

The Psyche.

(Translated from the Danish of H. C. Andersen.*)

AT the dawn of day, in the rosy light, there shines a great star, the clearest star of the morning. Its ray trembles on the white wall as if it wished to write there the things it knows of; the things that it has seen during thousands and thousands of years on the ever turning earth.

Only a short time since (the "short time since" of the star is centuries to us human beings) my beams followed a young artist; it was in the Papal States in the world-city of Rome. Much has changed there in the course of time, but not so quickly as the human form changes from child to man. The imperial city was in ruins as it is to-day; the fig and the laurel grew among the overturned marble pillars, and over the desolated bath-chambers, whose walls had once been splendid with ornaments of gold; the Colosseum was a ruin; the church-bells rang, the incense was odorous, processions went through the streets with lights and glittering canopies. There it was church-holy; and art was high and holy. In Rome lived Raphael, the world's most famous painter; there lived Michael Angelo, the most famous sculptor of the age. To those two the pope himself paid homage, honouring them with his visits. Art was recognized, honoured, and rewarded. But not all things great and gifted are therefore seen and recognized.

In a little narrow street stood an old house, that had once been a temple; here lived a young artist, poor, and unknown. To be sure, he had friends, artists like himself, young in mind, in hope, and in thought. They assured him that he was rich in talent and skill, but was foolish because he himself would never believe it. He always destroyed what he had modelled in the clay, was never content with it, and so finished nothing; and a work must be finished in order that it may be seen, be recognized, and bring in money.

*I have not seen this tale in any collected translation of our Danish writer's fairy-tales, so have translated it and insert it here.

"You are a dreamer," said they, "and that is your misfortune; and the reason is you have not yet really lived; have not tasted life; enjoyed it in deep invigorating draughts, as it is intended to be enjoyed. It is only in youth that life and the self can be made one, as they should be made one. See the great master Raphael, whom the pope honours, and the world admires; he does not deny himself bread and wine!"

"Nor does he deny himself the baker's wife, the charming Fornarina!" said Angelo, the merriest of his friends.

Yes, they all had so much to say, according to their youth and understanding. They wished the young artist to join them in their gaiety, their wild pranks; their madness it might also be called; and for a moment he felt the desire to do as they wished. His blood was warm, his fancy active; he could join in the gay chatter, laugh aloud with the others; and yet, that which they called "Raphael's jollity" sank from him like morning mist when he saw the godlike splendour that streamed from the pictures of that great artist; and when he stood in the Vatican before the forms of beauty that masters for centuries had shaped from blocks of marble, there came an up-welling in his breast, he felt within him something so high, so holy, so inspiring, great, and good, that he too desired to hew from blocks of marble, to create, such forms of loveliness. He too would produce an image of that which rose up from his heart towards the eternal, — but in what manner, and in what shape? Under his fingers the yielding clay took on forms of beauty, but next day, as before, he destroyed that which he had created.

One day he passed one of the magnificent palaces of which there are so many in Rome. He stood at the great open entrance, and saw the picture-adorned arcades surrounding a little garden that was filled as if to overflowing with the loveliest roses. Tall white arum lilies with their green sappy leaves stood in the marble basin, where plashed the clearest water. A young girl, daughter of this princely house, passed by, so light-footed, so dainty, so delightful! — such a maiden as he had never seen; — yes! painted by Raphael, painted as Psyche, in one of the Roman palaces. Ay,—there she was painted only; here she moved, a living being.

In his thought and in his heart was she living; he went home to his bare poor room, and he shaped the clay into a Psyche; it was the wealthy young Roman, the nobly-born young woman; and for the first time he looked at his work with satisfaction. His friends, when they saw it, were loud in their joy; it was a revelation of his artistic greatness,

a greatness which they had long known, and which now the world should know.

Clay in a manner may be flesh-like and living, but it lacks the whiteness, the durability of marble; in marble the Psyche must be given life, and the precious block of stone was already there. It had belonged to his parents, and for many years had lain in the courtyard; shards of glass, fennel, leavings of artichokes, were heaped over it and soiled it, but within it was the mountain snow; from this the Psyche should emerge.

One day it happened,—though of this, the bright star tells nothing, for it did not see it, but we know it,—a company of aristocratic Romans came into the mean, narrow street. Their carriage waited at a little distance; they came to see the young artist's work, for in truth they had heard about it. And who were these distinguished visitors? Unfortunate young man,—all too fortunate young man he might also be called. The young girl herself stood in the room, and with what a smile when her father said the words,—“Why it is the living image of you!” That smile could not be given form, that glance could not be reproduced, that wonderful glance with which she looked at the young artist, and which raised up, ennobled,—and crushed him.

“The Psyche must be done in marble!” said the rich man. That was the word of life for the lifeless clay and for the unshaped marble, as it was the word of life for the eager-souled young artist. “When the work is finished, I shall buy it,” said the princely visitor.

It was as if new days had dawned in the bare workroom; it was lit with life and cheerfulness; it was the scene of industry. The burning morning-star saw how the work progressed. The clay itself seemed to have been inspired by her presence, and took on shapes of heightened beauty till in it her features were revealed.

“Now I know what life is,” he cried; “it is love; it is to be uplifted in the glorious; it is to be enraptured in the beautiful! what my companions call life and enjoyment is fugitive; a bubble in the fermenting lees; not the pure, heavenly wine of sacrament, the consecration in life!”

The marble block was made ready, great chips were hewed out with the chisel; measurements were taken, points and marks were made, the rough shaping was done, and little by little the limbs appeared, the lovely shape, the Psyche, delightful as God's image in the young woman. The heavy stone became bouyant, dancing, light as air, a graceful Psyche, with a mind as heavenly innocent as if it had mirrored itself in the heart of the young sculptor. The star in the rosy light

of morning saw it, and well it knew what emotions stirred in the young man's breast, understood the changing glow of his cheeks, the glance of his eyes, whilst he created,—gave again what God had given.

“You are a master, like those from the Greek time!” said his enraptured friends. “Soon all the world will admire your Psyche.”

“My Psyche!” he echoed. “Mine; yes that she must be! I too am an artist, like those great ones of the past! God has granted me gift of grace, raised me on high like the nobly born.”

He sank on his knees, wept in gratitude to God — and again forgot Him for her, for her likeness in marble, the Psyche that stood as if cut from snow, rosy in the morning sunshine.

In reality, too, he should see her, the living, the swaying, her whose word sounded as music. He could go and tell them in the wealthy palace that the marble Psyche was finished. He entered, passed the open court where the water plashed from the dolphins in the marble basin, where the arum lilies blossomed, and the fresh roses were fragrant. He stepped into the great lofty entrance-hall, where walls and ceiling were blazoned and coloured with coats-of-arms and pictures. Proud liveried servants, their heads held high like sledge horses with their bells, went to and fro; some lay stretched at ease, idle and arrogant, on the carved wooden benches; they seemed the masters of the house. He told his errand, and was shewn up the soft carpet-covered steps of the polished marble stair. On both sides stood statues; he was led through luxurious rooms with pictures, and floors of shining mosaic. He found it hard to breathe in this splendour and magnificence, but soon his breath came freely again; the old princely aristocrat met him so kindly, almost heartily; and when they had spoken together, he wished him, before leaving, to go to the young Signora, who also wished to see him. The servants escorted him through splendid rooms and halls to her apartment, where she was the glory and the splendour.

She spoke to him; no miserere, no church singing could more effect the heart, more raise the soul. He seized her hand, pressed it to his lips; no rose was so soft; but from this rose flowed fire, a fire that coursed through him, an exaltation; words poured from his lips, he himself knew not what words; does the crater know that it pours glowing lava? He told her of his love. She stood surprised, offended, proud, and with a look of scorn, yes, with an expression as if she had suddenly touched a wet and clammy frog; her cheeks

He leaned his head on pillow, his thoughts grew dim, and he slept.

At dawn he aroused, pulled himself together again. What was it? Had he dreamed it all?—dreamt her words, dreamt the visit to the osteria, the evening with the deep-flushed carnations?—No; all was reality, a reality he had never known before.

In the purple-tinted light shone the pure star; its beams fell upon him and upon the marble Psyche. He himself trembled to behold that image of imperishability; it seemed to him that his glance was unclean. He threw a cloth over the statue; again, a desire to unveil it moved him, but he did not dare to look at his work.

Quiet, gloomy, his thoughts turned inward, he sat there through the long day; he did not know what was going on outside the house; and no one knew what was going on inside this mortal heart.

Days passed, and weeks; — the nights were the longest. One morning the trembling star saw him rise from his bed, pale, shivering with fever, go to the marble image, draw aside the veil, look at it with a glance so tender, so full of painful longing, and then, sinking with the weight, drag it into the courtyard. There was a dry, tumbled-in well, a hole it might be called, into which he lowered the Psyche, covered it with earth, and threw nettles and brushwood over the newly made grave.

"Away! down!" was the short burial service. The star saw it in the rosy light, and trembled in the two big tears on the death-white cheeks of the young man, the fever-stricken,—the death-stricken they called him as he lay on his bed of sickness.

The friar Ignatius came, as friend and physician, came with religion's word of comfort; spoke of the peace and happiness of the church; of the sin of man, of the mercy and rest in God.

The words fell like warm sunbeams on moist teeming ground. from which rose thin clouds of mist, thought-pictures, — pictures which had their reality; and from these floating islands he looked down on human life;—it was delusion and disappointment: had been so for him. Art was a sorceress who led us, through vanity, to earthly desires. We were false to ourselves, false to our friends, false to God. Always, the serpent whispered within us; "Taste and you shall be as God!"

Now for the first time he seemed to understand himself, to have found the way to truth and peace. In the church

was the light and truth of God, in the call of the monk that peace in which the tree of life could grow up through eternity.

Brother Ignatius fostered his thought, and his resolution stood fast. A child of the world became a servant of the church; the young artist renounced the world, and entered the cloister.

The brothers welcomed him, with gladness and friendliness; holy was his consecration. God, it seemed to him, was in the sunshine of the church, beamed from the sacred pictures, and from the burnished cross. And when in the evening hour, at sunset, he stood in his little cell, opened the window, and looked out over ancient Rome, the ruined temples, the mighty but lifeless Colosseum,—saw it in the spring when the acacias bloomed, when the evergreens renewed themselves, the roses clustered, the citrons and oranges hung gleaming, the palms were fragrant,—then he felt himself joy-filled and inspired as never before. The open, peaceful champaign stretched towards the blue, snow-covered mountains that seemed painted on the air,—all a blended spiritual peace and beauty, beaming, and dreaming,—and all a dream.

Yes, the world here was a dream, and the dream may sway for hours, and in hours may come again, but the life of the cloister is a life of years, long and many.

From within comes much that makes a man unclean; that he must learn! What were the flames that hourly burned through him? What was the spring from which evil, whether he would or no, welled up within him? He mortified his body, but the evil came from within. What kind of spirit was this within him which, supple as the serpent, turned back on itself and under the guise of great love, comforted him, lulling his conscience to sleep?—the holy ones pray for us, the virgin prays for us, Jesus himself has given his blood for us. Was it the spirit of the child, or the thoughtless spirit of youth that caused him to yield himself to grace, feeling thereby so uplifted, uplifted above so many? — for he had thrust from him the vanity of the world; he was a son of the Church.

One day, after many years, Angelo met him;—he recognized him. "Man!" said he;—"yes, it is you!—are you happy now?—you have sinned against God and cast from you his gift, refused your mission in life. Read the parable of the talents! the master who told that told truth! What have you found, what won? Are you not creating a dream life, creating for yourself a religion to suit your own desires, as indeed they all do! Supposing all this too were a dream; a fantasy; thoughts of beauty only!"

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

"Turn from me Satan," said the monk, and left Angelo. "There is a devil, a personal devil; — to-day I saw him!" muttered the monk. "Once I reached him a finger; he seized my whole hand!—No," he sighed; "the evil is in myself,—and in this man is evil, though it does not crush him; he goes with head erect enjoying his well-being;—and I clutch for my well-being in the comfort of religion. — If it were but comfort; if everything here, like the world I forsook, were but thoughts of beauty! It is all illusion, like the rosy loveliness of the clouds of evening, like the billowy blue-veiled beauty of the far mountains. Near at hand, how different they are!—Eternity, you are like the vast unbounded calm-faced ocean, that glances, calls to us, fills us with forebodings; and if we answer the call we sink, we disappear,—we die, we cease to be!—Deceiver!—away! down!"

Tearless, lost in thought, he sat on his hard bench, kneeled—to whom? The stone cross in the wall? No; it was through habit he knelt with bended head.

The deeper he examined his own heart, the darker it seemed to be. "Nothing within, nothing without! a squandered life!" and this thought-snowball rolled, and grew, and crushed him—blotted him out.

"In no one can I confide or tell of this inward gnawing worm! my secret is my captive; if I release it, its captive am I!" And the God-strength in him drove and strove.

"Lord! Lord!" he cried in his despair, "be merciful; give me trust! Thy gift I cast away, cast from me my mission in this world; I lacked strength; thou didst not give me strength. Immortality, the Psyche within me,—away! down! —it shall be buried like that Psyche, my best life-vision!—never shall it rise from the grave!"

The star glowed in the rosy light, the star that yet will be quenched and pass away whilst the soul still lives and glows; the trembling ray fell on the white wall, but it wrote nothing there of the glory of God, of the mercy, of the love passing understanding, whose voice is heard in the breast of the believer.

"The inner Psyche never dies!—Live in consciousness?—can the unimaginable be the real?—yes, yes, unimaginable is my own self; unimaginable art thou, O God! — all thy creation unimaginable; — a marvel of might, of glory,—of love!"—

His eyes brightened, their light darkened. The beat of the church-bell was the last sound that passed over him, the

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dead monk. He was buried in earth brought from Jerusalem, mixed with the dust of other unknown dead.

Years afterwards his bones were removed, as had been those of the monks dead before him. They were arranged in the brown monk's habit, the string of beads put in the hand, and set in a niche made of human bones found in the burial-ground of the cloister. The sun shone without; within, the incense floated fragrantly, the mass was read.

Years passed.

The bones fell apart and mingled; the skulls were set up; they formed the whole of an outer wall of the church. His was there, in the burning sunshine; there were so many, many dead; no one now knew their names; no one knew his name. And see! within the two eye-sockets something living moved in the sunshine;—what was it?—a variegated lizard ran in the hollow forehead, gliding in and out of the big, empty eye-sockets. It was now the only life in that head where once great thoughts and glowing dreams had stirred, love of art and the beautiful had soared, from whose eyes the hot tears had gushed, and wherein had dwelt the hope of immortality. The lizard sprang, and disappeared; the forehead mouldered, became dust, and mingled with dust.

It was centuries afterwards. The clear star shone unchanged, as it had shone through thousands of years; the air glowed redly, fresh as roses, blushing as with blood.

Where once was a narrow street and the remains of an ancient temple there now stood a convent. In the garden a grave was being dug; a young nun had died, and was on this morning to be buried. The spade struck stone, dazzlingly white; the white marble could be seen; it rounded to a shoulder; more was revealed. The spade was used more carefully; a woman's head was uncovered.—butterfly-wings. From the grave where the young nun was to be laid, they raised, in the rosy glowing morning, a lovely Psyche-shape, carved from white marble. "It is delightful; perfect; a work of art of the best period!" they said. Who could the master be? No one knew; no one but the clear thousand-year burning star; it knew the course of his earthly life, his trial, his weakness. His mortal body it knew; — that was dead, departed, as the earthly must; — but the expression of his noblest striving, the most glorious, which revealed the god-like in him, the Psyche, that never dies, that outshines fame,—a gleam from it here upon earth, — it remained, seen and known, admired and loved.

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

In the rosy light the clear beams of the star trembled on the Psyche, and on the blissful smile that lingered on the lips and in the eyes of those who, admiring, saw as it were the very soul carved from the block of marble.

That which is earthly passes away, and is forgotten; only the star in the eternal knows of it. That which is heavenly beams from fame, and when fame itself is quenched—still the Psyche lives.