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THE

HALL OF JUSTICE.

IN TWO PARTS. (1)

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(1) [See ante, p 22.]

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W. H. G.

Constance
Annesley

H. A.

THE

HALL OF JUSTICE.

PART I.

Confiteor facere hoc annos; sed et altera causa est,
Anxietas animi, continuusque dolor.

OVID.

MAGISTRATE, VAGRANT, CONSTABLE, &c.

VAGRANT.

TAKE, take away thy barbarous hand,
And let me to thy Master speak;
Remit awhile the harsh command,
And hear me, or my heart will break.

MAGISTRATE.

Fond wretch! and what canst thou relate,
But deeds of sorrow, shame, and sin?
Thy crime is proved, thou know'st thy fate;
But come, thy tale! — begin, begin! —

VAGRANT.

My crime! — This sick'ning child to feed,
 I seized the food, your witness saw;
 I knew your laws forbade the deed,
 But yielded to a stronger law. (1)

Know'st thou, to Nature's great command
 All human laws are frail and weak?
 Nay! frown not — stay his eager hand,
 And hear me, or my heart will break.

In this, th' adopted babe I hold
 With anxious fondness to my breast,
 My heart's sole comfort I behold,
 More dear than life, when life was blest;
 I saw her pining, fainting, cold,
 I begg'd — but vain was my request.

I saw the tempting food, and seized —
 My infant-sufferer found relief;
 And, in the pilfer'd treasure pleased,
 Smiled on my guilt, and hush'd my grief

But I have griefs of other kind,
 Troubles and sorrows more severe;
 Give me to ease my tortured mind,
 Lend to my woes a patient ear;
 And let me — if I may not find
 A friend to help — find one to hear.

(1) [Original MS.: — Or, —

What is my crime? a deed of love;
 I fed my child with pilfer'd food:
 Your laws will not the act approve,
 The law of Nature deems it good.]

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Nature deems it good.]

Yet nameless let me plead—my name
Would only wake the cry of scorn;
A child of sin, conceived in shame,
Brought forth in woe, to misery born.

My mother dead, my father lost,
I wander'd with a vagrant crew;
A common care, a common cost,
Their sorrows and their sins I knew;
With them, by want on error forced,
Like them, I base and guilty grew.

Few are my years, not so my crimes;
The age, which these sad looks declare,
Is Sorrow's work, it is not Time's,
And I am old in shame and care. (1)

Taught to believe the world a place
Where every stranger was a foe,
Train'd in the arts that mark our race,
To what new people could I go?
Could I a better life embrace,
Or live as virtue dictates? No!—

So through the land I wandering went,
And little found of grief or joy;
But lost my bosom's sweet content
When first I loved—the Gipsy-Boy.

(1) [MS.:— My years, indeed, are sad and few,
Though weak these limbs, and shrunk this frame :
For Grief has done what Time should do ;
And I am old in care and shame.]

A sturdy youth he was and tall,
His looks would all his soul declare ;
His piercing eyes were deep and small,
And strongly curl'd his raven-hair.

Yes, AARON had each manly charm,
All in the May of youthful pride,
He scarcely fear'd his father's arm,
And every other arm defied.—

Oft, when they grew in anger warm,
(Whom will not love and power divide ?)
I rose, their wrathful souls to calm,
Not yet in sinful combat tried.

His father was our party's chief,
And dark and dreadful was his look ;
His presence fill'd my heart with grief,
Although to me he kindly spoke.

With Aaron I delighted went,
His favour was my bliss and pride ;
In growing hope our days we spent,
Love growing charms in either spied,
It saw them, all which Nature lent,
It lent them, all which she denied

Could I the father's kindness prize,
Or grateful looks on him bestow,
Whom I beheld in wrath arise,
When Aaron sunk beneath his blow ?

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He drove him down with wicked hand,
It was a dreadful sight to see ;
Then vex'd him, till he left the land,
And told his cruel love to me ;—
The clan were all at his command,
Whatever his command might be.

The night was dark, the lanes were deep,
And one by one they took their way ;
He bade me lay me down and sleep,
I only wept and wish'd for day.

Accursed be the love he bore,
Accursed was the force he used,
So let him of his God implore
For mercy, and be so refused !

You frown again,—to show my wrong
Can I in gentle language speak ?
My woes are deep, my words are strong,—
And hear me, or my heart will break.

MAGISTRATE.

I hear thy words, I feel thy pain ;
Forbear awhile to speak thy woes ;
Receive our aid, and then again
The story of thy life disclose.

For, though seduced and led astray,
Thou'st travell'd far and wander'd long ;
Thy God hath seen thee all the way,
And all the turns that led thee wrong.

THE
HALL OF JUSTICE.

PART II.

Quondam ridentes oculi, nunc fonte perenni
Deplorant poenas nocte dieque suas.

Corn. Galli Eleg.

MAGISTRATE.

COME, now again thy woes impart,
Tell all thy sorrows, all thy sin ;
We cannot heal the throbbing heart
Till we discern the wounds within.

Compunction weeps our guilt away,
The sinner's safety is his pain ;
Such pangs for our offences pay,
And these severer griefs are gain.

VAGRANT.

The son came back—he found us wed,
Then dreadful was the oath he swore ;—
His way through Blackburn Forest led,—
His father we beheld no more.

Of all our daring clan not one
Would on the doubtful subject dwell ;
For all esteem'd the injured son,
And fear'd the tale which he could tell.

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But I had mightier cause for fear,
For slow and mournful round my bed
I saw a dreadful form appear,—
It came when I and Aaron wed.

Yes ! we were wed, I know my crime, —
We slept beneath the elmin tree ;
But I was grieving all the time,
And Aaron frown'd my tears to see.

Corn. Galli Eng.

Monte perenni
que suas.

For he not yet had felt the pain
That rankles in a wounded breast ;
He waked to sin, then slept again,
Forsook his God, yet took his rest.—

But I was forced to feign delight,
And joy in mirth and music sought, —
And mem'ry now recalls the night,
With such surprise and horror fraught,
That reason felt a moment's flight,
And left a mind to madness wrought. (1)

When waking, on my heaving breast
I felt a hand as cold as death :
A sudden fear my voice suppress'd,
A chilling terror stopp'd my breath.—

I seem'd—no words can utter how !
For there my father-husband stood, —

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(1) [MS. :— Compell'd to feast in full delight
When I was sad and wanted power,
Can I forget that dismal night ?
Ah ! how did I survive the hour ?]

And thus he said :—“ Will God allow,
 “ The great Avenger just and Good,
 “ A wife to break her marriage vow?
 “ A son to shed his father’s blood ? ” (1)

I trembled at the dismal sounds,
 But vainly strove a word to say ;
 So, pointing to his bleeding wounds,
 The threat’ning spectre stalk’d away. (2)

I brought a lovely daughter forth,
 His father’s child, in Aaron’s bed ;
 He took her from me in his wrath,
 “ Where is my child ? ” —“ Thy child is dead.”

’T was false—we wander’d far and wide,
 Through town and country, field and fen,
 Till Aaron, fighting, fell and died,
 And I became a wife again.

I then was young :—my husband sold
 My fancied charms for wicked price ;
 He gave me oft for sinful gold,
 The slave, but not the friend of vice :—
 Behold me, Heaven ! my pains behold,
 And let them for my sins suffice !

(1) [MS. :—Or —
 • And there my father-husband stood —
 • I felt no words can tell you how —
 • As he was wont in angry mood,
 • And thus he cried, “ Will God allow,” &c.]

(2) The state of mind here described will account for a vision of this nature, without having recourse to any supernatural appearance.

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“ Will God allow a vision of this
will account for a supernatural appearance.

The wretch who lent me thus for gain,
Despised me when my youth was fled ;
Then came disease, and brought me pain : —
Come, Death, and bear me to the dead !
For though I grieve, my grief is vain,
And fruitless all the tears I shed.

True, I was not to virtue train'd,
Yet well I knew my deeds were ill ;
By each offence my heart was pain'd,
I wept, but I offended still ;
My better thoughts my life disdain'd,
But yet the viler led my will.

My husband died, and now no more
My smile was sought, or ask'd my hand,
A widow'd vagrant, vile and poor,
Beneath a vagrant's vile command.

Ceaseless I roved the country round,
To win my bread by fraudulent arts,
And long a poor subsistence found,
By spreading nets for simple hearts.

Though poor, and abject, and despised,
Their fortunes to the crowd I told ;
I gave the young the love they prized,
And promised wealth to bless the old
Schemes for the doubtful I devised,
And charms for the forsaken sold.

At length for arts like these confined
In prison with a lawless crew,
I soon perceived a kindred mind,
And there my long-lost daughter knew;

His father's child, whom Aaron gave
To wander with a distant clan,
The miseries of the world to brave,
And be the slave of vice and man.

She knew my name—we met in pain.
Our parting pangs can I express?
She sail'd a convict o'er the main,
And left an heir to her distress.

This is that heir to shame and pain,
For whom I only could despise
A world of trouble and disdain:
Yet, could I bear to see her die,
Or stretch her feeble hands in vain,
And, weeping, beg of me supply?

No! though the fate thy mother knew
Was shameful! shameful though thy race
Have wander'd all a lawless crew,
Outcasts despised in every place;

Yet as the dark and muddy tide,
When far from its polluted source,
Becomes more pure and purified,
Flows in a clear and happy course;

PART II.
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In thee, dear infant ! so may end
Our shame, in thee our sorrows cease !
And thy pure course will then extend,
In floods of joy, o'er vales of peace.

Oh ! by the God who loves to spare,
Deny me not the boon I crave ;
Let this loved child your mercy share,
And let me find a peaceful grave ;

Make her yet spotless soul your care,
And let my sins their portion have ;
Her for a better fate prepare,
And punish whom 'twere sin to save !

MAGISTRATE.
Recall the word, renounce the thought,
Command thy heart and bend thy knee.
There is to all a pardon brought,
A ransom rich, assured and free ;
'T is full when found, 't is found if sought,
Oh ! seek it, till 'tis seal'd to thee.

VAGRANT.
But how my pardon shall I know ?

MAGISTRATE.
By feeling dread that 't is not sent,
By tears for sin that freely flow,
By grief, that all thy tears are spent,

By thoughts on that great debt we owe,
With all the mercy God has lent,
By suffering what thou canst not show,
Yet showing how thine heart is rent,
Till thou canst feel thy bosom glow,
And say, “**MY SAVIOUR, I REPENT!**”⁽¹⁾

(1) [“The Hall of Justice, or the story of the Gypsy Convict, is very nervous,—very shocking,—and very powerfully represented. It is written with very unusual power of language, and shows Mr. Crabbe to have great mastery over the tragic passions of pity and horror.”—JEFFREY.]

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