

THE DEMON OF THE VALLEY.

It was a lovely evening towards the decline of that sweet month, which, even in our tardy clime, clothed with verdure and blossom, brings with it all the nameless charms and associations of spring-time, when we arrived at the ancient little town of Terni, and, compelled to proceed on our journey at an early hour the following morning, lost no time in ordering horses to take us to the Cascade. We drove at once to the highest point of view, a distance of about five miles, the road one of continued, and, in the latter part, of so tremendously steep ascent, it required no small labour on the part of the postilion to prevent his horses from falling.

We alighted at the top of the hill, from whence the depth of the rocky and wooded valleys and chasms with which you find yourself surrounded is particularly fine. Pursuing a somewhat rugged and winding path, among the rocks and underwood, for about a mile, our ear soon informed us that we must be near the scene of action, and we speedily obtained a view, through a narrow passage cut in the rock, of the River Volind, hurrying forward with mad and irresistible impetuosity, to precipitate itself from the impending heights into the Nera.

There was something very imposing in this rush of waters, which, when we had walked a short distance, we beheld boiling and hissing at a depth of the hundred feet below us, the rocks around carpetted with verdure from the continual action of the spray, which rises in beautiful and ever-varying columns to a great height.

After viewing the fall from these heights, we proceeded to a sort of temple, built on the edge of the rocks overlooking the great fall, from whence the scene is truly magnificent! We next descended, by a steep but romantic path, to view the falls from below. The rocks, as we proceeded, were almost all encrusted with vegetable petrifications, apparently fern and other shrubs, very curious and beautiful.

Our guide conducted us across the stream to an ascent on the opposite side, where rustic bowers are erected, covered over with branches of trees and evergreens, in spots most favourable to the view of artists and amateurs.—From the last of these delightful resting-places, fitted up with a couch of laurels and myrtle, which are found very refreshing after a hot and toilsome walk, I took a sketch of the splendid scene before me. The rocky heights

were still illumined with the last and richest rays of sunset, whilst the peaceful valley where we sat, (forming a striking contrast to the tumultuous scene upon which we were gazing,) lay in deep shadow. We were unfortunately rather too late in the day to enjoy the opportunity of witnessing that beautiful effect of the sun upon the foam, and spray of the waters, producing those exquisite rainbows which all travellers describe with so much enthusiasm, and which suggested to Lord Byron two of his most sublime similes:—

“Beneath the glittering morn,
An Iris sits amidst the infernal surge,
Like hope upon a death-bed, and unworn
Its steady dye—whilst 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 unalterable mien.”

His splendid descriptions of this spot were fresh in my recollection, and threw a halo of additional interest over the whole. Our walk to the carriage, which we had ordered to wait for us near the foot of the hill, was lovely—The perfume of blossoms; the evening song of birds, among which the note of the thrush and the nightingale were predominant, the stream flowing through “a valley sacred to sweet peace,” with gentle lapse—it seemed after its late tumultuous warfare like the return of a warrior from the strife of the battlefield to the calm current of domestic life; or as the repose of a good man, when, the storms and tempests of life overpast, he holds his silent and unruffled course towards the ocean of eternity. Thus it flows, “to scatter plenty o’er a smiling land,” or refresh with unnumbered blessings the soft bosom of the lowly vale.

We approached the confines, or rather entrance, of this sweet valley, through an avenue of orange-trees, planted, we were told, by the unfortunate Caroline of England. I believe we had also reached the confines of our walk, but in this we were deceived; nor were we destined to conclude it without becoming the witnesses of a singular instance of Italian superstition, which, connected, as it proved to be, with a little history of real suffering and sorrow, deeply awakened our interest and sympathy.

Finding we had yet to cross the vale ere we rejoined our carriage at the neighbouring village, we proceeded, under the escort of our guide, through a deep gorge or glen, near the centre of which the stream here steals its con-