for some little time retain you as my prisoner--I will introduce you to some of the inhabitants of these peaceful Gardens--It shall not be to any whose exuberant happiness will form an u[n]pleasing contrast with your heavy grief but it shall be to those whose chief care here is to acquired knowledged [sic] & virtue--or to those who having just escaped from care & pain have not yet recovered full sense of enjoyment--This part of these Elysian Gardens is devoted to those who as before in your world wished to become wise & virtuous by study & action here endeavour after the same ends by contemplation--They are still unknowing of their final destination but they have a clear knowledge of what on earth is only supposed by some which is that their happiness now & hereafter depends upon their intellectual improvement--Nor do they only study the forms of this universe but search deeply in their own minds and love to meet & converse on all those high subjects of which the philosophers of Athens loved to treat--With deep feelings but with no outward circumstances to excite their passions you will perhaps imagine that their life is uniform & dull--but these sages are of that disposition fitted to find wisdom in every thing & in every lovely colour or form ideas that excite their love--Besides many years are consumed before they arrive here--When a soul longing for knowledge & pining at its

narrow conceptions escapes from your earth many spirits wait to receive it and to open its eyes to the mysteries of the universe--many centuries are often consumed in these travels and they at last retire here to digest their knowledge & to become still wiser by thought and imagination working upon memory [92]--When the fitting period is accomplished they leave this garden to inhabit another world fitted for the reception of beings almost infinitely wise--but what this world is neither can you conceive or I teach you--some of the spirits whom you will see here are yet unknowing in the secrets of nature--They are those whom care & sorrow have consumed on earth & whose hearts although active in virtue have been shut through suffering from knowledge--These spend sometime here to recover their equanimity & to get a thirst of knowledge from converse with their wiser companions--They now securely hope to see again those whom they love & know that it is ignorance alone that detains them from them. As for those who in your world knew not the loveliness of benevolence & justice they are placed apart some claimed by the evil spirit & in vain sought for by the good but She whose delight is to reform the wicked takes all she can & delivers them to her ministers not to be punished but to be exercised & instructed untill acquiring a love of virtue they are fitted for these gardens where they will acquire a love of knowledge

As Fantasia talked I saw various groupes of figures as they walked among the allies of the gardens or were seated on the grassy plots either in contemplation or conversation several advanced together

towards the fountain where I sat--As they approached I observed the principal figure to be that of a woman about 40 years of age her eyes burned with a deep fire and every line of her face expressed enthusiasm & wisdom--Poetry seemed seated on her lips which were beautifully formed & every motion of her limbs although not youthful was inexpressibly graceful--her black hair was bound in tresses round her head and her brows were encompassed by a fillet--her dress was that of a simple tunic bound at the waist by a broad girdle and a mantle which fell over her left arm she was encompassed by several youths of both sexes who appeared to hang on her words & to catch the inspiration as it flowed from her with looks either of eager wonder or stedfast attention with eyes all bent towards her eloquent countenance which beamed with the mind within--I am going said Fantasia but I leave my spirit with you without which this scene wd fade away--I leave you in good company--that female whose eyes like the loveliest planet in the heavens draw all to gaze on her is the Prophetess Diotima the instructress of Socrates[93]--The company about her are those just escaped from the world there they were unthinking or misconducted in the pursuit of knowledge. She leads them to truth & wisdom untill the time comes when they shall be fitted for the journey through the universe which all must one day undertake--farewell--

And now, gentlest reader--I must beg your indulgence--I am a being too weak to record the words of Diotima her matchless wisdom & heavenly eloquence[.] What I shall repeat will be as the faint shadow of a tree by moonlight--some what of the form will be preserved but there will

be no life in it--Plato alone of Mortals could record the thoughts of Diotima hopeless therefore I shall not dwell so much on her words as on those of her pupils which being more earthly can better than hers be related by living lips[.]

Diotima approached the fountain & seated herself on a mossy mound near it and her disciples placed themselves on the grass near her--Without noticing me who sat close under her she continued her discourse addressing as it happened one or other of her listeners--but before I attempt to repeat her words I will describe the chief of these whom she appeared to wish principally to impress--One was a woman of about 23 years of age in the full enjoyment of the most exquisite beauty her golden hair floated in ringlets on her shoulders--her hazle eyes were shaded by heavy lids and her mouth the lips apart seemed to breathe sensibility[94]--But she appeared thoughtful & unhappy--her cheek was pale she seemed as if accustomed to suffer and as if the lessons she now heard were the only words of wisdom to which she had ever listened--The youth beside her had a far different aspect--his form was emaciated nearly to a shadow--his features were handsome but thin & worn--& his eyes glistened as if animating the visage of decay--his forehead was expansive but there was a doubt & perplexity in his looks that seemed to say that although he had sought wisdom he had got entangled in some mysterious mazes from which he in vain endeavoured to extricate himself--As Diotima spoke his colour went & came with quick changes & the flexible muscles of his countenance shewed every impression that his mind received--he seemed one who in life had

studied hard but whose feeble frame sunk beneath the weight of the mere exertion of life--the spark of intelligence burned with uncommon strength within him but that of life seemed ever on the eve of fading[95]--At present I shall not describe any other of this groupe but with deep attention try to recall in my memory some of the words of Diotima--they were words of fire but their path is faintly marked on my recollection--[96]

It requires a just hand, said she continuing her discourse, to weigh & divide the good from evil--On the earth they are inextricably entangled and if you would cast away what there appears an evil a multitude of beneficial causes or effects cling to it & mock your labour--When I was on earth and have walked in a solitary country during the silence of night & have beheld the multitude of stars, the soft radiance of the moon reflected on the sea, which was studded by lovely islands--When I have felt the soft breeze steal across my cheek & as the words of love it has soothed & cherished me--then my mind seemed almost to quit the body that confined it to the earth & with a quick mental sense to mingle with the scene that I hardly saw--I felt--Then I have exclaimed, oh world how beautiful thou art!--Oh brightest universe behold thy worshiper!--spirit of beauty & of sympathy which pervades all things, & now lifts my soul as with wings, how have you animated the light & the breezes!--Deep & inexplicable spirit give me words to express my adoration; my mind is hurried away but with language I cannot tell how I feel thy loveliness! Silence or the song of the nightingale the momentary apparition of some bird that

flies quietly past--all seems animated with thee & more than all the deep sky studded with worlds!"--If the winds roared & tore the sea and the dreadful lightnings seemed falling around me--still love was mingled with the sacred terror I felt; the majesty of loveliness was deeply impressed on me--So also I have felt when I have seen a lovely countenance--or heard solemn music or the eloquence of divine wisdom flowing from the lips of one of its worshippers--a lovely animal or even the graceful undulations of trees & inanimate objects have excited in me the same deep feeling of love & beauty; a feeling which while it made me alive & eager to seek the cause & animator of the scene, yet satisfied me by its very depth as if I had already found the solution to my enquires [sic] & as if in feeling myself a part of the great whole I had found the truth & secret of the universe--But when retired in my cell I have studied & contemplated the various motions and actions in the world the weight of evil has confounded me--If I thought of the creation I saw an eternal chain of evil linked one to the other--from the great whale who in the sea swallows & destroys multitudes & the smaller fish that live on him also & torment him to madness--to the cat whose pleasure it is to torment her prey I saw the whole creation filled with pain--each creature seems to exist through the misery of another & death & havoc is the watchword of the animated world--And Man also--even in Athens the most civilized spot on the earth what a multitude of mean passions--envy, malice--a restless desire to depreciate all that was great and good did I see--And in the dominions of the great being I saw man [reduced?][97] far below the animals of the field preying on one another's [sic]

hearts; happy in the downfall of others--themselves holding on with bent necks and cruel eyes to a wretch more a slave if possible than they to his miserable passions--And if I said these are the consequences of civilization & turned to the savage world I saw only ignorance unrepaired by any noble feeling--a mere animal, love of life joined to a low love of power & a fiendish love of destruction--I saw a creature drawn on by his senses & his selfish passions but untouched by aught noble or even Human--

And then when I sought for consolation in the various faculties man is possessed of & which I felt burning within me--I found that spirit of union with love & beauty which formed my happiness & pride degraded into superstition & turned from its natural growth which could bring forth only good fruit:--cruelty--& intolerance & hard tyranny was grafted on its trunk & from it sprung fruit suitable to such grafts--If I mingled with my fellow creatures was the voice I heard that of love & virtue or that of selfishness & vice, still misery was ever joined to it & the tears of mankind formed a vast sea ever blown on by its sighs & seldom illuminated by its smiles--Such taking only one side of the picture & shutting wisdom from the view is a just portraiture of the creation as seen on earth

But when I compared the good & evil of the world & wished to divide them into two separate principles I found them inextricably intertwined together & I was again cast into perplexity & doubt--I might have considered the earth as an imperfect formation where having bad

materials to work on the Creator could only palliate the evil effects of his combinations but I saw a wanton malignity in many parts & particularly in the mind of man that baffled me a delight in mischief a love of evil for evils sake--a siding of the multitude--a dastardly applause which in their hearts the crowd gave to triumphant wick[ed]ness over lowly virtue that filled me with painful sensations. Meditation, painful & continual thought only encreased my doubts--I dared not commit the blasphemy of ascribing the slightest evil to a beneficent God--To whom then should I ascribe the creation? To two principles? Which was the upermost? They were certainly independant for neither could the good spirit allow the existence of evil or the evil one the existence of good--Tired of these doubts to which I could form no probable solution--Sick of forming theories which I destroyed as quickly as I built them I was one evening on the top of Hymettus beholding the lovely prospect as the sun set in the glowing sea--I looked towards Athens & in my heart I exclaimed--oh busy hive of men! What heroism & what meaness exists within thy walls! And alas! both to the good & to the wicked what incalculable misery--Freemen ye call yourselves yet every free man has ten slaves to build up his freedom--and these slaves are men as they are yet d[e]graded by their station to all that is mean & loathsome--Yet in how many hearts now beating in that city do high thoughts live & magnanimity that should methinks redeem the whole human race--What though the good man is unhappy has he not that in his heart to satisfy him? And will a contented conscience compensate for fallen hopes--a slandered name torn affections & all the miseries of civilized life?--

Oh Sun how beautiful thou art! And how glorious is the golden ocean that receives thee! My heart is at peace--I feel no sorrow--a holy love stills my senses--I feel as if my mind also partook of the inexpressible loveliness of surrounding nature--What shall I do? Shall I disturb this calm by mingling in the world?--shall I with an aching heart seek the spectacle of misery to discover its cause or shall I hopeless leave the search of knowledge & devote myself to the pleasures they say this world affords?--Oh! no--I will become wise! I will study my own heart--and there discovering as I may the spring of the virtues I possess I will teach others how to look for them in their own souls--I will find whence arises this unquenchable love of beauty I possess that seems the ruling star of my life--I will learn how I may direct it aright and by what loving I may become more like that beauty which I adore And when I have traced the steps of the godlike feeling which ennobles me & makes me that which I esteem myself to be then I will teach others & if I gain but one proselyte--if I can teach but one other mind what is the beauty which they ought to love--and what is the sympathy to which they ought to aspire what is the true end of their being--which must be the true end of that of all men then shall I be satisfied & think I have done enough--

Farewell doubts--painful meditation of evil--& the great, ever inexplicable cause of all that we see--I am content to be ignorant of all this happy that not resting my mind on any unstable theories I have come to the conclusion that of the great secret of the universe I

can know nothing--There is a veil before it--my eyes are not piercing enough to see through it my arms not long enough to reach it to withdraw it--I will study the end of my being--oh thou universal love inspire me--oh thou beauty which I see glowing around me lift me to a fit understanding of thee! Such was the conclusion of my long wanderings I sought the end of my being & I found it to be knowledge of itself--Nor think this a confined study--Not only did it lead me to search the mazes of the human soul--but I found that there existed nought on earth which contained not a part of that universal beauty with which it [was] my aim & object to become acquainted--the motions of the stars of heaven the study of all that philosophers have unfolded of wondrous in nature became as it were [sic] the steps by which my soul rose to the full contemplation & enjoyment of the beautiful--Oh ye who have just escaped from the world ye know not what fountains of love will be opened in your hearts or what exquisite delight your minds will receive when the secrets of the world will be unfolded to you and ye shall become acquainted with the beauty of the universe--Your souls now growing eager for the acquirement of knowledge will then rest in its possession disengaged from every particle of evil and knowing all things ye will as it were be mingled in the universe & ye will become a part of that celestial beauty that you admire--[98]

Diotima ceased and a profound silence ensued--the youth with his cheeks flushed and his eyes burning with the fire communicated from hers still fixed them on her face which was lifted to heaven as in

inspiration--The lovely female bent hers to the ground & after a deep sigh was the first to break the silence--

Oh divinest prophetess, said she--how new & to me how strange are your lessons--If such be the end of our being how wayward a course did I pursue on earth--Diotima you know not how torn affections & misery incalculable misery--withers up the soul. How petty do the actions of our earthly life appear when the whole universe is opened to our gaze--yet there our passions are deep & irrisisbale [sic] and as we are floating hopeless yet clinging to hope down the impetuous stream can we perceive the beauty of its banks which alas my soul was too turbid to reflect--If knowledge is the end of our being why are passions & feelings implanted in us that hurries [sic] us from wisdom to selfconcentrated misery & narrow selfish feeling? Is it as a trial? On earth I thought that I had well fulfilled my trial & my last moments became peaceful with the reflection that I deserved no blame--but you take from me that feeling--My passions were there my all to me and the hopeless misery that possessed me shut all love & all images of beauty from my soul--Nature was to me as the blackest night & if rays of loveliness ever strayed into my darkness it was only to draw bitter tears of hopeless anguish from my eyes--Oh on earth what consolation is there to misery?

Your heart I fear, replied Diotima, was broken by your sufferings--but if you had struggled--if when you found all hope of earthly happiness wither within you while desire of it scorched your soul--if you had

near you a friend to have raised you to the contemplation of beauty & the search of knowledge you would have found perhaps not new hopes spring within you but a new life distinct from that of passion by which you had before existed[99]--relate to me what this misery was that thus engrosses you--tell me what were the vicissitudes of feeling that you endured on earth--after death our actions & worldly interest fade as nothing before us but the traces of our feelings exist & the memories of those are what furnish us here with eternal subject of meditation.

A blush spread over the cheek of the lovely girl--Alas, replied she what a tale must I relate what dark & phrenzied passions must I unfold--When you Diotima lived on earth your soul seemed to mingle in love only with its own essence & to be unknowing of the various tortures which that heart endures who if it has not sympathized with has been witness of the dreadful struggles of a soul enchained by dark deep passions which were its hell & yet from which it could not escape--Are there in the peaceful language used by the inhabitants of these regions--words burning enough to paint the tortures of the human heart--Can you understand them? or can you in any way sympathize with them--alas though dead I do and my tears flow as when I lived when my memory recalls the dreadful images of the past--

--As the lovely girl spoke my own eyes filled with bitter drops--the spirit of Fantasia seemed to fade from within me and when after placing my hand before my swimming eyes I withdrew it again I found

myself under the trees on the banks of the Tiber--The sun was just setting & tinging with crimson the clouds that floated over St. Peters--all was still no human voice was heard--the very air was quiet I rose--& bewildered with the grief that I felt within me the recollection of what I had heard--I hastened to the city that I might see human beings not that I might forget my wandering recollections but that I might impress on my mind what was reality & what was either dream--or at least not of this earth--The Corso of Rome was filled with carriages and as I walked up the Trinita dei' Montes I became disgusted with the crowd that I saw about me & the vacancy & want of beauty not to say deformity of the many beings who meaninglessly buzzed about me--I hastened to my room which overlooked the whole city which as night came on became tranquil--Silent lovely Rome I now gaze on thee--thy domes are illuminated by the moon--and the ghosts of lovely memories float with the night breeze among thy ruins--contemplating thy loveliness which half soothes my miserable heart I record what I have seen--Tomorrow I will again woo Fantasia to lead me to the same walks & invite her to visit me with her visions which I before neglected--Oh let me learn this lesson while yet it may be useful to me that to a mind hopeless & unhappy as mine--a moment of forgetfulness a moment [in] which it can pass out of itself is worth a life of painful recollection.

CHAP. 2

The next morning while sitting on the steps of the temple of Aesculapius in the Borghese gardens Fantasia again visited me & smilingly beckoned to me to follow her--My flight was at first heavy but the breezes commanded by the spirit to convoy me grew stronger as I advanced--a pleasing languour seized my senses & when I recovered I found my self by the Elysian fountain near Diotima--The beautiful female who[m] I had left on the point of narrating her earthly history seemed to have waited for my return and as soon as I appeared she spoke thus--[100]