

ARGUMENT

CANTO V.

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Introduction—Charm of Poetry—Psyche beholds the palace of Chastity—Pleads for the admission of her Knight—Obtains it through the intervention of Hymen—Hymn celebrating the triumphs of Chastity—Psyche, enraptured, desires to devote herself solely to the service of Chastity—Entrusted by her to the protection of the Knight—Psyche's Voyage—Tempest—Coast of Spleen—Psyche received and sheltered by Patience.

CANTO V.

DELIGHTFUL visions of my lonely hours !
Charm of my life and solace of my care !
Oh ! would the muse but lend proportioned powers,
And give me language, equal to declare
The wonders which she bids my fancy share,
When rapt in her to other worlds I fly,
See angel forms unutterably fair,
And hear the inexpressive harmony
That seems to float on air, and warble through the sky.

Might I the swiftly glancing scenes recal!
 Bright as the roseate clouds of summer's eve,
 The dreams which hold my soul in willing thrall,
 And half my visionary days deceive,
 Communicable shape might then receive,
 And other hearts be ravished with the strain:
 But scarce I seek the airy threads to weave,
 When quick confusion mocks the fruitless pain,
 And all the fairy forms are vanished from my brain.

Fond dreamer! meditate thine idle song!
 But let thine idle song remain unknown:
 The verse, which cheers thy solitude, prolong;
 What, though it charm no moments but thine own,
 Though thy loved Psyche smile for thee alone,
 Still shall it yield thee pleasure, if not fame,
 And when, escaped from tumult, thou hast flown
 To thy dear silent hearth's enlivening flame,
 There shall the tranquil muse her happy votary claim!

My Psyche's wanderings then she loves to trace;
 Unrols the glowing canvas to my sight;
 Her chaste calm eye, her soft attractive grace,
 The lightning of her heavenly smile so bright,
 All yield me strange and unconceived delight:
 Even now entranced her journey I pursue,
 And gaze enraptured on her matchless knight;
 Visions of love, pure, innocent and true!
 Oh! may your graceful forms for ever bless my view!

See as they tread the green, soft-levelled plain,
 Where never weed, nor noxious plant was found!
 Psyche, enchanted, bids her knight explain
 Who rules that lovely and well cultured ground,
 Where fairest flowers and purest springs abound:
 "Oh! object of my anxious cares," (he cried,
 As with a half-breathed sigh he gazed around)
 "A stranger here, full oft I vainly tried
 "Admittance to obtain, and sooth the sovereign's pride.

“ Here Castabella reigns, whose brow severe
“ Oft chilled my sanguine spirit by its frown ;
“ Yet have I served her with adoring fear,
“ Though her ungrateful scorn will oft disown
“ The faithful homage by her servant shown ;
“ Me she hath banished from her fair domain,
“ For crimes my loyal heart had never known ;
“ While thus excluded vainly I complain,
“ And feel another’s guilt my injured honour stain.

“ With false assumption of my arms and name,
“ Knight of the Bleeding Heart miscalled too long,
“ A vile impostor has disgraced my fame,
“ And much usurped by violence and wrong,
“ Which to the virgin queen by right belong ;
“ On me her irritated vengeance falls,
“ On me, repulsed by force of arms so strong
“ That, never suffered to approach her walls,
“ Unheard, indignant truth in vain for justice calls.

“ Yet she alone our progress can assist,
 “ And thou, Oh Psyche! must her favour gain;
 “ Nor from thy soft entreaties e'er desist
 “ Till thou free entrance for thy knight obtain;
 “ Here let his faithful services remain
 “ Fixed on thy grateful heart! nor thou consent,
 “ Nor let their force thy gentleness constrain
 “ To leave him, thus disgraced, yet innocent,
 “ Thine undeserved neglect forsaken to lament.”

While yet he speaks, before her ravished eyes
 The brilliant towers of Castabella shine:
 The sun that views them from unclouded skies
 Sheds not through heaven a radiance more divine;
 The adamantine walls with strength combine
 Inimitable lustre ever clear;
 Celestial temple! 'tis not lips like mine
 Thy glories can reveal to mortal ear,
 Or paint the unsullied beams which blaze for ever here.

Approaching now the well defended gates,
Which placed at distance guard the sacred fane,
Their lowly suit a stern repulse awaits ;
The timid voice of Psyche pleads in vain,
Nor entrance there together can they gain :
While yet they stay, unwilling to retreat,
The dove, swift-sailing through the ethereal plain,
Has reached already Castabella's seat,
And in her spotless breast has found a welcome sweet.

Caressing oft her well remembered guest,
Serener smiles illumed her softened brow ;
The heaven-sent messenger her soul confest,
And mildly listened to his murmurs low,
Which seemed in pleading eloquence to flow ;
His snowy pinions then he wide displayed,
And gently lured her from her throne to go
Even to the gates, where Psyche blushing stayed
Beside her awe-struck knight half doubtingly afraid.

That form majestic might the bravest awe:
 Yet Psyche gazed with love unmixed with fear,
 And felt those charms her soul attracted draw
 As to maternal tenderness most dear;
 Congenial souls! they at one glance appear
 Linked to each other by a mutual tie:
 Her courteous voice invites her to draw near,
 And lo! obedient to their sovereign's eye,
 To Psyche's willing steps the barriers open fly.

But to the lion, and his gallant lord
 Sudden the affrighted guards the portals close.
 Psyche looks back, and mindful of her word,
 Mindful of him who saved her from her foes,
 Guide of her course and soother of her woes,
 The tear that started to her downcast eye,
 The deepening blush which eloquently rose,
 Silent assistant of the pleading sigh,
 To speed the unuttered suit their powers persuasive try.

And now the knight, encouraged to approach,
Asserts his injured fame, and justice claims,
Confutes each charge, repels each foul reproach,
And each accusing falsehood boldly shames,
While conscious innocence his tongue inflames:
A firm attachment to her reign he vows,
The base impostor's guilty madness blames,
And, while the imputed crimes his spirit rouse,
No intercourse with him his nobler soul allows.

Mean time his faithful page had not been mute,
And he had found a ready warm ally;
For (while his master urged the eager suit)
As through the goodly train he cast his eye,
He chanced exulting mid the group to spy
A joyous youth, his fondly cherished friend;
Hymen, the festive, love-attending boy,
Delighted his assistance hastes to lend,
Laughing unbars the gates, and bids the parley end.

Around their queen the timid virgins crowd,
Who half consentingly receives the knight,
And checks her sportive boy, whose welcome loud
Speaks his gay triumph and his proud delight:
Yet graceful smiles her happy guests invite
To share the feast with sacred honours blest ;
The palace opens to their dazzled sight ;
Still as they gazed, the adoring eye confest
That wondering awe which filled each consecrated breast.

All was divine, yet still the fairest queen
Like Dian mid her circling nymphs appeared,
Or as Minerva on Parnassus seen,
When condescendingly with smiles she cheered
The silent Muses who her presence feared :
A starry crown its heavenly radiance threw
O'er her pale cheek ; for there the rose revered
The purer lilies of her saint-like hue,
Yet oft the mantling blush its transient visits knew.

The hand of Fate, which wove of spotless white
 Her wondrous robe, bade it unchangeable
 Preserve unsullied its first lustre bright,
 Nor e'er might be renewed that sacred spell
 If once destroyed; wherefore to guard it well
 Two hand-maids she entrusts with special care,
 Prudence and Purity, who both excel,
 The first in matron dignity of air,
 The last in blooming youth unalterably fair.

Favourite of heaven! she at her birth received
 With it the brilliant zone that bound her waist,
 Which, were the earth of sun and stars bereaved,
 By its own light beneficently cast
 Could cheer the innocent, and guide the chaste:
 Nor armour ever had the virgin bore,
 Though oft in warlike scenes her youth she past,
 For while her breast this dazzling cestus wore,
 The foe who dared to gaze beheld the light no more.

But when her placid hours in peace are spent,
 Concealed she bids its latent terrors lie,
 Sheathed in a silken scarf, with kind intent
 Wove by the gentle hand of Modesty ;
 And see, the blushing maid with down-cast eye
 Behind her mistress hides her charms retired !
 While, foremost of the group, of stature high,
 Firm Courage lifts her brow by Truth inspired,
 Who holds a crystal lamp in flames celestial fired.

See, fresh as Hebe blooming Temperance stand,
 Present the nectared fruits, and crown the bowl !
 While bright-eyed Honour leads the choral band,
 Whose songs divine can animate the soul,
 Led willing captive to their high control :
 They sing the triumphs of their spotless queen,
 And proudly bid immortal fame enrol
 Upon her fairest page such as had been
 The champions of her cause, the favourites of her reign.

From Pallas first begins the lofty song,
 And Cynthia, brightest goddess of the skies;
 To her the virgin deities belong,
 And each beholds her with a sister's eyes;
 The mystic honours next of Fauna rise;
 Her solemn rites which purest hands require;
 And Vesta, who her virgins taught to prize,
 And guard the sacred symbols of the fire
 Which earth could ne'er revive if suffered to expire.

Emblem divine of female purity!
 Whose trust betrayed to like sad fate shall doom;
 Pursued by scorn, consigned to infamy,
 The hapless victims perish in their bloom
 Mid the dark horrors of a living tomb;
 Effulgent queen! thou wilt the pure defend
 From the dark night of this opprobrious gloom;
 Nor even with life thy favouring smiles shall end,
 They bid illustrious fame beyond the grave extend.

First of the noble youths whose virtue shone
 Conspicuous chief in Castabella's train,
 They sing the firm unmoved Bellerophon;
 And Peleus flying the Magnesian plain,
 Pursued by all a wanton's fierce disdain.
 You too, Hippolytus, their songs employ!
 Beloved by Phædra, but beloved in vain;
 With the chaste honours of the Hebrew boy,
 Which time shall ne'er obscure, nor idle scorn destroy.

Nor was unsung whom on Hymettus' brow
 The bright Aurora wooed with amorous care;
 He, mindful of his sacred nuptial vow,
 Refused the goddess though celestial fair,
 Breathing pure perfumes and ambrosial air:
 Of wanton Circe's baffled arts they tell,
 And him, too wise her treacherous cup to share,
 Who scorned the enchantress, and her mystic spell,
 And all the Syrens' arts could gloriously repel.

The long tried virtue of his faithful spouse
 Now sweetly animates the tuneful string,
 Unsullied guardian of her virgin vows!
 Who twice ten years had wept her wandering king.
 Acastus' mourning daughter next they sing;
 The chaste embrace which clasped her husband's shade:
 And thee, Dictynna! who, with daring spring,
 Called from the Cretan rock on Dian's aid:
 And still the goddess loves her favourite luckless maid.

Pleased to assume herself a name so dear
 She bids her altars to Dictynna rise,
 Thus called, she ever turns, with willing ear,
 To aid each nymph who for her succour cries.
 See how the trembling Arethusa flies
 Through pathless woods, o'er rocks and open plains;
 In vain to escape the ravisher she tries,
 Fast on her rapid flight Alpheus gains,
 And scarce her fainting strength the unequal course
 sustains.

And now more near his dreaded step she hears,
 His lengthened shadow flies before her feet,
 Now o'er her neck his panting breath appears
 To part her locks, which, in disorder sweet,
 Ambitious seemed to fan the fervid heat
 That flushed her glowing cheek and heightened charms:
 Hear how her gasping sighs for aid entreat!
 " Dictynna! pitying see my just alarms,
 " And snatch thy fainting maid from those polluting
 arms."

The goddess hears, and in a favouring cloud
 Conceals her suppliant from Alpheus' sight;
 In vain he looks around, and calls aloud,
 And wondering seeks the traces of her flight:
 Enveloped, still she views him with affright,
 An icy coldness creeps o'er all her frame,
 And soon, dissolving in a current bright,
 The silver stream retains her honoured name,
 And still unmingled flows, and guards its virgin fame.

'Twas thus Castalia's sacred fountain sprung,
 Once a fair nymph by bright Apollo loved:
 To Daphne too his amorous strain he sung,
 But sung in vain: her heart remained unmoved,
 No vain delight her modest virtue proved
 To be the theme of all his wanton lays:
 To shun the god the silvan scene she roved;
 Nor prized the flattery of his tuneful praise,
 Nor one relenting smile his splendid gifts could raise.

Yet were his lips with eloquence endued,
 And melting passion warbled o'er his lyre,
 And had she yielding listened as he wooed,
 The virgin sure had caught the kindling fire,
 And fallen a victim to impure desire;
 For safety cautious flight alone remained,
 While tears of trembling innocence require
 Her parents aid: and lo! that aid obtained,
 How suddenly her charms immortal laurels gained!

Dear to the Muses still her honours live :
 And they too glory in their virgin name ;
 To pure delights their tranquil hours they give,
 And fear to mingle with a grosser flame
 The chaster fires which heaven hath bid them claim :
 They smiled when Pan, on Ladon's banks deceived,
 The fair Syringa clasped, who, snatched from shame,
 Already had her tuneful form received,
 And to the breathing winds in airy music grieved.

Still in that tuneful form to Dian dear
 She bids it injured innocence befriend ;
 Commands her train the sentence to revere,
 And in her grove the vocal reeds suspend
 Which Virtue may from calumny defend :
 Self-breathed, when virgin purity appears,
 What notes melodious they spontaneous send !
 While the rash guilty nymph with horror hears
 Deep groans declare her shame to awe-struck wonder-
 ing ears.

The spotless virgins shall unhurt approach
 The stream's rude ordeal, and the sacred fire.
 See the pure maid, indignant of reproach,
 The dreadful test of innocence require
 Amid the holy priests and virgin choir!
 See her leap fearless on the blazing shrine!
 The lambent flames, bright-circling, all aspire
 Innocuous wreathes around her form to twine,
 And crown with lustrous beams the virgin's brow divine.

Nor was the daring Clusia then unsung,
 Who plunged illustrious from the lofty tower;
 The favouring winds around the virgin clung,
 And bore her harmless from the tyrant's power:
 Nor those, whom Vesta in the trying hour
 Protects from slander, and restores to fame;
 Nor Clelia, shielded from the arrowy shower;
 Nor thou! whose purest hands the Sibyls claim,
 And bid the modest fane revere Sulpicia's name.

O'er her soft cheek how arch the dimples play,
 While pleased the goddess hears Sinope's wiles!
 How oft she mocked the changeful lord of day,
 And many a silvan god who sought her smiles:
 But chief when Jove her innocence beguiles;
 "Grant me a boon," the blushing maid replies,
 Urged by his suit: hope o'er his amorous toils
 Exulting dawns:—"thine oath is past," she cries;
 "Unalterably pure thy spotless virgin dies!"

Rome shall for ages boast Lucretia's name!
 And while its temples moulder into dust
 Still triumph in Virginia's rescued fame,
 And Scipio's victory over baffled lust:—
 Even now the strain prophetically just,
 In unborn servants bids their queen rejoice,
 And in her British beauties firmly trust;
 Thrice happy fair! who still adore her voice,
 The blushing virgin's law, the modest matron's choice!

Psyche with ravished ear the strain attends,
 Enraptured hangs upon the heaven-strung lyre ;
 Her kindling soul from sensual earth ascends ;
 To joys divine her purer thoughts aspire ;
 She longs to join the white robed spotless choir,
 And there for ever dwell a hallowed guest :
 Even Love himself no longer can inspire
 The wishes of the soft enthusiast's breast,
 Who, filled with sacred zeal, would there for ever rest ;

Despising every meaner low pursuit,
 And quite forgetful of her amorous care,
 All heedless of her knight, who sad and mute
 With wonder hears the strange ungrateful fair,
 A prostrate suppliant, pour the fervent prayer
 To be received in Castabella's train,
 And that in tranquil bliss secluded there,
 Her happy votary still she might remain,
 Free from each worldly care, and each polluting stain.

With gracious smile the Queen her favourite heard,
 And fondly raised, and clasped her to her breast ;
 A beam of triumph in her eye appeared,
 While ardent Psyche offered her request,
 Which to the indignant knight her pride confest :
 “ Farewell, mistaken Psyche !” he exclaims,
 Rising at length with grief and shame opprest,
 “ Since thy false heart a spouse divine disclaims,
 “ I leave thee to the pomp which here thy pride enflames.”

“ Yet stay, impetuous youth,” the Queen replies,
 Abashed, irresolute as Psyche stands,
 “ My favourite’s happiness too dear I prize,
 “ Far other services my soul demands
 “ Than those which here in these sequestered lands
 “ Her zeal would pay : no, let her bear my fame
 “ Even to the bowers where Love himself commands :
 “ There shall my votary reign secure from blame,
 “ And teach his myrtle groves to echo to my name.

“ My lovely servant still defend from harms,
 “ And stem with her yon strong opposing tide;
 “ Haste, bear her safely to her lover’s arms!
 “ Be it thy care with steady course to guide
 “ The light-winged bark I will myself provide.
 “ Depart in peace! thou chosen of my heart!
 “ Leave not thy faithful knight’s protecting side.
 “ Dear to me both, oh may no treacherous art
 “ Your kindred souls divide, your fair alliance part!

“ Here rest to-night! to-morrow shall prepare
 “ The vessel which your destined course shall speed.
 “ Lo! I consign my Psyche to thy care,
 “ Oh gallant youth! for so hath Fate decreed,
 “ And Love himself shall pay the generous meed.”
 She said, and joined their unreluctant hands.
 The grateful knight, from fear and sorrow freed,
 Receives with hope revived the dear commands,
 And Psyche’s modest eye no other law demands.

Now Peace with downy step and silent hand
Prepares for each the couch of soft repose:
Fairest attendant! she with whispers bland
Bids the obedient eye in slumbers close;
She too the first at early morning goes
With light-foot Cheerfulness the guests to greet,
Who soothed by quiet dreams refreshed arose,
Ready the labours of the day to meet;
But first due homage pay at Castabella's feet.

Bright was the prospect which before them shone;
Gay danced the sun-beams o'er the trembling waves:
Who that the faithless ocean had not known,
Which now the strand in placid whispers laves,
Could e'er believe the rage with which it raves
When angry Boreas bids the storm arise,
And calls his wild winds from their wintry caves?
Now soft Favonius breathes his gentlest sighs,
Auspicious omens wait, serenely smile the skies.

The eager mariners now seize the oar,
The streamers flutter in the favouring gale.
Nor unattended did they leave the shore:
Hymen, whose smiles shall o'er mischance prevail,
Sits at the helm, or spreads the swelling sail:
Swift through the parting waves the vessel flies,
And now at distance scarce can Psyche hail
The shore, so fast receding from her eyes,
Or bless the snowy cliffs which o'er the coast arise.

Pleased with her voyage and the novel scene,
Hope's vivid ray her cheerful heart expands:
Delighted now she eyes the blue serene,
The purple hills, and distant rising lands,
Or, when the sky the silver queen commands,
In pleasing silence listens to the oar
Dashed by the frequent stroke of equal hands;
Or asks her knight if yet the promised shore
May bless her longing eyes when morn shall light restore?

The impatient question oft repeated thus
He smiling hears, and still with many a tale,
Or song of heavenly lore unknown to us
Beguiles the live-long night, or flagging sail
When the fresh breeze begins their bark to fail.
Strong ran the tide against the vessel's course,
And much they need the kind propitious gale
Steady to bear against its rapid force,
And aid the labouring oars, their tedious last resource.

But lo ! the blackening surface of the deep
With sullen murmurs now begins to swell,
On ruffled wing the screaming sea fowl sweep
The unlovely surge, and piteous seem to tell
How from the low-hung clouds with fury fell
The demons of the tempest threatening rage ;
There, brooding future terrors, yet they dwell,
Till with collected force dread war they wage,
And in convulsive gusts the adverse winds engage.

The trembling Psyche, supplicating Heaven,
 Lifts to the storm her fate-deploring eye,
 Sees o'er her head the livid lightnings driven :
 Then, turned in horror from the blazing sky,
 Clings to her knight in speechless agony :
 He all his force exerts the bark to steer,
 And bids the mariners each effort try
 To escape the rocky coast which threatens near,
For Hymen taught the youth that dangerous shore to
 fear.

Who has not listened to his tuneful lay,
 That sings so well the hateful cave of Spleen ?
 Those lands, submitted to her gloomy sway,
 Now open to their view a dreary scene,
 As the sad subjects of the sullen queen
 Hang o'er the cliffs, and blacken all the strand ;
 And where the entrance of the cave is seen
 A peevish, fretful, melancholy band,
Her ever wrangling slaves, in jarring concert stand.

Driven by the hurricane they touch the shore,
 The frowning guards prepare to seize their prey,
 The knight (attentive to the helm no more)
 Resumes his arms, and bids his shield display
 Its brilliant orb : “ Psyche, let no dismay
 “ Possess thy gentle breast,” he cheerly cries,
 “ Behind thy knight in fearless safety stay,
 “ Smile at the dart which o’er thee vainly flies,
 “ Secure from each attack their powerless rage despise.

“ Soon shall the fury of the winds be past,
 “ Serener skies shall brighten to our view,
 “ Let us not yield to the imperious blast
 “ Which now forbids our vessel to pursue
 “ Its purposed course ; soon shall the heavens renew
 “ Their calm clear smile ; and soon our coward foes,
 “ Despairing thus our courage to subdue,
 “ Shall cease their idle weapons to oppose,
 “ And unmolested peace restore our lost repose.”

Still as he spoke, where'er he turned his shield
The darts drop quivering from each slackened bow,
Unnerved each arm, no force remains to wield
The weighty falchion, or the javelin throw ;
Each voice half choked expires in murmurs low,
A dizzy mist obscures their wondering sight,
Their eyes no more their wonted fury know,
With stupid awe they gaze upon the knight,
Or, as his voice they hear, trembling disperse in flight.

Yet raged the storm with unabated power ;
A little creek the labouring vessel gains ;
There they resolve to endure the blustering hour,
The dashing billows, and the beating rains.
Soon as the bark the sheltering bay attains,
And in the shallows moored securely rides,
Attentive still to soften all her pains,
The watchful knight for Psyche's ease provides ;
Some fisher's hut perchance the shelving harbour hides.

Deep in the steril bank a grotto stood,
 Whose winding caves repel the inclement air,
 Worn in the hollowed rock by many a flood
 And sounding surge that dashed its white foam there,
 The refuge now of a defenceless fair,
 Who issuing thence, with courteous kind intent
 Approached the knight, and kindly bad him share
 Whatever good indulgent heaven had lent
 To cheer her hapless years in lonely suffering spent.

More sweet than health's fresh bloom the wan hue
 seemed
 Which sat upon her pallid cheek; her eye,
 Her placid eye, with dove-like softness beamed;
 Her head unshielded from the pitiless sky,
 Loose to the rude wild blast her tresses fly,
 Bare were her feet which prest the shelly shore
 With firm unshrinking step; while smilingly
 She eyes the dashing billows as they roar,
 And braves the boisterous storms so oft endured before.

Long had she there in silent sorrow dwelt,
And many a year resigned to grief had known ;
Spleen's cruel insolence she oft had felt,
But never would the haughty tyrant own,
Nor heed the darts which, from a distance thrown,
Screened by her cavern she could safely shun ;
The thorny brakes she trod for food alone,
Drank the cold stream which near the grotto run,
And bore the winter's frosts and scorching summer'
sun.

In early youth, exchanging mutual vows,
Courage had wooed and won his lovely bride ;
Tossed on those stormy seas, her daring spouse
From her fond arms the cruel waves divide,
And dashed her fainting on that rock's rough side.
Still hope she keeps, and still her constant heart
Expects to hail with each returning tide
His dear remembered bark ; hence can no art
From those unlovely scenes induce her to depart.

When the vexed seas their stormy mountains roll,
She loves the shipwrecked mariner to cheer;
The trembling wretch escaped from Spleen's control,
Deep in her silent cell conceals his fear,
And panting finds repose and refuge here;
Benevolently skilled each wound to heal,
To her the sufferer flies, with willing ear
She woos them all their anguish to reveal,
And while she speaks, they half forget the woes they
 feel.

Now to her cave has Patience gently brought
Psyche, yet shuddering at the fearful blast,
Largely she heaped with hospitable thought
The blazing pile, and spread the pure repast;
O'er her chilled form her own soft mantle cast,
And soothed her wearied spirits to repose,
Till all the fury of the storm is past,
Till swift receding clouds the heavens disclose,
And o'er subsiding waves pacific sunshine glows.