

LITERATURE.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

BY THOMAS HOOD.

The "Haunted House" is not the work of Imagination, but almost purely of Fancy. The conception is a kind of conceit—though a fine one—and the execution is but a string of exquisite conceits, the "gentil children of Fantasie," from the first to the last. The poem is, indeed, remarkable for this, yet for being, at the same time, highly artistic—since each fancy is sprung upon us naturally, and heightens the effect. We cannot resist quoting a few verses from one of the most curious and original pieces in the language. The idea sought to be set forth is that of a strange spirit of utter desolation, which has spread itself through and around a noble old mansion, because of a horrible murder committed there, the memory of which lingered in every nook and chamber, and over the deserted garden.

"O'er all there hung a shadow and a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is haunted!

No dog was at the threshold, great or small—
No pigeon on the roof—no household creature—
No cat demurely dozing on the wall—
Not one domestic feature.

No human figure stirred, to go or come—
No face looked forth from shut or open casement—
No chimney smoked—there was no sign of home
From parapet to basement.

The wren had built within the porch, she found
Its quiet loneliness so sure and thorough;
And on the lawn, within its turfy mound,
The rabbit made his burrow.

The rabbit wild and gray, that flitted thro'
The shrubby clumps, and frisked, and sat and vanished,
But leisurely and bold, as if he knew
His enemy was banished.

The coot was swimming in the reedy pond,
Beside the water hen, so soon affrighted;
And in the weedy moat the heron, fond
Of solitude, alighted.

The moping heron, motionless and stiff,
That on a stone, as silently and stilly,
Stood, an apparent sentinel, as if
To guard the water-lily.

The vine unpruned, and the neglected peach,
Dropped from the wall with which they used to grapple;
And on the cankered tree, in easy reach,
Rotted the golden apple.

But awfully the truant shunned the ground,
The vagrant kept aloof, and daring poacher;
In spite of gaps that thro' the fences round
Invited the encroacher.

The marigold amidst the nettles blew,
The gourd embraced the rosebush in its ramble,
The thistle and the stock together grew,
The holly-hock and bramble.

The statue, fallen from its marble base,
Amidst the refuse leaves, and herbage rotten,
Lay like the idol of some by-gone race,
Its names and rites forgotten.

The centipede along the threshold crept,
The cobweb hung across in mazy tangle,
And in its winding sheet the maggot slept,
At every nook and angle.

Howbeit, the door I pushed—or so I dreamed—
Which slowly, slowly gaped—the hinges creaking
With such a rusty eloquence, it seemed
That Time himself was speaking.

But Time was dumb within that mansion old,
Or left his tale to the heraldic banners
That hung from the corroded walls, and told
Of former men and manners.

Those tattered flags, that with the opened door,
Seemed the old wave of battle to remember,
While fallen fragments danced upon the floor
Like dead leaves in December.

The startled bats flew out—bird after bird—
The screech-owl over head began to flutter,
And seemed to mock the cry that she had heard
Some dying victim utter.

A shriek that echoed from the joisted roof,
And up the stairs, and further still and further,
Till in some ringing chamber far aloof,
It ceased its tale of murder.

Meanwhile the rusty armour rattled round,
The banner shuddered, and the rugged streamer;
All things the horrid tenor of the sound
Acknowledged with a tremor.

The subtle spider, that from overhead
Hung like a spy on human guilt and error,
Suddenly turned, and up its slender thread
Ran with a nimble terror.

The very stains and fractures on the wall,
Assuming features solemn and terrific,
Hinted some tragedy of that old hall,
Locked up in hieroglyphic.

Some tale that might, perchance, have solved the doubt,
Wherefore amongst those flags so dull and livid,
The banner of the BLOODY HAND shone out
So ominously vivid.

If but a rat had lingered in the house,
To lure the thought into a social channel!
But not a rat remained, or tiny mouse,
To speak behind the panel.

The floor was redolent of mould and must,
The fungus in the rotten seams had quickened;
While on the oaken table coats of dust
Perennially had thickened.

There was so foul a rumour in the air,
The shadow of a presence so atrocious;
No human creature could have feasted there,
Even the most atrocious!

'Tis hard for human actions to account,
Whether from reason or from impulse only;
But some internal prompting bade me mount
The gloomy stairs and lonely.

Those dreary stairs, where with the sounding stress
Of every step so many echoes blended,
The mind, with dark misgivings feared to guess
How many feet ascended.

The air was thick—and in the upper gloom
The bat—or something in its shape—was winging;
And on the wall, as chilly as a tomb,
The Death's-head moth was clinging.

The mystic moth, which, with a sense profound
Of all unholy presence, augurs truly;
And with a dim magnificence flits round
The taper burning bluely.

Yet no portentous shape the sight amazed;
Each object plain, and tangible, and valid;
But from their tarnished frames dark figures gazed,
And faces spectre-pallid.

Such earnest woe their features overcast,
They might have stirred, or sighed, or wept, or spoken;
But, save the hollow moaning of the blast,
The stillness was unbroken.

No other sound or stir of life was there,
Except my steps in solitary chamber,
From flight to flight, from humid stair to stair,
From chamber into chamber.

Deserted rooms of luxury and state,
That old magnificence had richly furnished
With pictures, cabinets of ancient date,
And carvings gilt and burnished.

Rich hangings, storied by the needle's art,
With scripture, history, or classic fable:
But all had faded, save one ragged part,
Where Cain was slaying Abel.

The sky was pale; the cloud a thing of doubt;
Some hues were fresh, and some decayed and duller;
But still the BLOODY HAND shone strangely out
With vehemence of color.

The BLOODY HAND significant of crime,
That glaring on the old heraldic banner,
Had kept its crimson unimpaired by time,
In such a wondrous manner!

And yet no gory stain was on the quilt—
The pillow in its place had slowly rotted:
The floor alone retained the trace of guilt,
Those boards obscurely spotted.

Obscurely spotted to the door, and thence
With mazy doubles to the grated casement—
Oh, what a tale they told of fear intense,
Of horror and amazement!

What human creature in the dead of night
Had coursed like hunted hare that cruel distance?
Had sought the door, the window in his flight,
Striving for dear existence?

What shrieking spirit in that bloody room
Its mortal frame had violently quitted?
Across the sunbeam, with a sudden gloom,
A ghostly shadow flitted!

A LAWYER'S REMINISCENCES.

'Is there no hope, sir?' said an old, white-headed man, with a feeble, tremulous voice, to the physician, who had just mounted his horse, and was about to turn down the avenue to the high road.

'None?' replied the physician, kindly looking on the questioner—'none, I fear, in this world.'

The old domestic muttered a few words in a low voice, raised one hand to his tearful eye, and turned, with faltering step, towards the house.

'And what a cheerless faith is theirs,' said the physician inwardly, 'who believe there is not a better world. If earth had aught of happiness, surely one might have hoped to find it in such a spot.'

As he spoke, his eye fell mournfully on the scene before him. He checked his horse for a moment, sighed, and proceeded on his way. And beautiful, in truth, was the spot which he had just quitted.

A cottage, the very model of rustic elegance, over whose light trellis-work the dark foliage of the fragrant clematis hung in rich and heavy masses, relieved by the countless flowers of the creeping rose, crowned the summit of a gentle hill. On the left, in the friendly shelter of a picturesque clump of evergreens, shadowed by a few of the more stalwart children of the forest, was a small but tastefully-disposed flower-garden, and in front a lawn of the brightest verdure descended, with an easy slope, to the broad bosom of the river, beyond which stretched a rich cultivated plain to the foot of the blue but clearly-defined chain of hills, behind which the sun was hastening to his setting.

A like stillness prevailed within the cottage. The cheerful room, usually occupied by its inmates, was tenantless, the Venetian blinds drawn down, and the air of the apartment itself seemed clearly to indicate that for some days it had not been frequented by its accustomed visitants. What it was, indeed, that would lead one to this conclusion, it might be difficult to say; the furniture was arranged as usual; drawing-portfolios, music, books, were distributed with the same graceful negligence as on ordinary occasions. Yet the room wore that lonely aspect which told as if, by some hidden sympathy in our nature, that the pulse of human life had not throbbled there lately, and the most careless observer could perceive that the fair being, the evidences of whose refined occupations were on all sides visible, had long neglected them—had withdrawn its charm from the silent walls.

One room in the corresponding angle of the building was not thus occupied. It was the noiseless bed-chamber of an invalid, the two windows of which commanded the prospect described at the beginning of the narrative. Of one of them the blind was quite down; that of the other partially raised, and the casement open, admitting the fragrance of the air without, while a flood of rich crimson light streamed through it on the opposite wall, on which hung the sword of a British general officer. The chamber had two occupants. In the bed lay one who, notwithstanding his snowy locks rivalled the whiteness of the pillows which they rested on, was plainly of no very advanced age: he certainly had not seen sixty winters, nor did his form seem to have suffered from any lingering malady; but it required no very skillful glance to see that the sand of his existence was nearly run. The deadly paleness which overspread his finely-moulded features, combined with a hectic flush which momentarily displaced it, and the prominence of the deep blue veins that traversed his broad marble forehead, told sufficiently of a disease beyond the healer's art. Beside his pillow sat a fair being, in whose form the light gracefulness of the girl had already given place to the stately beauty of maturer womanhood. Her attitude, as she leaned over the pillow, displayed her finely proportioned figure in all its loveliness, while her rich dark hair, drawn plainly from her pure and lofty forehead, showed the profile of a face, possessing all the dignity which could be combined with feminine softness, to which the deep blush mantling her entire countenance, and the tears that suffused her clear blue eyes, lent an unwonted tenderness of expression.

She leaned on one hand over the pillow, the other lay clasped in that of the invalid, whose eyes looked steadily into hers, as, with the most supplicating tone and looks, she exclaimed—

'Spare me, dear father, do spare me this. God knows I have had my share of sorrow, and now that I am losing my last—my only comforter—you cannot, with your latest request, pour this bitterness into the cup that I have yet to drink. Think only what you ask of me—to drag before a heartless world, subject to the jest and jibe of every scoffer, the sacred confidence of a love like mine—to have bandied in a public court, every affectionate word, every endearing epithet, in the security of a trusting heart, I have lavished on one who—' (here her eyes dilated, and the throbbing veins of her temple swelled almost to bursting)—'has deserted and betrayed me. You cannot,' she added, resuming her deprecatory manner, after a moment's pause, and sobbing loudly—'you cannot, surely, ask me this.'

The old man trembled violently—paused—compressed his lips, and, with a powerful effort, which all but rent the feeble ties that bound him yet to life, quelled his struggling emotions, and, with calm but emphatic tones replied—

'Emily St. Aubyn, you are my child. You bear a name of which I am the first inheritor who have seen insult flung upon it, and not wiped that insult off with his blood who dared to offer it. There was a time when