

## THE LAST OF THE GRACES.\*

*By the Author of "The Arabs."*

LET the chill Stoic look upon thy reign,  
 O Beauty! as a pageant, fleet and vain,—  
 Whate'er, through life, his varied course may be,  
 Man's pilgrim heart shall turn, sweet shrine, to thee.  
 Not thine the fault, if false allurements claim  
 The fool's blind homage in thy sacred name :  
*They* are not fair who boast but outward grace—  
 The naught but beautiful of form or face ;  
*They* are the lovely—they in whom unite  
 Earth's fleeting charms with Virtue's heavenly light ;  
 Who, though they wither, yet, with faded bloom,  
 Bear not their all of sweetness to the tomb.

I had a dream, which, in my waking hour,  
 Seemed less the work of Fancy's airy power  
 Than Reason's deep creation ; for the hue  
 Of life was o'er it :—life approves it true.

\* Written as an Illustration of the Skeleton Trio in the Vignette Title-page.

Methought that I was wandering in a room,  
Whose air was naught but music and perfume ;  
A thousand lights were flaming o'er my head ;  
And all around me flitted feet, whose tread  
Roused not the listening echoes, for each bound  
Was but the mute response to softest sound.  
Sweet eyes, whose looks were language, and bland  
tongues,  
Whose accents died into Eolian songs,  
Were there the things of worship ; and man's sigh  
The incense of his heart's idolatry.  
High swelled each breast within that proud saloon ;  
For midnight there was Fashion's sparkling noon ;  
The vain beheld a sun in every gem ;—  
That room was all the universe to them.  
But they were not the happy :—who can hide  
Th' intranquil heart ?—their looks their lips belied.  
Stiff in the gorgeous masquerade of state,  
The miserably rich, the joyless great,  
The beautiful, whose beauty was a care  
More deep than wrinkles, sighed, yet *would* not share  
E'en the dull calm which mere exhaustion throws  
O'er silken couches—soft without repose.  
Foremost, and most conspicuous of the dance,  
I now beheld three glowing forms advance,

Who seemed the envy or the boast of all:—  
For they were deemed the Graces of the ball.  
The first,—in spangled vesture—as she came,  
Shot from her eye keen Wit's electric flame,  
Whose sparks, tho' playful, like the lightning's dart,  
Fall on the cold, alike, and feeling heart.  
The next had veiled beneath a dazzling dress  
Of vain adornments her own loveliness,  
Resembling but that elegant deceit,  
The rose of Art—superb, without a sweet.  
The last was gentlest; but her soul—all love,  
Unveiled as Venus in her Paphian grove—  
Burned on her lips and quickly-heaving breast,  
As they were things but purposed to be prest.  
With arms entwined, these Graces of a night,—  
WILD WIT, FALSE TASTE, and AMOROUS DELIGHT,  
Praised by the many, by the few admired,  
Performed their part, then suddenly retired:—  
The dance stood still—men watched the closing door!  
Sighed—turned—and all went gaily as before.

Contemplating the scene, my sight grew dim;—  
The ceaseless whirling made my senses swim:  
Quick o'er my frame there came a torpid chill;  
The tapers died; and all was dark and still;



All, save the glimmerings of a sullen lamp,  
And the cold droppings of sepulchral damp,  
Which, falling round me, through the lurid gloom,  
Told that I trod the charnel of the tomb:  
It was a mausoleum, vast and high,  
Whose soil was reeking with mortality:  
There, in the midst, O sight of horror! stood  
Three forms whose aspect chilled my vital blood:  
Grouped on a grave's cold slab, like things that  
breathed,  
Three skeletons their fleshless arms entwined;  
But moveless—silent as the ponderous stone  
Whereon they stood:—and I was all alone!  
“O for the Ethiop's sable charms to hide  
Those hideous vestiges of Beauty's pride!”  
To this I heard a hollow voice reply,  
“Behold the GRACES!—mortal, feast thine eye!”  
But I did turn me, sickening with disgust;  
For I beheld them mouldering into dust.  
“And is this all, O Beauty!—this the close  
Of thy brief transit?—this thy last repose?”  
As thus I spake, a slow expanding ray  
Broke through the gloomy mist, like opening day;  
Unfolding to my gaze a spacious scene

Of hill and valley, clothed in fadeless green,  
On every side, a thousand varied flowers  
Seemed dropping from the sun, in odorous showers:  
And there were groves and avenues, all graced  
With Temples and with monuments of Taste;  
Where Sculpture, Painting—all that polished Art,  
Combined with useful Science, could impart,  
Blended harmonious; whilst th' ethereal soul  
Of Music poured its sweetness o'er the whole.  
I looked around; and, in the east there shone  
Three stars of beauty, burning 'neath the sun,  
E'en with increase of splendour; for their rays  
Were such as wooed the brightness of his blaze.  
But tho' they seemed like spheres of heavenly birth,  
Their path was not in heaven, but o'er the Earth;  
And they advanced towards me:—as they came,  
Their orbs dilated into thinner flame;  
And, softly from the circumambient light,  
Three Angel forms emerged upon my sight.  
The first—if either first engaged mine eye—  
Bore in her own the tear of sympathy:  
Ne'er looked the sun upon a fairer cheek;  
Ne'er met his glance a glance more mild and meek.  
The next had, in her delicate caress,  
Far more of majesty than playfulness:  
And tho' her eye was kind—'twas chastely clear  
As fountain-drops, beneath the moon's pale sphere.

The last—possessed of woman's sprightlier charm—  
Bloomed like the blush-rose, pure, get inly warm :  
Pure as its leaves the thoughts her bosom bore—  
Her generous heart as glowing as its core.  
Linked hand in hand, I saw them onward move,  
Until they faced the rosy bower of Love ;—  
When, mingled with the music, breathing near,  
These gladsome accents fell upon mine ear :  
“ Hail, PITY ! CHASTITY ! BENEVOLENCE !  
Sweet is the calm your gentle smiles dispense !  
Hail, Sister GRACES, who adorn the Fair !  
Fresh be your garlands—happy they who wear !”  
And, thus proceeding, all on which they cast  
Their radiant glances, brightened as they passed :  
And I did follow them with eye and heart,  
Until I saw their fading forms depart :  
Again they slowly melted into light ;  
Again like stars became distinctly bright ;  
And, hovering o'er the dimmed horizon, shed  
Soft rays like those which linger o'er the dead—  
Those lovely halos which dispel the gloom  
When Memory hangs o'er Virtue's early tomb.  
Thus did I gaze until some flickering beam  
Of Fancy passed, and broke my fitful Dream.