

FRAGMENT OF A POEM.

GLOOMY and still was the broad solemn deep,
 Whose rolling tides for twice a hundred years,
 Had lashed the rugged walls of Tora's Towers,
 The strong abode of Curdmore's haughty kings.
 Its frowning battlements o'erhung the sea,
 Where in the fair serene of summer days,
 Each answering Tower a nether heaven did meet,
 And cast its pictured shadow on the waves.
 But now, no mild blue sky in gentle grandeur,
 Did lend its azure covering to the main,
 Softening the most majestic work of nature,
 Nor even a sunbeam through the rifted cloud,
 Glanced on the distant wave.

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Dull heavy clouds hung in the lower air,
 Misty and shapeless, like the humid chaos,
 Ere God divided it and called it water.
 The creatures of the deep forgot their prey,
 Leaving the upper waves to seek the bottom ;
 The flocking sea-fowl homeward bent their flight,
 In dusky bands to caverned rock or cliff.
 A deadly calm reigned in the stately woods,
 That hung aloft upon the hardy shore ;
 The mingled music of the forest ceased
 Before the day had run its wonted term,
 Yet birds of night forgot their twilight song,
 And every creature, whether fierce or tame,
 Skulked in its hole, seized with unwonted fear.

Nor was that creature styled the lord of earth
 Without his fear : that secret worst of fears,
 The mind unknowing what it has to dread.
 Fenced in the seeming safety of his home,
 Man's sometime-haughty spirit sank within him,
 And dark uncertainty of ill unseen
 Encreased the sombre gloom of Tora's Halls.

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The sullen watch did lean upon their arms,
 With quickened breath half-check'd and listening
 ear,

In expectation of some unknown thing.

Each smothered in his breast his untold fears,
 And wished within himself the hours might speed,
 But that the night with tenfold horror came,
 To close the frightful day.

No cheerful converse graced the evening board,
 Slow went the goblet round, each face was grave ;
 And ere the first dark watch fulfilled its term,
 All were retired to rest in Tora's Halls.

Sleep came, and closed full many a weary eye,
 But not that gentle kindly visitor,
 That oft-times bringeth to the poor man's cot,
 More wealth than e'er enjoyed his haughty lord ;
 Or to the couch of the dejected lover
 Brings true love-knots, and kind remembrances,
 And cheering glances, making him by night
 The favoured man he fain would be by day ;
 Nor yet that haggard tyrant of the night,

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Who comes oft-times to shake the ill man's bed,
 Tearing him from his heaps of silk and down,
 To hang his quivering carcase o'er the gulf,
 Or through the air by foul fiends goaded on,
 Bears him with dizzy, furious speed along;
 But she, stiff shrouded in her blackest weed,
 And swathed with leaden bands, awful and still,
 Who by the couch of the condemned wretch,
 Harassed and spent, before the morning breaks,
 Whose setting sun he never shall behold,
 Oft takes her stand, and scarce is known from
 death.

But still the red lamp, pendent from the roof,
 Did cast its trembling and unjoyous light
 Athwart the lofty chamber of the king;
 For he alone felt not her weighty power.
 A load of cares lay heavy at his heart;
 His thoughtful eyes were bent upon the ground;
 And the unsuiting gravity of age,
 Had sadly sobered o'er his cheek of youth,
 That newly blushed beneath a galling crown.

Long had his warlike father ruled the land,
Whose vengeful bloody sword no scabbard knew.
Wild was his fury in the field of battle,
And dreadful was his wrath to nations round,
But kind and glowing yearned his manly heart,
To the brave hardy sons of his blue hills.
He owned a friend and brother of the field,
In each broad-chested brawny warrior,
Who followed to the fight his daring steps.
One deed of fame, done by a son of Curdmore,
He prized more than the wealth of peaceful realms,
And dealt them death and ruin in his love.
Unshaped and rude the state, and knew no law,
Save that plain sense which nature gives to all,
Of right and wrong within the monarch's breast;
And when no storm of passion shook his soul,
It was a court of mildest equity.

One distant nation only in the field,
Could meet his boasted arms with equal strength.
Impetuous, rushing from their mountains rude,
Oft had they striven like two adverse winds,

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That bursting from their pent and narrow glens,
On the wide desert meet,—in wild contention
Tossing aloft in air dun clouds of sand,
Tearing the blasted herbage from its bed,
And bloating the clear face of beauteous heaven
With the dissevered fragments of the earth,
Till spent their force, low growling they retire,
And for a time within their caverns keep,
Gathering new force with which they issue forth
To rage and roar again.—So held they strife.
But even while Corvan gloried in his might,
Death came and laid him low.

His spear was hung high in the sombre hall,
Whose lofty walls with darkening armour clad,
Spoke to the valiant of departed heroes,
A fellow now to those which rest ungrasped,
Unburnished, and know no master's hand.
A hardy people, scattered o'er the hills,
And wild uncultivated plains of Curdmore,
Depending more upon to-morrow's chace,
Than on the scanty produce of their fields,

Where the proud warrior, as debased by toil,
Throws down unwillingly his boasted weapons,
To mar the mossy earth with his rude tillage,
Bedding his dwarfish grain in tracks less deep,
Than he would plough the bosom of a foe ;
A people rude but generous now looked up,
With wistful and expecting eyes, to Allener,
The son of their beloved, their only hope.
The general burthen, though but new to care,
Was laid on him. His heart within him whispered
That he was left in rough and perilous times,
Like elder brother of a needy race,
To watch and care for all, and it was thoughtful ;
Sombre and thoughtful as unjoyous age.
But never had he felt his mind so dark,
As in this heavy and mysterious hour.

With drooping head and arms crossed o'er his
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His spirit all collected in itself,
As it had ceased to animate the body,
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He felt a cold and shivering wind pass o'er him,
 And from his sinking bosom raised his head.
 A thick and mazy mist had filled the chamber,
 Thro' which the feeble lamp its blue flame showed
 With a pale moony circlet compassed round,
 As when the stars through dank unwholesome air
 Show thro' the night their blunted heads, enlarged,
 Foretelling plagues to some affrighted land.
 When, lo! a strange light, breaking thro' the gloom,
 Struck his astonished mind with awe and wonder.
 It rose before him in a streamy column,
 As, seen upon the dim benighted ocean,
 By partial moon-beams through some severed cloud,
 The towering, wan, majestic waterspout
 Delights and awes the wondering mariner.

Soul-awed within himself shrunk Curdmore's
 king;

Thick beat his fluttering heart against his breast,
 As towards him the moving light approached,
 While opening by degrees its beamy sides,
 A mighty phantom showed his awful form,

Gigantic, far above the sons of men.
A robe of watery blue in wreathy folds,
Did lightly float o'er his majestic limbs:
Firm in their strength more than was ever pictured,
Of fabled heroes in their fields of war.
One hand was wide outstretchd in threatened act,
As if to draw down vengeance from the skies,
The other, spread upon his ample breast,
Seemed to betoken what restrained its fellow.
Thus far to mortal eye he stood revealed,
But misty vapour shrouded all above,
Save that a ruddy glow did oft break through
With hasty flash, according with the vehemence
And agitation of the form beneath,
Speaking the terrors of that countenance,
The friendly darkness veiled.
Commotions strange disturbed the heaving earth.
A hollow muffled rumbling from beneath,
Rolled deeply in its dark and secret course.
The castle trembled on its rocky base;
And loosened fragments from the nodding towers,
Fell on the flinty ground with hideous crash.

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The bursting gates against the portal rung,
And windows clattered in their trembling walls ;
And as the phantom trode, far echoing loud,
The smitten pavement gave a fearful sound.
He stopped, the trembling walls their motion ceased,
The earth was still ; he raised his awful voice.

“ Thou creature, set o’er creatures like thyself,
To bear the rule for an appointed season,
Bethink thee well, and commune with thy heart.
If one man’s blood can mark the unblest front,
And visit with extreme of inward pangs
The dark breast of the secret murderer,
Canst thou have strength all singly in thyself,
To bear the blood of thousands on thy head,
And wrongs which cry to heaven and shall be
heard ?

Kings to the slaughter lead their people forth,
And home return again with thinned bands,
Bearing to every house its share of mourning,
Whilst high in air they hang their trophied spoils,
And call themselves the heroes of the earth.

“ Thy race is stained with blood : such were thy
fathers :

But they are passed away and have their place,
And thou still breathest in thy weeds of clay,
Therefore to thee their doom is veiled in night.
Yet mayst thou be assured, that mighty Power
Who gave to thee thy form of breathing flesh,
Of such like creatures as thyself endowed,
Although innumerable on this earth,
Doth knowledge take, and careth for the least,
And will prepare his vengeance for the man
Whose wasteful pride uproots what he hath sown.
And now he sets two paths before thy choice,
Which are permitted thee : even thou thyself
Mayst fix thy doom,—a doom which cannot change.
Wilt thou draw out securely on thy throne
A life of such content and happiness
As thy wild country and rude people yield,
Laying thee late to rest in peaceful age,
Where thy forefathers sleep ; thy name respected,
Thy children after thee to fill thy seat ?
Or wilt thou, as thy secret thoughts incline,

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Across the untried deep conduct thy bands,
 Attack the foe on their unguarded coast,
 O'ercome their strength at little cost of blood,
 And raise thy trophies on a distant shore,
 Where none of all thy race have footing gained,—
 Gaining for Curdmore wealth, and power, and
 fame,

But not that better gain, content and happiness?
 Wealth, power, renown, thou mayest for Curdmore
 earn,

But mayest not live to see her rising state:
 For far from hence, upon that hostile shore,
 A sepulchre which owns no kindred bone,
 Gapes to receive thee in the pride of youth.
 This is the will of Heaven: then choose thy fate,
 Weak son of earth, I leave thee to thy troubles;
 A little while shall make us more alike,
 A spirit shalt thou be when next we meet.

It vanished. Black mist thickened where it
 stood.

A hollow sounding wind rushed thro' the chamber,

And rent in twain the deep embodied darkness
 Which, curling round in many a pitchy volume,
 On either side, did slowly roll away,
 Like two huge waves of death.

And now the waving banners of the castle,
 In early breath of morn began to play,
 And faintly through the lofty windows looked
 The doubtful grey-light on the silent chambers
 Sleep's deadly heaviness fled with the night,
 And lighter airy fancies of the dawn
 Confusedly floated in the half-waked mind,
 Till roused with fuller beams of powerful light,
 Up sprung the dreamers from their easy beds,
 And saw with a relieved and thankful heart,
 The fair blue sky, the uncapped distant hills,
 The woods, and streams, and valleys brightening
 gladly,
 In the blest light of heaven.

But neither hill, nor vale, nor wood, nor stream,
 Nor yet the sun high riding in his strength,

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That beauty gave to all, cheered Allener,
 Who wist not when it rose, nor when it set.
 Silent but troubled in his lofty chamber
 Two days he sat and shunned the searching
 eyes,
 The sidelong looks of many a friendly chief.
 Oft in his downcast eye the round tear hung,
 Whilst by his side he clenched his trembling
 hand,
 As if to rouse the ardour of his soul.
 His seat beneath him shook,—high heaved his
 breast,
 And burst the bracings of its tightened vestment.
 The changing passions of his troubled soul
 Passed with dark speed across his varied face;
 Each passing shadow followed by a brother,
 Like clouds across the moon in a wild storm:
 So warred his doubtful mind, till by degrees
 The storm subsided, calmer thoughts prevailed;
 Slow wore the gloom away like morning mist;
 A gleam of joy spread o'er his lightened visage,
 And from his eye-balls shot that vivid fire,

Which kindles in the bosoms of the brave,
When the loud trumpet calls them forth to battle,
"Gird on mine armour," said the rising youth,
"I am the son of Corvan!"