THE ROSE OF THE ROCK.

Margaret Chalmers

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
--GRAY.

“THE summer blooms, let us a while exchange
“Lerwegian scenes for rural, calm delights:
“Come, let us skim the undulating wave,
“Inhale the balmy breeze from yonder mead,
“Which, gilded by the cheering sunny ray,
“Across the silvery bay allures the eye.”

Hope’s vivid promise well nigh realiz’d,
We Hangcliff’s* steep and lofty summit gain,
Which o’er the deep in awful form projects;
And, in one wide and heart-dilating view,
Gives Thulè’s utmost boundaries to the eye.

Eastward, beyond where keenest sight can pierce,
The German Ocean rolls his frequent wave
To Beraca’s coast remote. Far in the north,
Rise Vaalifield’s high ridge and Saxaford;+
In yonder space, that points to Faro’s Isles
And Iceland’s lasting snows, towers Rona’s Hill,*
Majestic ‘midst his tributary mountains.
Turning thence the obedient eye to where
The setting sun gleams on Orcadian shores,
See cloud-girt Foula+ fam’d in classic lore;
Then circling still the penetrating gaze,
Lo! Fitful+ lifts on high his aged head;
While, far beyond the south extreme, appears
(Seen as an azure cloud) the lone Fair Isle.

The spot where now we stand, exhibiting
Nature’s stupendous grandeur, strikes the mind
With solemn thought. Ye precipices rude!
Whose shagged tops usurp the airy reign,
Whose brinks abrupt a near approach forbid;
The dizzied head averts, the eye withdraws,
It seems a danger even to dare a glance;
Yet do you in magnific language speak,
And to the great Creator lift the soul.
The tranquil air is suddenly disturb’d
By wings innumerable rapid beat,
By harsh discordant screaming wildly pierc’d.
Forth from their homes the feather’d nations fly,
“Mix’d and evolv’d,” whirling a thousand ways,
Scar’d at the sight of human visitants.

Fear not, ye fluttering parents, we nor wish,
Nor treacherous gun, with deadly metal charg’d,
Bring to destroy your callow, harmless brood;
Retire into your sedge-built, rocky homes,
Where, castled high, ye dwell amid the cliffs,
There, range o’er range, your varied plumage show.

The billows’ rage, aiding the power of time
To which full oft yields even the solid rock,
Had, from the parent island, wide disjoin’d
A craggy cliff, whose deep resounding base
Was insulated by the circling wave.
Half way adown the bleak and rugged steep,
Secur’d from most intrepid schoolboy’s reach,
Nature, amid a scene whose wild sublime
Might chill the blood and even to horror rouse,
Had dropt a lovely solitary flower,
As remembrancer of another style
Of beauty, by full contrast heighten’d seen.

Of the rose tribe its origin confest,
Full blown, all glowing, dazzling to the eye.
Surprise and admiration seize my mind,
As on the blooming stranger, pleas’d I gaze.
Yet ’twas an unimparted, miser’s joy,
For caution’s dictates instantly impose
Reluctant silence, since amongst the groupe
Was one whose childish, rash, impetuous years,
Less listen’d to the strict restraint of care,
Than curiosity’s supreme impulse;
Which might have urg’d her giddy heedless steps
Toward the precipice, near view to gain
Of the fair blushing beauty of the rock.
This dread forbade participation; mute,
Linger ing, absorp’t, irresolute I stand.
Sweet Isle of Noss! a greater wonder far
Than rose-crown’d rock thy banks did then afford,
Since there a secret was by woman kept.
Now evening call'd our wandering party home,
And the discovery of the hidden flower
Becoming then the theme of our discourse,
With eager, keen, and deep reproachful looks,
The blooming traveller dejected stood;

The spoil of meads, the pride of fountain brink,
Unheeded dropt from her relaxing hand;
Not Eden's fair, amid the fragrant bowers,
More ardently desir'd forbidden fruit,
Than now, with disappointments arrow stung,
Her young descendant doth forbidden flower.

"O wherefore spake you not. O why conceal
"From me a sight so beauteous and rare?
"Let us return, O let us quick return;
"For every flower will droop and wither soon."
"Sure child, to day full many a verdant field,
"Where flower with flower vied, you wander'd through."
"I did, and with delight; yet would I far,
"Far rather see the Rock Rose than them all."
"Reflect, we either twice must cross the sea,
"And o'er two islands must retrace our steps,
"Or we must brave the surge 'round Bressa's Ord,
"And stem the impetuous force of Baarda stream,"
"Ere we can reach the spot from whence 'tis seen."
"I care not, I would travel Zetland o'er,
"To see the Rose that grows amid the Rock."

* The Dutch name of Noss Head.
+ Vaalifield and Saxaford, two hills in the Island of Unst.
* The highest hill in Zetland.
+ Now generally allowed by the most intelligent modern historians and geographers, to have been the Thulè seen by the Roman fleet, that circumnavigated Britain, during the last campaign of Agricola.
+ Fitful Head, a lofty, precipitous cape, at the south western extremity of the country.
* The Ord and the Baard, two promontories on the south side of the island of Bressa.