

From the Token for 1839.

IL SASSO RANCIO.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN.

By Nathaniel Greene.

The lake of Como, the most delightful of all the lakes at the foot of the Alps, is surrounded by mountains eight or nine thousand feet high, descending towards the lake, and generally terminating in hills resembling terraces. Near Nobialio, however, the mountain extends its long chain of high and precipitous rocks quite into the lake. The name of Sasso Rancio (*Orange Rock*) has been given to this mountain, in consequence of the orange colour, which the rocks derive from the presence of large quantities of iron ore. The road, which conducts the traveller from Italy into Germany, runs along these rocks at a great elevation above the waters of the lake. It is so narrow that it can be traversed only by pedestrians, and in some places so dangerous, that a single false step is inevitable destruction. A body of Russian troops, attached to the army of Bellegarde, were compelled to attempt the difficult pass in 1779; but a large proportion of those Scythian adventurers miserably perished in the lake beneath, or upon the rocks projecting into the intermediate space. A disaster of later occurrence, however, has given a more painful interest to this locality, the narration of which is calculated to excite the deepest sympathies of our nature. The following is a translation of the story as it appeared in an Italian publication, for which it was furnished by the curate of Menaggio, a man of undoubted veracity.

A small village upon the Alps, above Domaso, was the birth place of Rosalie. At the age of sixteen, resplendent with health, beauty, and youthful spirits, she was the pride of her native village, and the envy of all the maidens of the three neighbouring parishes. Her mother, who had enjoyed the advantages of a city residence in her earlier years, had taught her many accomplishments; and a maternal uncle, a professor of *belles lettres* in Perugia, had cultivated her mind with great assiduity.

In accordance with the usage of the neighbourhood, she wore a dress of woollen stuff, cut after the fashion of the Capuchins. This singular apparel, used in Sicily by certain devotees of the saint from whom the maiden derived her name, had been introduced from thence by inhabitants of these mountains, who have long been in the habit of repairing to that island for employment. But the belt of polished leather, with which Rosalie confined her robe about her waist, was always bright, and fastened with a buckle of burnished silver. The collar, which fell over her well-formed shoulders and covered her bosom, was of a snowy whiteness, and added to the youthful vivacity of her appearance.

Her father led an honest and laborious life in Palermo, where he consoled himself with the hope of returning in a few years to his native hills, to enjoy in the bosom of his delightful family the fruits of his labor and economy. Rosalie and her mother attended to the cultivation of a beautiful little farm, which had belonged to their family for something like three centuries. The innocence of her life added lustre to the charms of the delicate girl.

A much frequented fair is held once a year at Gravedona. Among the youths who attended this fair in 1805, for the purpose of amusement and not for business, Vincenzo *** was by far the handsomest. He was a native of Menaggio, a considerable village upon the opposite shore of the lake, and was the only son of a man, who, from a poor pedler, had accumulated great wealth by the dishonest means of contraband trade. Vincenzo saw Rosalie as she was negotiating the purchase of some ribbons, and was much struck with her pleasing appearance. Perhaps her singular dress, although neither unknown nor new to him, contributed to attract his delighted gaze. He followed her through the crowd for a long time, admiring her graceful carriage, and that beautiful form which was concealed by her claustral dress. At length she and her mother left Gravedona for Domaso; and still he followed her. Although not generally timid, he was nevertheless so much awed by the modest demeanor and commendable reserve of the maiden, that he kept at a respectable distance without daring to address her. Fortune came to his aid, however, and gave him an opportunity to interpose himself between her and an enraged animal, which she encountered in the way. This enabled him to make her acquaintance, and obtain permission of both mother and daughter to escort them home.

Who can portray the blessedness of those moments, when virtuous love first dawns in youthful hearts? The dangerous service rendered by her deliverer awakened in Rosalie a sense of gratitude, which was but the precursor of a more tender feeling. Her modest thanks were so tremulously spoken, and her ingenuous countenance beamed with such evident sincerity and kindness, that the enraptured youth dissembled not when he declared this the happiest event of his life.

Upon their arrival at Domaso Vincenzo reluctantly took his leave; but not until he had learned from Rosalie's own lips, that her pious mother usually conducted her to the very ancient church of Gravedona on the first sabbath of every month. This discovery, by affording the certainty of again beholding the lovely maiden, alleviated his sorrow at parting.

Men who have been coarsely reared, and from a state of destitution have acquired wealth, ordinarily feel the value of a

good education more than others. Vincenzo's father, who was one of these, had determined that nothing should be wanting in the education and accomplishment of his son. Hence he had caused him to be instructed in literature and jurisprudence at Pavia, and in all gentlemanly exercises at Milan. His own ambition was the incentive to these efforts in behalf of his son. Possessor of a large and constantly increasing fortune, it was his most ardent desire that Vincenzo should emerge from the class in which he was born, and his proud hopes aspired even to a noble alliance for his son. The youth, however, of a philosophical disposition, and naturally inclined to the softer affections and sympathies, fed his well-regulated mind with no vain aspirations.

When the desired sabbath arrived, Vincenzo was seen in his light bark at an early hour, crossing the lake towards Gravedona. After waiting a long time at the church, he at length discerned the approaching maiden, whose face became suffused with a modest blush on seeing him again.

I will not undertake to narrate their conversations, nor how Vincenzo obtained the mother's permission to visit their humble dwelling. The course of these events may be easily imagined by the reader. I will only say, that, through the year subsequent to this interview, Vincenzo crossed the lake to Domaso every alternate day, generally returning to Menaggio in the evening. Love was the pilot of his little bark, Hope led him forth, and Memory cheered his return. Rosalie's ingenuous manners, her affectionate heart, and the brightness of her cultivated intellect, had so fascinated the youth, that he firmly believed he should have loved her with an affection no less ardent, even had she not been, as she was, adorned with singular beauty.

Conscious that his affection was reciprocated with equal fervor, Vincenzo began to take measures for the accomplishment of a union so much desired. The mother of Rosalie was authorized by her husband to dispose of the daughter's hand, and her consent was obtained. But the steady refusal of Vincenzo's father opposed an insuperable obstacle to the marriage. The tears and entreaties of the youth were lost upon the proud and ambitious old man, who obstinately persisted in forbidding what he considered an unequal alliance. At length, in reply to his son's continued solicitations, the father angrily exclaimed, 'It was not to enable you to marry a peasant girl, that I have endured so many fatigues in amassing wealth; nor was it that you might ally yourself with the plough, that I have caused you to be so delicately reared.'

Aware of the ambitious views of his proud father, Vincenzo had feared that he should find him at first opposed to his wishes; he had, nevertheless, hoped that he would finally yield to his tears and supplications. But this inexorable repulse came upon him like a thunderbolt. Stunned by the blow, he repaired to Rosalie's mother for sympathy and advice. 'My daughter,' replied the discreet mother, 'can never become your wife against your father's will. I feel for you, Vincenzo, and yet more do I compassionate my poor daughter, who may not have strength to sustain this cruel intelligence. But honour and fraternal duty alike compel me to say to you, that, from this day, you must see Rosalie no more, except to offer her your hand with your father's consent. You are too considerate, not to be willing to submit to this indispensable requirement.'

At this moment the daughter entered. Vincenzo had not courage to speak to her, but, pressing her hand, burst into tears. Rosalie, at once divining the meaning of these tears, fell to the earth in a swoon. Her mother took her in her arms, and motioned Vincenzo to depart. The latter returned to his father, threw himself at his feet, and solemnly assured him, that, by prohibiting these nuptials, he would destroy his only son. But the vain plebeian, unchangeable in his purpose, coldly replied, by directing him to prepare for an immediate journey to Milan, whence he should not return until he had eradicated this unworthy passion from his breast.

His grief at seeing himself deprived of every hope of possessing Rosalie, the severe but just prohibition of her mother, his unwillingness to depart, and, in fine, the struggle of love, anger and despair in his bosom, so wrought upon the unhappy youth that he took to his bed with a raging fever.

Forty days had passed since the afflicted Rosalie had obtained any tidings of Vincenzo, when one morning she received the following letter, in which she recognized the characters of her lover, though traced with a trembling hand.

'For more than a month, oh Rosalie, I have been confined to the bed of sickness, a victim to my father's inflexible will and my inhuman destiny. I feel that in a few days I shall be numbered with the dead. Oh Rosalie! if you have the least feeling of compassion, do not let your faithful lover descend to the tomb without an opportunity of bidding you a last adieu! My father has departed for Como, where he will remain three days. There is no one with me but my kind and affectionate aunt.

'Pray, Rosalie! pray, persuade your good mother to the most holy work of bringing you to see me. Will she deny this last consolation to one who is dying for having too dearly loved her virtuous daughter? If she will yield neither to your prayers nor mine, say to her, that duty, and even religion, impose on her this sacrifice. She may save from death.

'Ah yes! your presence, the mere sight of one for whose sake alone the light is dear to me, the mild beaming of your eyes, your words of sympathy and compassion; who knows but they will renovate my strength, and snatch its prey from the yawning sepulchre?

'But, at all events, I desire to see you. Yes, I desire, I must see you! I must press to my pale lips that hand, of which I am denied the possession. Death will then appear less terrible; and, if you once more assure me of your love, it will perhaps enable me to await with tranquillity the awful moment of dissolution.'

What were the feelings, what the agony, of the wretched girl, on reading this sad letter! To embrace her mother and conjure her to comply with Vincenzo's request, and then to weep, and weep, and weep,—such was the part to which the unhappy one had recourse. How could the tender heart of the mother resist so many tears, so much sorrow? The despair and grief of Rosalie became so excessive, as to cause her mother to tremble, not only for the life of Vincenzo, but for that also of her daughter.

'Since you are so resolutely bent upon this visit,' said the mother to Rosalie, 'I am disposed to gratify you; but how is it possible to proceed to Menaggio at the present moment? Hear you not how furiously the storm is raging? Stefano, who has just arrived from Domaso, says, that even the courier from Lindo found it impossible to cross the lake, and was compelled to take the circuitous route by land.'

'And we, dear mother, must take this same route; I know it is a long distance from here to Menaggio,—nearly fifteen miles,—but God will give us strength—my mother, and we shall save Vincenzo. Yes, my mother, we shall rescue him from death; it will be a deed of mercy, and Heaven will reward you. I will tell him, that, because he loves me, he ought to live, as his Rosalie would infallibly follow him to the tomb.'

'I will do every thing in my power to please you, my dear child; but are you really aware how difficult and dangerous this land route is in certain places? Does not even the idea of passing the Sasso Rancio, in the midst of this terrible storm, fill you with terror?'

'Oh my mother, my mother! is there any peril which can discourage one who loves, and sees the object of that love perishing? I shall walk upon the brink of that deep precipice not less securely than the young kids upon our mountain tops. As for you, dear mother, you can have Stefano by your side; he is strong and active, and will safely sustain you over the most difficult passes.'

It was eleven o'clock in the morning when the two females left their village, accompanied by their neighbour Stefano. They stopped a short time at Dongo to procure refreshments, but Rosalie could not be induced to partake of them. At Rezzonico they made another short halt, and thence proceeded to Acqua Seria. The heavens were obscured, the weather was tempestuous, and it was now nearly sunset. The Sasso Rancio, formidable in the brightest hour and most favourable season, was now rendered frightful by the raging elements and approaching night. Again they started. A strange terror possessed the mind of Rosalie's mother, which made her shudder. She would have given every thing she possessed in the world to avoid attempting that fearful passage, but could not bring herself to disappoint her daughter by proposing to stop. The latter, now that she was near her dying idol, seemed to become a different being from her former self. She no longer appeared to see, hear, or attend to any thing; she was not alarmed by the wind, the rain, the darkness. She seemed to be in a state of hallucination, and firmly to believe, that the power of love could prevail over nature, and even death itself.

The mother, supported by Stefano, proceeded cautiously along the difficult path cut in the rocks high up on the Sasso Rancio. Rosalie, absorbed in her own thoughts, followed her, heedless of the peril. They had already passed a considerable portion of the distance, when a sudden cry froze the blood in the mother's veins. Turning instantly, she saw,—ah, cruel sight!—saw Rosalie, whose foot had slipped in the most dangerous pass, precipitated headlong down the dread abyss. No power on earth could now save the falling girl. Her tender limbs were torn and bruised by the rough projecting points, as she bounded from rock to rock, until she finally disappeared in the lake below. Alas, it would have been a harrowing spectacle for any human eye! And yet a mother was destined to sustain the horror!

She would have thrown herself down the precipice after her poor child, but Stefano withheld her by main force. With great difficulty he then conveyed her to Gaeta, where they remained until the corpse of the maiden was found and rescued from the fury of the waves. The distracted mother, after bathing it with her tears, caused it to be transported to Domaso. The funeral rites having been duly performed in the little church of the place, it was interred in the cemetery not far from the shore of the lake, to which the maidens of the neighboring villages make a pilgrimage every year, to scatter flowers upon her grave.

This unhappy event was studiously concealed from Vincenzo. Receiving no reply to his letter, nor hearing any intelligence from Rosalie, he came to the conclusion that her mother persisted in her right prohibition. Youthful vigour and latent hope gradually