

THE  
IDLER IN ITALY.

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*May 8th, 1828, half-past eleven at night.*—The only melancholy hours that I ever passed at the beautiful Villa Palatina, were those which I spent there last evening. Our kind and amiable friend its owner, Mr. Mills, insisted that our last dinner at Rome should be partaken of beneath his roof, and collected some of the persons we most value to meet us. Will the same party ever again meet together? The thought occurred to me more than once during the evening, and added to my *tristesse*. Alas! who can hope, much less count, on what a short time may bring forth. Death is ever hovering within reach of his prey, and if the grim tyrant spares some, during a few brief years, he may snatch

away those whose loss destroys all the happiness of the survivors.

Never did guests do so little honour to the *recherché* dinner given to them, as did those of Mr. Mills, yesterday. Schemes of future meeting, too faintly spoken to cheat into hope of their speedy fulfilment, furnished the general topic; and some were there, already stricken with maladies, the harbingers of death—and they, too, spoke of again meeting! Yet who can say whether the young and the healthy may not be summoned from life before those whose infirmities alarm us for their long continuance in it?

As my eyes glanced over the extensive view beheld from the windows of the Villa Palatina, embracing some of the finest ruins of Rome, I was so forcibly reminded of the instability of all earthly things, that I became almost ashamed of indulging in selfish melancholy for my own private regrets, in face of the desolation of the once proud scene before me. And there were with me two persons to whom every ruin, and every spot in view, were “familiar as household words;” men who had explored them all, with the feelings of the historian, the research of the antiquarian, and the reflections of the philosopher—Sir William Gell and Mr. Dodwell; both

advanced towards the downward path of life, every step of which rapidly abridges the journey, and consequently reminds parting friends of the probability that each farewell may be the last. There was our host, seated in a paradise of his own creation, based on the ruins of the palace of the Cæsars, yet, forgetful for the moment of the mutability of fortune of which such striking memorials were before his eyes, thinking only that we were on the eve of parting. Mrs. Dodwell was there, her lustrous eyes often dimmed by a tear of regret at our separation, but her rare beauty in no way diminished by the sadness that clouded a face always lovely.

Baron Mortier, besides the persons already named, and our own large family, formed the party at the Villa Palatina. Baron Mortier is a very superior man; well educated, highly informed, frank and manly; he has the bearing of a *preux* chevalier, with the urbanity of a finished gentleman. Here were the natives of so many different countries—English, Irish, French, and Italian,\* united by the bonds of friendship, and animated by one sentiment—regret at separation.

Some one remarked on the pain of parting being

\* Mrs. Dodwell is an Italian, and universally considered to be one of the most beautiful women of our time.

always enhanced by the dread of never again meeting, when Mr. Dodwell, willing to give a more lively turn to the conversation, observed that the meeting of friends long separated, was, perhaps, as much to be feared.

“ They will be all so changed in looks,” said he, “ as to render a recognition painful, if not difficult. The old will have fallen into dotage, the mature into senility, and the young will have lost the charms of youth, their dimples having undergone the fearful metamorphosis of being converted into wrinkles. But grant that the meeting should occur before the persons of the parties should have undergone any injurious alteration, who can answer for the changes that may take place in their minds ?” continued he. “ Different scenes, pursuits, and trains of thought, new associations supplying the place of old attachments, the impossibility of recalling the feelings to the precise state in which they were, when daily habits of intimacy rendered the persons not only so agreeable, but almost necessary to each other. Ah ! here’s the rub ; and this certainty of change produced by time, occasions a meeting after long absence to be rather more painful than pleasant. You ladies would exclaim—‘ Poor dear Lady So-and-so, or Mrs. Such-a-one, how dreadfully changed

she is!’—the lady making the remark being quite unconscious that *she* is as much changed as the friend on whose altered looks she comments. We men, too, would say—‘ I used to think B. C. or D. a good-looking fellow, and very agreeable ; but he is grown stout, and rather red-faced, and bores one to death about his health, and his schemes for amending it. Hang the fellow ! he treats every man he ever chanced to know before, as if they were contemporaries.’ ”

We all laughed at Mr. Dodwell’s picture of the pains of meeting, but it did not diminish those of parting.

TERNI, *May 9th.*—A melancholy presentiment that I shall see no more some of the dear friends left at Rome yesterday, haunted me as I drove from the Eternal City. That I shall see Rome itself no more, I cannot allow myself to think, and yet, with the uncertainty of life, who can count on any remote event ? How prone are we to fear for the stability of the existence of those, either older, or more infirm in health than ourselves, notwithstanding that we every day see the young and healthy snatched away from life, and the aged and delicate spared ! We fear more for others than for self ;

as if *we* were more exempt from danger and death than they. Strange delusion! that while we tremble for those dear to us, the conviction of the irrevocable certainty of our own dissolution is less vividly felt! we picture our own death as remote, and consequently less to be dreaded; and even when most impressed with the awful conviction that we, like all other mortals, must pass away, though our reason acknowledges the truth, our hearts refuse to believe that the event may be near.

I visited the grave of Sir W. Drummond very early yesterday morning. A blue and cloudless sky canopied the spot, and the air was as fresh and balmy, and the scene as bright, as if no graves were there to remind one of the brief space allotted to us on earth. There stood the pyramid of Caius Sextus, the sunbeams gleaming on its massive walls, whose funereal character seems to consecrate this place of graves, where so many of our countrymen have found a last resting place. There, too, I cast my eyes on the narrow homes of Shelley and Keats; Drummond, himself a poet, would not have disliked the neighbourhood, for he loved and revered genius, whether crowned by praise, or persecuted by intolerance.

I wish the mortal remains of my poor departed

friend Drummond might be left to repose here ; but they are to be removed to Scotland in the course of a few months. I should like to remember his grave as it now is, with a blue sky above, and gentle breezes fanning it ; and not as it will be, overhung by murky clouds, and swept by the hoarse and rude winds of bleak Scotia. I thought of the happy hours passed in his society, as I stood beside his grave—the brilliant conversation, the deep reflections, I have heard from those lips, now silent for ever—I remembered how often the hands, now mouldering in the dust, had been held out in amity to meet mine, and I dropped a tear on the stone inscribed with his name.

The monument erected to the memory of the fair and youthful Miss Bathurst, whose melancholy death excited so much interest at Rome, was glittering in the sun when I passed before it. The poetical and graceful conception, the snowy whiteness of the marble, the excellence of the execution, and the bright verdure that surrounds it, render it a peculiar ornament to the burial-ground ; while the contrast between it and the massive pyramid in its vicinity, remind one of a delicate snowdrop, germinating beneath a colossal oak. This monument, so applicable to the youth and beauty of her whose fate it

commemorates, is the work of Mr. Richard Westmacott, to whose taste and skill it is highly creditable.

Sir William Gell and Count Paul Esterhazy came to see us depart ; and never did the Palazza Negroni present such sad faces, as those assembled there when the heavily laden carriages drove round to the door. Poor Gell ! I still seem to feel the pressure of his hand, and the tears that bedewed mine as he pressed it to his lips, and murmured his fears that we should meet no more.

“ You have been visiting our friend Drummond’s grave to-day,” said he, “ and if you ever come to Italy again, you will find me in mine.”

I was tempted to be angry with our courier when I saw his smiling face, and heard the gay cracking of his whip, as we drove away. He, in the excitement of resuming his wonted occupation, after a winter’s repose, had little sympathy with our regrets, and probably anticipated with pleasurable emotions the *buona mano* he may count on receiving at every inn where we stop, for many days to come.

We noticed the whiteness of the cows feeding along the banks of the ancient Clitumnus, a peculiarity ascribed to the effect of its waters. The animals looked very picturesque, and reminded one of those offered for sacrifice in days of yore.

Saw the celebrated waterfall to-day. I have heard the majority of those who have spoken of it, declare that it disappointed them; but it has not had this effect on me, perhaps because I expected less. One of the advantages of time and travel, is to lower expectations within bounds more likely to be satisfied in reality. I thought of Byron as I gazed on this fine cataract, for he has painted it in never fading colours.

The roar of waters!—from the headlong height  
 Velino cleaves the wave-worn precipice;  
 The fall of waters! rapid as the light  
 The flashing mass foams shaking the abyss;  
 The hell of waters! where they howl and hiss,  
 And boil in endless torture; while the sweat  
 Of their great agony, wrung out from this  
 Their Phlegethon, curls round the rocks of jet  
 That gird the gulf around, in pitiless horror set,

And mounts in spray the skies, and thence again  
 Returns in an unceasing shower, which round,  
 With its unemptied cloud of gentle rain,  
 Is an eternal April to the ground,  
 Making it all one emerald:—how profound  
 The gulf! and how the giant element  
 From rock to rock leaps with delirious bound,  
 Crushing the cliffs, which, downward worn and rent  
 With his fierce footsteps, yield in chasms a fearful vent.

To the broad column which rolls on, and shows  
 More like the fountain of an infant sea  
 Torn from the womb of mountains by the throes  
 Of a new world, than only thus to be  
 Parent of rivers, which flow gushingly,  
 With many windings, through the vale :—look back !  
 Lo ! where it comes, like an eternity,  
 As if to sweep down all things in its track,  
 Charming the eye with dread,—a matchless cataract,

Horribly beautiful ! but on the verge,  
 From side to side, beneath the glittering morn,  
 An Iris sits, amidst the infernal surge,  
 Like Hope upon a death-bed, and, unworn  
 Its steady dyes, while all around is torn  
 By the distracted waters, bears serene  
 Its brilliant hues with all their beams unshorn :  
 Resembling, 'mid the torture of the scene,  
 Love watching Madness with unaltered mien.

The verdure occasioned by the eternal showers of spray, which fall to a considerable distance around, I have nowhere seen equalled, except in Ireland. I noticed this aloud, and an Irish servant in our suite remarked, *sotto voce*, to one of his companions, —“ Yes, our poor Ireland is as green as the wounds inflicted on it, and to which no healing balsam has yet been applied.”

The vivid hue of the verdure greatly adds to the