



ROXANA to USBECK.

From LES LETTRES PERSANNES.

By the Same.

Roxana, one of Usbeck's wives, was found (whilst he was in Europe) in bed with her lover, whom she had privately let into the seraglio. The guardian eunuch who discovered them, had the man murdered on the spot, and her close guarded till he received instructions from his master how to dispose of her. During that interval she swallowed poyson, and is supposed to write the following letter whilst she is dying.

THINK not I write my innocence to prove,
 To sue for pity, or awake thy love :
 No mean defence expect, or abject pray'rs ;
 Thou know'st no mercy, and I know no tears :
 I laugh at all thy vengeance has decreed,
 Avow the fact, and glory in the deed.

Yes, tyrant ! I deceiv'd thy spies and thee :
 Pleas'd in oppression, and in bondage free :
 The rigid agents of thy cruel laws
 By gold I won to aid my juster cause :
 With dextrous skill eluded all thy care,
 And acted more than jealousy could fear :
 To wanton bow'rs this prison-house I turn'd,
 And blest'd that absence which you thought I mourn'd.

But

But short those joys allow'd by niggard Fate,
 Yet so refin'd, so exquisitely great,
 That their excess compensated their date.

I die : already in each burning vein
 I feel the poys'nous draught, and bless the pain :
 For what is life unless its joys we prove ?
 And where is joy, depriv'd of what we love ?

Yet, ere I die, this justice I have paid
 To my dear murder'd lover's injur'd shade :
 Those sacrilegious instruments of power,
 Who wrought that ruin these sad eyes deplore,
 Already with their blood their crimes atone,
 And for his life have sacrific'd their own.

Thee, tho' restraint and absence may defend
 From my revenge, my curses still attend :
 Despair like mine, barbarian ! be thy part,
 Remorse afflict, and sorrow sting thy heart.

Nor think this hate commencing in my breast,
 Tho' prudence long its latent force suppress'd ;
 I knew those wrongs that I was forc'd to bear,
 And curs'd those chains Injustice made me wear.

For could'st thou hope Roxana to deceive
 With idle tales, which only fools believe ?
 Poor abject souls in superstition bred,
 In ign'rance train'd, by prejudice misled ;
 Whom hireling dervises by proxy teach
 From those whose false prerogative they preach.

Didst thou imagine me so weak of mind,
 Because I murmur'd not, I ne'er repin'd,
 But hugg'd my chain, and thought my jaylor kind?
 That willingly those laws I e'er obey'd,
 Which Pride invented, and Oppression made?
 And whilst self-licens'd through the world you rove,
 To quicken appetite by change in love;
 Each passion fated, and each with possess'd
 That Lust can urge, or Fancy can suggest:
 That I should mourn thy loss with fond regret,
 Weep the misfortune, and the wrong forget?

Could I believe that heav'n this beauty gave,
 (Thy transient pleasure, and thy lasting slave;) }
 Indu'd with reason, only to fulfil
 The harsh commands of thy capricious will?
 No, Usbeck, no, my soul disdain'd those laws;
 And tho' I wanted pow'r t' assert my cause,
 My right I knew; and still those pleasures sought,
 Which Justice warranted, and Nature taught:
 On Custom's senseless precepts I refin'd,
 I weigh'd what heav'n, I knew what man design'd,
 And form'd by her own rules my free-born mind. }

Thus whilst this wretched body own'd thy pow'r,
 Doom'd, unredress'd, its hardships to deplore;
 My soul subservient to herself alone, }
 And Reason independent on her throne,
 Contemn'd thy dictates, and obey'd their own: }

Yet

Yet thus far to my conduct thanks are due,
 At least I condescended to seem true ;
 Endeavour'd still my sentiments to hide,
 Indulg'd thy vanity, and sooth'd thy pride.
 Tho' this submission to a tyrant paid,
 Whom not my duty, but my fears obey'd,
 If rightly weigh'd, would more deserve thy blame,
 Who call it Virtue, but prophane her name :
 For to the world I should have own'd that love,
 Which all impartial judges must approve :
 You urg'd a right to tyrannize my heart,
 Which he solliciting, assail'd by art,
 Whilst I, impatient of the name of slave,
 To force refus'd, what I to merit gave.

Oft, as thy slaves this wretched body led
 To the detested pleasures of thy bed ;
 In those soft moments, consecrate to joy,
 Which extacy and transport should employ ;
 Clasp'd in your arms, you wonder'd still to find
 So cold my kisses, so compos'd my mind :
 But had thy cheated eyes discern'd aright,
 You'd found aversion, where you sought delight.

Not that my soul incapable of love,
 No charms could warm, no tenderness could move ;
 For him, whose love my every thought possess'd,
 A fiercer passion fill'd this constant breast,
 Than truth e'er felt, or falsehood e'er possess'd.

}

This stile unusual to thy pride appears,
 For truth's a stranger to the tyrant's ears ;
 But what have I to manage or to dread ?
 Nor threats alarm, nor insults hurt the dead :
 No wrongs they feel, no miseries they find ;
 Cares are the legacies we leave behind :
 In the calm grave no Usbecks we deplore,
 No tyrant husband, no oppressive pow'r.
 Alas ! I faint — Death intercepts the rest :
 The venom'd drug is busy in my breast :
 Each nerve's unstrung : a mist obscures the day :
 My senses, strength, and ev'n my hate decay :
 Tho' rage awhile the ebbing spirits stay'd,
 'Tis past — they sink beneath the transient aid.
 Take then, inhuman wretch ! my last farewell ;
 Pain be thy portion here, hereafter, hell :
 And when our prophet shall my fate decree,
 Be any curse my punishment, but thee.

