

ARGUMENT.

Introduction—Sympathy—Suspicion—Psyche benighted—Credulity represented, according to a Picture by Apelles, as an old Woman the devoted prey of Slander, or the Blatant Beast—Contest between the Knight and Slander—The Knight wounded—Slander flies—Credulity leads Psyche to the Castle of Suspicion—Psyche deluded, laments the desertion of her Knight to the train of Inconstancy—Psyche betrayed by Suspicion into the power of Jealousy—Persuaded by him that her Knight, by whom she was then abandoned, was indeed Love—Psyche delivered by her Knight—Reconciliation.

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CANTO IV.

FULL gladsome was my heart ere while to tell
How proud Ambition owned superior Love ;
For ah ! too oft his sterner power could quell
The mild affections which more gently move,
And rather silent fled than with him strove :
For Love content and tranquil saw with dread
The busy scenes Ambition's schemes approve,
And, by the hand of Peace obscurely led,
From pride of public life disgusted ever fled.

There are who know not the delicious charm
Of sympathising hearts ; let such employ
Their active minds ; the trumpet's loud alarm
Shall yield them hope of honourable joy,
And courts may lure them with each splendid toy :
But ne'er may vanity or thirst of fame
The dearer bliss of loving life destroy !
Oh ! blind to man's chief good who Love disclaim,
And barter pure delight for glory's empty name !

Blest Psyche ! thou hast 'scaped the tyrants power !
Thy gentle heart shall never know the pain
Which tortures pride in his most prosperous hour :
Yet dangers still unsung for thee remain ;
Nor must thou unmolested hope to gain
Immortal beauty's never failing spring ;
Oh ! no—nor yet tranquillity attain :
But though thy heart the pangs of doubt may sting,
Thy faithful knight shall yet thy steps in safety bring.

Warned by late peril now she scarcely dares
 Quit for one moment his protecting eye:
 Sure in his sight, her soul of nought despairs,
 And nought looks dreadful when that arm is nigh
 On which her hopes with confidence rely;
 By his advice their constant course they bend,
 He points where hidden danger they should fly,
 On him securely, as her heaven-sent friend,
 She bids her grateful heart contentedly depend,

Oh! who the exquisite delight can tell,
 The joy which mutual confidence imparts!
 Or who can paint the charm unspeakable
 Which links in tender bands two faithful hearts?
 In vain assailed by fortune's envious darts,
 Their mitigated woes are sweetly shared,
 And doubled joy reluctantly departs:
 Let but the sympathising heart be spared,
 What sorrow seems not light, what peril is not dared?

Oh! never may suspicion's gloomy sky
 Chill the sweet glow of fondly trusting love!
 Nor ever may he feel the scowling eye
 Of dark distrust his confidence reprove!
 In pleasing error may I rather rove,
 With blind reliance on the hand so dear,
 Than let cold prudence from my eyes remove
 Those sweet delusions, where nor doubt nor fear
 Nor foul disloyalty nor cruel change appear.

The noble mind is ever prone to trust;
 Yet love with fond anxiety is joined;
 And timid tenderness is oft unjust;
 The coldness which it dreads too prompt to find,
 And torture the too susceptible mind.
 Hence rose the gloom which oft o'er Psyche stole
 Lest he she loved, unmindful or unkind,
 Should careless slight affection's soft control,
 Or she long absent lose her influence o'er his soul.

'Twas evening, and the shades which sudden fell
 Seemed to forebode a dark unlovely night;
 The sighing wood-nymphs from their caves foretel
 The storm which soon their quiet shall affright:
 Nor cheering star nor moon appears in sight,
 Nor taper twinkles through the rustling leaves
 And sheds afar its hospitable light:
 But hark! a dismal sound the ear receives,
 And through the obscuring gloom the eye strange forms
 perceives.

It was a helpless female who exclaimed,
 Whose blind and aged form an ass sustained:
 Misshaped and timorous, of light ashamed,
 In darksome woods her hard-earned food she gained,
 And her voracious appetite maintained,
 Though all devouring, yet unsatisfied;
 Nor aught of hard digestion she disdained,
 Whate'er was offered greedily she tried,
 And meanly served, as slave, whoever food supplied.

A cruel monster now her steps pursued,
Well known of yore and named the Blatant Beast;
And soon he seized his prey with grasp so rude,
So fiercely on her feeble body prest,
That had the courteous knight not soon released
Her unresisting limbs from violence,
She must have sunk by his rough jaws opprest:
The spiteful beast, enraged at the defence,
Now turned upon the knight with foaming vehemence.

But, when his fury felt the couched spear,
On Psyche's unarmed form he bellowing flew;
'Twas there alone the knight his rage could fear;
Swifter than thought his flaming sword he drew,
And from his hand the doubtful javelin threw
Lest erring it might wound the trembling fair:
Eager the cruel monster to subdue
He scorned to use his shield's protecting care,
And rashly left his side in part exposed and bare.

Sharp were the wounds of his avenging steel,
 Which forced the roaring beast to quit the field :
 Yet ere he fled, the knight unused to feel
 The power of any foe, or e'er to yield
 To any arm which sword or spear could wield,
 Perceived the venom of his tooth impure ;
 But, with indignant silence, unrevealed
 The pain he bore, while through the gloom obscure
 The beast, in vain pursued, urged on his flight secure.

And now the hag, delivered from her fear,
 Her grateful thanks upon the knight bestowed,
 And, as they onward went, in Psyche's ear
 Her tongue with many a horrid tale o'erflowed,
 Which warned her to forsake that venturous road,
 And seek protection in the neighbouring grove ;
 Where dwelt a prudent dame, who oft bestowed
 Her sage advice, when pilgrims doomed to rove,
 Benighted there, had else with lurking dangers strove.

The knight now softly bade his charge beware,
 Nor trust Credulity whom well he knew :
 Yet he himself, harassed with pain and care,
 And heedful of the storm which fiercer grew,
 Yielded, a path more sheltered to pursue :
 Now soon entangled in a gloomy maze
 Psyche no longer has her knight in view,
 Nor sees his page's star-crowned helmet blaze ;
 Close at her side alone the hag loquacious stays.

Fearful she stops, and calls aloud in vain,
 The storm-roused woods roar only in reply ;
 Anxious her loved protector to regain
 She trembling listens to Credulity,
 Who points where they a glimmering light may spy ;
 Which, through the shade of intervening trees
 And all the misty blackness of the sky,
 Casting a weak and dubious ray she sees,
 And fain by this would seek her terrors to appease.

Yet hoping that, allured by that same light
Which singly seemed through all the gloom to shine,
She there at last might meet her wandering knight,
Thither her footsteps doubtingly incline
As best the uncertain path they could divine,
All tangled as it wound through brake and briar :
While to affright her soul at once combine
A thousand shapeless forms of terror dire,
Here shrieks the ill-omened bird, there glares the me-
teor's fire.

In the deep centre of the mazy wood,
With matted ivy and wild vine o'ergrown,
A Gothic castle solitary stood,
With massive walls built firm of murky stone ;
Long had Credulity its mistress known,
Meagre her form and tawny was her hue,
Unsociably she lived, unloved, alone,
No cheerful prospects gladdened e'er her view,
And her pale hollow eyes oblique their glances threw.

Now had they reached the sad and dreary bower
Where dark Disfida held her gloomy state:
The grated casements strong with iron power,
The huge port-cullis creaking o'er the gate,
The surly guards that round the draw-bridge wait,
Chill Psyche's heart with sad foreboding fears;
Nor ever had she felt so desolate
As when at length her guide the porter hears,
And at the well known call reluctantly appears.

In hall half lighted with uncertain rays,
Such as expiring tapers transient shed,
The gloomy princess sat, no social blaze
The unkindled hearth supplied, no table spread
Cheered the lone guest who weetless wandered,
But melancholy silence reigned around,
While on her arm she leaned her pensive head,
And anxious watched, as sullenly she frowned,
Of distant whispers low to catch the doubtful sound.

Startled to hear an unaccustomed noise
 Sudden she rose, and on the intruders bent
 Her prying eye askance; but soon the voice
 Of her old slave appeased her discontent,
 And a half welcome to her guests she lent:
 Her frequent questions satisfied at last,
 Through all the neighbouring woods her scouts she sent
 To seek the knight, while Psyche's tears flowed fast,
 And all the live-long night in anxious woe she past.

The sullen bell had told the midnight hour,
 And sleep had laid the busy world to rest,
 All but the watchful lady of that bower
 And wretched Psyche: her distracted breast
 The agony of sad suspense opprest,
 Now to the casement eagerly she flies,
 And now the wished-for voice her fancy blest:
 Alas! the screaming night-bird only cries;
 Only the drear obscure there meets her straining eyes.

Has thy heart sickened with deferred hope?
 Or felt the impatient anguish of suspense?
 Or hast thou tasted of the bitter cup
 Which disappointment's withered hands dispense?
 Thou knowest the poison which o'erflowed from hence
 O'er Psyche's tedious, miserable hours.
 The unheeded notes of plaintive Innocence
 No longer sooth her soul with wonted powers,
 While false Disfida's tales her listening ear devours.

Of rapid torrents and deep marshy fens,
 Of ambushed foes and unseen pits they tell,
 Of ruffians rushing from their secret dens,
 Of foul magicians and of wizard spell,
 The poisoned lance and net invisible;
 While Psyche shuddering sees her knight betrayed
 Into the snares of some enchanter fell,
 Beholds him bleeding in the treacherous shade,
 Or hears his dying voice implore in vain for aid.

At length the cruel messengers return,
 Their trampling steeds sound welcome in her ear ;
 Her rapid feet the ground impatient spurn,
 As eagerly she flies their news to hear.
 Alas! they bring no tidings which may cheer
 Her sorrowing soul opprest, disconsolate!
 "Dismiss," they cry, "each idly timid fear!
 "No dangers now thy faithless knight await,
 "Lured by a wanton fair to bowers of peaceful state.

"We saw him blithely follow where she led,
 "And urged him to return to thee in vain :
 "Some other knight, insultingly he said,
 "Thy charms might soon for thy protection gain,
 "If still resolved to tread with weary pain
 "The tedious road to that uncertain land ;
 "But he should there contentedly remain ;
 "No other bliss could now his heart demand
 "Than that new lady's love and kindly proffered hand."

A while she stood in silent wonder lost,
 And scarce believes the strange abandonment;
 No fears like this her heart had ever crost,
 Nor could she think his mind so lightly bent
 Could swerve so quickly from its first intent;
 Till sudden bursting forth in angry mood
 Disfida gave her indignation vent,
 " Ah, well I know," she cried, " that wicked brood
 " Whose cursed ensnaring arts in vain my cares with-
 stood,

" Vile Varia's fickle and inconstant train,
 " Perpetual torments of my harassed days :
 " Their nightly thefts my fruits, my flowers sustain,
 " Their wanton goats o'er all my vineyards graze,
 " My corn lies scattered, and my fences blaze,
 " My friends, my followers they basely lure ;
 " I know their mischievous detested ways !
 " My castle vainly have I built so sure
 " While from their treacherous wiles my life is insecure.

“ But I will lead thee to the glittering sands,
 “ Where shines their hollow many-coloured fane :
 “ There, as the circling group fantastic stands,
 “ Thy truant knight perhaps thou mayst regain
 “ From the light arts of that seductive train.”

She paused—but Psyche spoke not in reply ;
 Her noble heart, which swelled with deep disdain,
 Forbad the utterance of a single sigh,
 And shamed the indignant tear which started to her eye.

At length with firm, but gentle dignity
 And cold averted eye she thus replies :
 “ No ! let him go : nor power nor wish have I
 “ His conduct to control. Let this suffice ;
 “ Before my path a surer guardian flies,
 “ By whose direction onward I proceed
 “ Soon as the morn’s first light shall clear the skies.”
 She ceased, then languishing her griefs to feed,
 Her cold dark chamber sought from observation freed.

'Twas there regret indulged the bitter tear ;
 She feels herself forsaken and alone :
 " Behold," she cries, " fulfilled is every fear,
 " Oh ! wretched Psyche, now indeed undone !
 " Thy love's protecting care no more is shown,
 " He bids his servant leave thee to thy fate,
 " Nor longer will the hopeless wanderer own :
 " Some fairer, nobler spouse, some worthier mate,
 " At length by Venus given shall share his heavenly
 state.

" Oh ! most adored ! Oh ! most regretted love !
 " Oh ! joys that never must again be mine,
 " And thou lost hope, farewell!—vainly I rove,
 " For never shall I reach that land divine,
 " Nor ever shall thy beams celestial shine
 " Again upon my sad unheeded way !
 " Oh ! let me here with life my woes resign,
 " Or in this gloomy den for ever stay,
 " And shun the scornful world, nor see detested day."

“ But no ! those scenes are hateful to mine eyes,
 “ And all who spoke or witnessed my disgrace ;
 “ My soul with horror from this dwelling flies
 “ And seeks some tranquil, solitary place
 “ Where grief may finish life’s unhappy race !”
 So past she the long night, and soon as morn
 Had first begun to show his cheerful face,
 Her couch, which care had strewn with every thorn,
 With heavy heart she left, disquieted, forlorn.

Not thus Disfida suffered her to part,
 But urged her there in safety to remain,
 Repeating oft to her foreboding heart
 That fairy land she never could attain :
 But when she saw dissuasion was in vain,
 And Psyche bent her journey to pursue,
 With angry brow she called a trusty train
 And bade them keep the imprudent fair in view,
 And guard her dangerous path with strict observance true.

In vain their proffered service she declines,
And dreads the convoy of the scowling band;
Their hateful presence with her loss combines,
She feels betrayed to the destroyer's hand,
And trembling wanders o'er the dreary land;
While as she seeks to escape Disfida's power,
Her efforts still the officious guards withstand,
Led in vain circles many a tedious hour,
Undistanced still she sees the gloomy turrets lower.

Till wearied with her fruitless way, at length
Upon the ground her fainting limbs she threw;
No wish remained to aid exhausted strength,
The mazy path she cared not to pursue,
Since unavailing was the task she knew:
Her murmuring guards to seek for food prepare,
Yet mindful of their charge, still keep in view
The drooping victim of their cruel care,
Who sees the day decline in terror and despair.

Hark ! a low hollow groan she seems to hear
 Repeated oft ; wondering she looks around :
 It seemed to issue from some cavern near,
 Or low hut hidden by the rising ground ;
 For, though it seemed the melancholy sound
 Of human voice, no human form was nigh ;
 Her eye no human habitation found,
 But as she listening gazed attentively,
 Her shuddering ears received the deep and long drawn
 sigh.

The guard who nearest stood now whispering said,
 “ If aught of doubt remain within thy mind,
 “ Or wish to know why thus thou wert betrayed,
 “ Or what strange cause thy faithless knight inclined
 “ To leave the charge he with such scorn resigned,
 “ Each curious thought thou now mayst satisfy,
 “ Since here the entrance of a cave we find,
 “ Where dwells, deep hid from day’s too garish eye,
 “ A sage whose magic skill can solve each mystery.”

He staid not her reply, but urged her on
 Reluctant to the dark and dreary cave;
 No beam of cheerful Heaven had ever shone
 In the recesses of that gloomy grave,
 Where screaming owls their daily dwelling crave.
 One sickly lamp the wretched master shewed;
 Devouring fiend! Who now the prey shall save
 From his fell gripe, whose hands in blood imbrued,
 In his own bosom seek his lacerated food?

On the damp ground he sits in sullen woe,
 But wildly rolls around his frenzied eye,
 And gnaws his withered lips, which still o'erflow
 With bitter gall; in foul disorder lie
 His black and matted locks; anxiety
 Sits on his wrinkled brow and sallow cheek;
 The wasted form, the deep-drawn, frequent sigh,
 Some slow consuming malady bespeak,
 But medicinal skill the cause in vain shall seek.

“Behold,” the treacherous guard exclaimed, “behold,
 “At length Disfida sends thy promised bride!
 “Let her, deserted by her knight, be told
 “What peerless lady lured him from her side;
 “Thy cares her future safety must provide.”
 Smiling maliciously as thus he spoke,
 He seemed her helpless anguish to deride;
 Then swiftly rushing from the den he broke,
 Ere from the sudden shock astonished she awoke.

She too had fled; but when the wretch escaped
 He closed the cavern's mouth with cruel care;
 And now the monster placed his form mis-shaped
 To bar the passage of the affrighted fair:
 Her spirits die, she breathes polluted air,
 And vaporous visions swim before her sight:
 His magic skill the sorcerer bids her share,
 And lo! as in a glass, she sees her knight
 In bower remembered well, the bower of loose Delight.

But oh! what words her feelings can impart!
 Feelings to hateful envy near allied!
 While on her knight her anxious glances dart:
 His plumed helmet, lo! he lays aside;
 His face with torturing agony she spied,
 Yet cannot from the sight her eyes remove;
 No mortal knight she sees had aid supplied,
 No mortal knight in her defence had strove;
 'Twas Love! 'twas Love himself, her own adored Love.

Poured in soft dalliance at a lady's feet,
 In fondest rapture he appeared to lie,
 While her fair neck with inclination sweet
 Bent o'er his graceful form her melting eye,
 Which his looked up to meet in ecstasy.
 Their words she heard not; words had ne'er exprest,
 What well her sickening fancy could supply,
 All that their silent eloquence confest,
 As breathed the sigh of fire from each impassioned breast.

While thus she gazed, her quivering lips turn pale;
 Contending passions rage within her breast,
 Nor ever had she known such bitter bale,
 Or felt by such fierce agony opprest.
 Oft had her gentle heart been sore distress,
 But meekness ever has a lenient power
 From anguish half his keenest darts to wrest;
 Meekness for her had softened sorrow's hour,
 Those furious fiends subdued which boisterous souls
 devour.

For there are hearts that, like some sheltered lake,
 Ne'er swell with rage, nor foam with violence;
 Though its sweet placid calm the tempests shake,
 Yet will it ne'er with furious impotence
 Dash its rude waves against the rocky fence,
 Which nature placed the limits of its reign:
 Thrice blest! who feel the peace which flows from
 hence,
 Whom meek-eyed gentleness can thus restrain;
 Whate'er the storms of fate, with her let none complain!

That mild associate Psyche now deserts,
 Unlovely passions agitate her soul,
 The vile magician all his art exerts,
 And triumphs to behold his proud control:
 Changed to a serpent's hideous form, he stole
 O'er her fair breast to suck her vital blood;
 His poisonous involutions round her roll:
 Already is his forked tongue imbrued
 Warm in the stream of life, her heart's pure purple flood.

Thus wretchedly she falls Geloso's prey!
 But her, once more, unhop'd for aid shall save!
 Admitted shines the clear blue light of day
 Upon the horrors of that gloomy grave;
 Her knight's soft voice resounds through all the cave,
 The affrighted serpent quits his deadly hold,
 Nor dares the vengeance of his arm to brave,
 Shrunken to a spider's form, while many a fold
 Of self-spun web obscene the sorcerer vile enrolled.

Scarce had the star of his attendant youth
Blazed through the cavern and proclaimed the knight,
When all those spells and visions of untruth,
Bred in dark Erebus and nursed in night,
Dissolving vanished into vapour light;
While Psyche, quite exhausted by her pains,
And hardly trusting her astonished sight,
Now faint and speechless in his arms remains,
Nor memory of the past, nor present sense retains,

Borne from the cavern, and to life restored,
Her opening eyes behold her knight once more,
She sees whom lost with anguish she deplored;
Yet a half-feigned resentment still she bore,
Nor sign of joy her face averted wore,
Though joy unuttered panted at her heart;
In sullen silence much she pondered o'er
What from her side induced him to depart,
And all she since had seen by aid of magic art.

Was it then all a false deluding dream
 That wore the semblance of celestial Love?
 On this her wavering thoughts bewildered seem
 At length to rest; yet onward as they move,
 Though much his tender cares her doubts reprove,
 And though she longs to hear, and pardon all,
 Silence she still preserves: awhile he strove
 Her free and cheerful spirits to recall,
 But found the task was vain; his words unnoticed fall.

Now in his turn offended and surprised,
 The knight in silence from her side withdrew;
 With pain she marked it, but her pain disguised,
 And heedless seemed her journey to pursue,
 Nor backward deigned to turn one anxious view
 As oft she wished; till mindful of his lord,
 Constance alarmed affectionately flew,
 Eager to see their mutual peace restored,
 And blamed her cold reserve in many a soft breathed
 word.

“ O Psyche ! woud not thus thy faithful knight,
 “ Who fondly sought thee many an anxious hour,
 “ Though bleeding yet from that inglorious fight,
 “ Where thou wert rescued from the savage power
 “ Of that fell beast who would thy charms devour :
 “ Still faint with wounds, he ceased not to pursue
 “ Thy heedless course : let not displeasure lower
 “ Thus on thy brow : think not his heart untrue !
 “ Think not that e'er from thee he willingly withdrew !”

With self-reproach and sweet returning trust,
 While yet he spoke, her generous heart replies,
 Soft melting pity bids her now be just
 And own the error which deceived her eyes ;
 Her little pride she longs to sacrifice,
 And ask forgiveness of her suffering knight ;
 Her suffering knight, alas ! no more she spies,
 He has withdrawn offended from her sight,
 Nor can that gentle voice now hope to stay his flight.

Struggling no more her sorrows to restrain,
 Her streaming eyes look round with anxious fear;
 Nor are those tender showers now shed in vain,
 Her soft lamenting voice has reached his ear,
 Where latent he had marked each precious tear;
 Sudden as thought behold him at her feet!
 Oh! reconciling moment! charm most dear!
 What feeling heart thy pleasures would repeat,
 Or wish thy dearly purchased bliss, however sweet?

The smiles of joy which swell her glowing cheek,
 And o'er her parting lips divinely play,
 Returning pleasure eloquently speak,
 Forgetful of the tears which lingering stay,
 (Like sparkling dew drops in a sunny day)
 Unheeded tenants of rejoicing eyes;
 His wounds her tender care can well repay:
 There grateful kindness breathes her balmy sighs,
 Beneath her lenient hand how swiftly suffering flies!

Freed from the mazes of Disfida's groves,
 The opening landscape brightens to their view;
 Psyche, with strength revived, now onward moves
 In cheerful hope, with courage to renew
 Repeated toils, and perils to pursue:
 Thus when some tender plant neglected pines,
 Shed o'er its pendent head the kindly dew,
 How soon refreshed its vivid lustre shines!
 Once more the leaf expands, the drooping tendril twines.

Thus cheered, the knight intreats her to impart
 The dangers which her way had since befel,
 Her timid lips refuse to speak the art
 Which clothed him in a form she loved so well:
 That she had thought him Love, she blushed to tell!
 Confused she stopt; a gentle pause ensued;
 What chance had brought him to the demon's cell
 She then enquires; what course he had pursued,
 And who his steps had led throughout the mazy wood.

Sooth he had much to say, though modest shame
His gallant deeds forbade him to declare ;
For while through those bewildering woods he came,
Assisted by his page's active care,
He had detected *Varia's* wily snare,
And forced her wanton retinue to flee.
With like disgrace, malignant in despair,
Disfida's slaves their plots defeated see,
Their feeble malice scorned, their destined victims free.

But he had marked the traces of their feet,
And found the path which to the cavern led :
Whence now, rejoicing in reunion sweet,
Their way together cheerfully they tread,
Exempt awhile from danger and from dread ;
While *Psyche's* heart, with confidence more bold,
Full oft the hour of rapture pictured,
When those celestial charms she should behold,
And feel the arms of Love once more his bride enfold.