

THE
LAST MAN,

OR

OMEGARUS

AND

Sydera,

A ROMANCE IN FUTURITY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

Through what new scenes and changes must we pass?—
The wide, th'unbounded, prospect lies before me.—

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T H E
L A S T M A N.

C H A P. I.

NEAR the ruins of Palmyra is a solitary cavern, so much dreaded by the Syrians, that they denominated it the Cavern of Death. No man had ever dared to enter it without instantly receiving the punishment of his temerity. It is said that some intrepid Frenchmen, venturing to penetrate this place with arms in their hands, were all slain, and at the returning dawn their limbs were found scattered about the desert. When the nights are peaceful and serene, dreadful groans and tumultuous

VOL. I. B shrieks

shrieks issue from the cavern. Sometimes it vomits forth volumes of flame and smoke, the earth shakes, and the ruins of Palmyra are rocked about like the waves of the ocean.

I had travelled over Africa, visited the coasts of the Red Sea, and traversed Palestine. Influenced by some secret and unknown inspiration, I was desirous of beholding that superb city where Zenobia formerly reigned, and more particularly that awful cavern which was supposed to be the abode of Death. I repaired there, attended by several Syrians. Its aspect had nothing terrific: the entrance, shaded over by the thick foliage of the wild vine, invited the traveller to rest himself beneath its cooling shelter. No monster guarded the passage; the terror which it inspired had rendered it inaccessible.

While

While regarding it attentively, I perceived on the summit a man armed with a torch. His eyes were sharp and piercing, and his majestic brow seemed the seat of peace. From the perfect serenity he appeared to enjoy, it might have been concluded that he had always lived in his present retreat, a stranger to fear and hope. I am ignorant in what manner he communicated his ideas to me, but I understood that he invited me into the cavern, to which I felt myself attracted by a sudden and irresistible impulse; and, notwithstanding the alarm and cries of the Syrians, who were endeavouring to deter me, I sprang into the subterraneous abode.

For a long time I advanced in utter darkness, astonished at my own audacity, for the gloom rather continued to increase, as I advanced into this terrific recess.— Suddenly I lost the use of my external faculties; my feet denied their office, and

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I became

I became fixed to the ground, like a statue. The air I was inhaling failed, and I felt as if I had been in a void space, where, existing without the power of action, I enjoyed entire repose. A pleasure unknown to human nature, and so exquisite that it surpassed the softest voluptuousness, insensibly overcame me. In an instant after, the thick gloom by which I was enveloped vanished, the pure light of day burst upon my senses, and I beheld the various objects surrounding me.

I found myself in a circus erected with fragments of the hardest rock, opposite a sapphire throne, similar in form to the famous tripod of the priestesses of Apollo. This throne was canopied by gold and azure clouds, which some invisible power held suspended. A volatile flame, free from smoke, sparkled on an infinite number of tapers, and the walls were hung round with magic mirrors, wherein the eye

eye discovered a boundless horizon. On the right, at the foot of an adamantine column, a robust old man was chained down; his shoulders were mutilated, and he looked with an expression of melancholy at the fragments of a broken clock and two bloody wings, lying on the ground.

Then, without the agency of voice, and by means incomprehensible to me, a Spirit who dwelt in the tripod said, "I have punished with death the rash mortals who, scorning the fear my dwelling almost universally inspires, have fancied their temerity could force its entrance. Fear not the same fate, thou whom I have called into my presence. I am the celestial Spirit to whom eternal futurity is known.—All events are to me as if they were passed. Here Time is loaded with chains, and his empire destroyed.—In me behold the father of pre-science and dreams: I dictate oracles, and inspire celebrated politicians.

liticians. The moment that a mortal has stained his hands with crime, I place before his sight the preparations of that chastisement which human justice has in store for the guilty, and, as an augmentation of his torment, I make him prophecy of his punishment and death.

“ If I have conducted thy steps to this cavern, it was for the particular purpose of raising before thee the veil which conceals dark futurity from man, and to make thee a spectator of the scenes that will terminate the destinies of the universe.— In the magic mirrors thou beholdest around, the last man will stand revealed to thy sight. There, as on a stage, where the actors represent heroes who are no more, thou shalt hear him converse with the most illustrious personages of the last ages of the world, read in his soul his most secret thoughts, and be the witness and judge of his last actions.

“ Think

“ Think not that I intend by this spectacle merely to gratify the wishes of thy curiosity;—a nobler design actuates me. The last man will not have any posterity to know and admire him. I wish before his birth that he may live in memory: I desire to celebrate his struggles and victories over himself,—to tell what pains he will undergo to shorten those of human kind, to terminate the reign of time, and to hasten the day of everlasting recompence which the just have to expect; I wish to reveal to men this history, so deserving of their attention. . . . But attend! The great representation now commences, and will pass rapidly before thee!”

The celestial Spirit having explained his intention, the air returned with a loud noise into the rotunda where I stood. I felt it again circulating through my veins, and restoring to my frame the motion it had lost. In a similar manner did every thing

thing change and move around me. The flame of the tapers was agitated, the fine clouds which overshadowed the throne formed themselves into graceful shapes, the old man broke his chains, resumed his wings, and flew away.

Immediately in the magic mirror placed before me arose a superb palace, the work of the most powerful sovereigns on earth, but which the hand of Time was beginning to destroy. Under one of its peristyles, I beheld a woman advance slowly, whom, from her graceful motions and the charms of her heavenly form, I should not have taken for a mortal, had not the melancholy depicted on her countenance induced me to think that she was unhappy. A young man was walking by her side; his eyes were directed to the ground, and, like her, he appeared plunged in deep sorrow. A voice, which seemed to issue from the tripod, then spake thus :

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“ The young man thou seest is named Omegarus : Syderia is the appellation of the woman, whose beauty already interests thee. They are the last inhabitants of the universe. This is the pair thou art to celebrate. The enterprise will frequently confound thee, and, deeming it superior to thy powers, thou wilt be tempted to give it up. Meanwhile, do not despair.— I will support thy courage ; and, remember, there are no obstacles which may not be surmounted by perseverance.”

As soon as the voice had informed me that in Omegarus and Syderia I beheld the precious remains of the last race of man, I felt myself affected like a traveller, who, under a heap of thorns and briars, discovers the ruins of a celebrated city. I gazed again on the last pair with avidity. While my attention was absorbed by Omegarus, I regretted that I could not

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bestow

bestow it on the enchanting Syderia, and I regretted that I could not combine both under the same glance. Already I conceived an interest in their fate; their sorrows affected my heart, and, anxious to learn the cause of their sadness, I invoked the celestial Spirit in these terms:

“O thou, who allowest me to contemplate the latter days of the earth, I give thee thanks for having selected me to celebrate Omegarus and Syderia. To this object will I devote the remainder of my days. Inspire me, therefore, with thy spirit, shed the illumination of prophecy into my soul, and bestow on my voice the fierce sound of the trumpet!—But what do I ask?—Shall I require thy assistance to command the attention of men, when I unfold to them what will be the destinies of the earth and of their descendants!

“Ah!”

“Ah!” continued I, “if the fate of such dear objects have at any time alarmed the feeling mind of mortals,—if in the earth they have cherished the tender mother who fed them,—if the hope of living in their posterity has consoled them for being perishable creatures,—they will entreat this history of me; they will pass whole days in listening to it, and never shall I be weary of repeating the narration. In the mean time, O thou whom I invoke, tell me the cause of the griefs of Omegarus and Syderia. So young, to know misfortune!—Alas! will misfortune then be the companion of men in after-ages, even in their latest children; and, following the example of their fathers, will they temper the stubborn earth with their tears!”

While I thus invoked Futurity's celestial Spirit, Omegarus, Syderia, and the palace
 B 6 they

they inhabited, vanished from my sight.— In their place I beheld an island arise out of a swampy marsh, steaming with sulphur and bitumen, and so contiguous to the gates of hell, that it seemed as if they were joined together. The rays of the firmament and the heavenly bodies could not penetrate to this spot of horror; but light was supplied by fiery exhalations, vomited from its ignited bowels with a terrific glare. No verdure appeared, nor could the trace of any existing creature, not even of night-birds or serpents, be perceived.

The only inhabitant of this solitary island was a disconsolate old man, whose appearance inspired respect and compassion. Placed here by way of expiation for a fault which he had committed, he was deemed by heaven to behold the entrance of all guilty men into hell!— a torture
which

which he had endured from the creation of the world, and the pangs of which he yet continued to suffer in all their original bitterness.

Whenever he heard the infernal gates creak on their hinges, his whole frame trembled, his white hair stood erect, and he either averted his head, or strove to fly; but an invincible power chained him to the spot. He remained in this situation, his eyes fixed on each wretched victim, till the moment when the demons threw their prey over into the devouring flames.

This venerable old man was Adam, the first father of mankind, banished into that island by divine justice. His disobedience having caused the original sin of his race, the Almighty, to punish his transgression, decreed that he should behold the chastisement of that guilty posterity
whose

whose iniquities he had been the primary cause of.

Ignorant to what period his torment was to extend, he had for many ages entertained daily expectations of his deliverance, without having yet seen its accomplishment. Weary of longing for it, he no more possessed the strength even to form a wish for its cessation, and hence he endured his pangs as if they were decreed to last eternally. At the moment when hope, long since extinguished in his bosom, had ceased to soften his misery, he perceived at a distance a light cloud, which, with the velocity of the winds, rushed towards him, stopped, and presented the angel Ithuriel,—the same who, among the blooming bowers of Eden, was the messenger of the Creator's high commands.

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The Father of Men, transported with ardour at the sight of the celestial envoy, endeavoured to speak, but his lips could only utter inarticulate sounds: his soul was in a tumult of extacy. The more he strove to govern its movements, the more his agitation increased, till he was overcome by the violence of his efforts.

For some time he remained as if plunged in a sort of stupor; his eyes wandered, his whole frame shuddered: at length, he recovered himself, rested as if he had undergone a severe fatigue, and, having regained the power of articulation, he spake to the Angel thus:

“It appears to me that thou art the celestial Spirit who deigned sometimes to visit me in the terrestrial garden of Paradise. Oh! what pains have I undergone since that period! Eternity must surely

surely have elapsed!—Say, comest thou to announce the termination of my torments?”

He ceased abruptly, in order to hasten the Angel's reply: his lips remained open, and he feared to move, lest he might lose a word of the expected communication.

“My mission,” said the heavenly messenger, “is to conduct thee to earth, whither the Most High calls thee to accomplish certain designs, which he will reveal by shedding supernatural lights into thy spirit. Thy deliverance will now depend on the success of thy mission, and which will take place on the very day the destruction of the globe shall happen. The rest is veiled from me. Thus far I dare to extend my revelation,—a great revolution is preparing, various movements agitate the skies, and the Almighty has burst
from

from his quiescent state: he has dispersed over the universe legions of angels, who wait but for the signal to execute his mighty commands, and who at this moment fill, with the infinity of their numbers, the whole created space from the sanctuary where the Divinity dwells to the gates of chaos.”

Ithuriel ceased, and the Father of Men remained listening in suspense. Every word uttered by the Angel had filled his soul with hope and joy: he felt a new existence arise in himself, and he rapturously exclaimed, “O thrice happy day! Blessed be he who, in the name of the Most High, comes to communicate to me his divine commands!—Am I to believe your promises? What! again am I to behold the starry vaults, to contemplate that luminary which scatters on all creation those waves of fire of which my eyes have been

so

so long bereft ! Am I again to gaze on that chaste lamp of night which served as my nuptial torch !—again to embrace my children, enjoy the verdure of the earth and hear the voice of man !”

While he spake these words, Adam threw himself at the feet of the Angel, and for a time held them firmly embraced. The powers of his tongue were inadequate to the new sensations he experienced : he was oppressed until the moment when tears, like a copious dew, opened themselves a passage, and eased his joy. He then arose, and proceeded thus :

“ Convey me wherever thou wilt,” said he to the Angel ; “ there shall I find happiness, if removed far away from this detestable island. Oh ! that I may never again return hither ! for here I see passing before me all those children of guilt who
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are condemned by the Holy One to everlasting tortures, and who in my presence curse their first father and the day of their birth. Here I see the gates of hell open with a horrid noise that will long continue to grate on my ear, and when they are extended, I hear the shrieks and groans that issue from this abode of infernal torture. Sometimes I feel the heat of the sulphurous flames !— Oh ! may these dreadful scenes never appal my sight again ! And now, my kind protector, let us quit this island, let us take the shortest path, and dart through the air !”

His prayer was heard. The angel Ithuriel enveloped him in a dark cloud, and in an instant wafted him into the air. They traversed the æthereal plains with prodigious rapidity, and alighted on a great empire, not far from the residence of Omegarus.

“ Behold,”

“Behold,” said the Angel to the Father of Mankind, “thy foot is on the land in which thou wast first created. Unless thou wilt begin ages of torment again, and return into the island thou hast just left, thou must now successfully conclude the mission which the Almighty is about to entrust to thy care.”

This said, the Angel vanished from his sight, and the cloud that concealed the Father of Men instantly dispersed.

Scarcely had Adam recognized the earth, when, in a transport of joy, he threw himself on its bosom; he hugged it to his breast, and kissed it with his lips. “O my country!” exclaimed he, “O my primæval abode! do I once more embrace thee!” Afterwards, impatient to view it, he arose abruptly, and looked anxiously on the surrounding prospect.

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The sun had just then commenced its career. With what astonishment did the Father of Mankind behold the plains and the mountains stripped of verdure, dry and barren like a rock; the trees in decay, and covered with a whitish bark; the sun, whose fire was grown dim, casting on every object a livid and gloomy light. It was not the hoary frost of winter which shed this horror on nature. She preserved, even during that hard season, a beauty, a vigour, which promised an early fecundity; but the earth had undergone the common destiny. After having for ages struggled against the efforts of time and men, who had exhausted it, she bore the melancholy features of decay.

As a son whom a long absence had separated from his mother, young and gay when he left her, and who, again finding her bent under the weight of years, feels his

his heart oppressed with sorrow at the sight, and embraces her while he hides his tears, so the Father of Men could not without grief behold this decay of the universe. Hence he vented his feelings in the following apostrophe :

“ O Earth, how fair I saw thee come out of thy Creator's hand ! Where are thy pleasant hills, verdant fields, and green bowers ?—Alas ! nothing remains of thee but an extensive waste ! Old age has dimmed even the lustre of the parent of light, whose resplendent rays seemed immortal. I can now endure to gaze upon it without pain.” He ceased, as if silenced by the great ideas which crowded upon his mind. Again raising his hands towards heaven, he exclaimed, “ O thou, whose youth outlives thy works, thy glory overpowers me ! How insignificant is man, and how great does the Omnipotent appear amidst the
fragments

fragments of the crumbling world ! Thou art the only king, and I see none but thee in the Universe !”

The Father of Mankind, while he was paying the Almighty this homage, experienced a sudden revolution : he felt a divine flame warming his heart : he was affected—transported. God himself was in communication with Adam, instructing him in the object of his mission. The Deity appeared not to him under a visible form, but endowed his soul with an intellectual light, and spoke to it without the medium of the external senses.

Adam, composed into a religious silence, respectfully listened to the supreme arbiter of his fate, and promised to execute his sovereign commands. Sent to Omega-rus, he was to demand from him, in the name of the Almighty, one of the most
painful

painful sacrifices which can be required of the human heart, without using any other means than eloquence and persuasion.

Adam stood appalled at the great of the enterprise, and his cloudy brow indicated the uneasiness of his mind

“Alas!” said he, “I am going to return to the gates of hell, to linger out a new revolution of ages and torments!—I who was brought up by the Creator under the eyes of his angels, and who have violated the most easy of all his commands, behold, I am to expect from an imperfect and weak young man that obedience and virtue in which I have failed!”

The Father of Men, deeply afflicted, raised his hands to heaven, and entreated God, who can bend the most obdurate heart according to his pleasure, to influence
that

that of the youthful Omegarus to obedience.

Guided afterwards by a secret and divine inspiration, he walked forth on the earth, and the palace inhabited by Omegarus offered itself to his sight. The moment approached which was to place the Father of Men in heaven, or again to confine him before the gates of hell. He felt disturbed, his heart was oppressed, and he could with difficulty advance.

Omegarus and Syderia, who, for some days, had been plunged into a deep melancholy, were just then going out of their dwelling. Terrified that night by sinister presages, they had not been able to enjoy the comforts of sleep.—They had seen bleeding spectres stalk about in their palace, and sheets of flame enfolding them: they had heard
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deep groans and shrieks issuing from the earth, and were then availing themselves of the first sun-beams to tranquilize their alarmed minds, and seeking, in the beautiful view of waking nature, that calm they were so much in want of.

Although Adam, banished into an island at the entrance of the infernal abode, had not ceased to suffer during a long series of ages, and still dreaded to undergo the same torture again, at the glimpse only of a man his pains were forgotten. He was going to speak to his descendants, to his children, whom he had not beholden in existence since he had quitted the earth. Ah! what a moment of rapture would it have been to the Father of Men, had it not been embittered by the cruel office assigned him,—had he but been permitted to disclose himself, and press his children

dren in his arms,—had not God, by whose inspiration he was impelled, commanded him not reveal himself to the objects of his mission!

Omegarus saw with astonishment the appearance of a stranger in that solitude which he and Syderia only inhabited, and which no traveller had ever visited. The arrival of the old man seemed a favourable omen: they imagined heaven had sent them a comforter: their gloomy sorrows vanished, and they recovered that serenity which they had lost. Happy influence of man on his fellow beings!—two isolated unfortunates meet, and, even before they speak, they taste the consolatory charm of society!

Adam first addressed the youthful pair. "May the peace of the blessed be with you!" said he: "may heaven pour

its grace into your hearts, and endow you with strength to obey its commands, and courage to endure misfortune!—These are the wishes of an unfortunate old man, who ardently esteems you, and whose affection you would repay, were you to be informed of his name.”

“Respectable stranger,” answered Omegarus, “you already possess that esteem you seem to wish for. Scarcely had you appeared to our sight, when it seemed that heaven had sent us a father; a beam of joy broke into our afflicted hearts, and we thought happiness was returning to be our guest.”

“Happiness!” replied the Father of Men; “alas! seek it not on earth, but in heaven; and even there happiness is not to be purchased without severe trials and great sacrifices. May I, however, venture to inquire into the source
of

of your sorrows? Ah! if they equal the duration and severity of mine, they must be dreadful indeed!”

“It is only within these few days,” said Omegarus, “that our fate has changed. An insurmountable terror has taken possession of our souls: every thing concurs to raise it,—our labours, our pleasures, our conversations, our silence, the approach of night, the return of the sun; nay, the very cares that we take to destroy it. We dread to advance in life, as if our woes were to augment unceasingly. Terrific presages alarm our minds. Last night, bleeding spectres appeared before us. We heard threatening voices, and the palace we inhabit seemed in flames:—hence I fear heaven is irritated at our conduct.”

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“You

“You have conjectured rightly,” replied Adam. “You have committed a fault which torments you with remorse, and for which you are threatened with a severe misfortune. I am sent to teach you the means to avoid it; therefore you must speak without reserve, and make me acquainted with the history of your woes.”

“You come,” said Omegarus to him, “at a season when my wounded heart is desirous of consolation. Judge with what rapture I shall unbosom my soul to you, and accept all your proffered assistance, when I inform you that I have committed an act reproachful to myself, which I am anxious to excuse, and have every instant present before my eyes. Alas! I hope my crime is not unpardonable. You shall hold the torch of truth to my conscience. Behold, I am ready to confess all my errors,

rors, and, if requisite, to impart the history of my life, however I may dread your censure.”

“Were you acquainted with him who addresses you,” said Adam, “you would be sensible that I have lost the right of censuring sin with severity. Indulgence, which with the just is a virtue, with me will always be a duty. Let your soul unburthen itself in full confidence; it shall be my part, less to administer reproof than consolation. If I am unable to restore all your former peace and happiness, I may at least succeed in reducing your mental anguish by the balm of benevolent counsel.”

The Father of Men, during this conversation, often regarded Syderia with an expression of deep interest. The charms of her person, her modesty, her flaxen hair profusely floating on her

shoulders, the elegance of her slender and majestic shape, reminded him of a cherished wife, whose fate he had not discovered in the dwelling of the shades.

Eve, like Syderia, had once all the bloom and freshness of spring, and that same lovely and interesting bashfulness which had charmed Adam, when, first waking, he beheld her by his side. In retracing that former instant of happiness, the tide of feeling overflowed, and he shed tears.

The venerable appearance of the old man, — that knowledge of the heart which he seemed to possess, and the tears which gushed from his eyes, won the confidence of Omegarus, and he wished to proceed instantly in narrating the subject of his griefs. Already far from the palace, which they no longer saw, they had entered a superb grotto,

to, where the most solemn silence seemed to preside.

Omegarus suggested that the place was adapted for confession, and, having seated himself between Syderia and the Father of Men, he commenced the development of the secrets of his life. — Meanwhile the serenity of the air augmented their attention. The sun was just emerging from the horizon : not a cloud obscured the bright azure of the sky, and the day was lovely, considering the declining state of the world.