LEONILDA: A ROMAN ROMANCE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649452019

Leonilda: A Roman Romance of the Sixteenth Century by Felix Meldred

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

FELIX MELDRED

LEONILDA: A ROMAN ROMANCE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Trieste

LEONILDA.

A Roman Romance of the Sixteenth Century.

BY

FELIX MELDRED.

ORA CHE NUOVA STORIA E QUESTA?
UN' ANTICHISSIMA STORIA SI
VOLETE, DI AMORE, VENDETTA,
CONFIGURAZIONI, - - -
BASTA! BASTA! AVANTI!

ITALIAN COMEDY.

LONDON:
JOHN MITCHELL,
BOOKSELLER AND PUBLISHER TO HER MAJESTY,
33, OLD BOND STREET.
1857.

LONDON:
HENRY VIZETELLY, PRINTER AND ENGRAVER,
GOUGH SQUARE, FLEET STREET.

CONTENTS.

PREFACE.

Some fifteen years since, I found myself in Rome an idle man. Surrounded by art and artists, I took up the brush from sympathy; but the difficulty of representing successfully that which I saw, or that which I thought, convinced me of the want of education or taste, and perhaps both. In all the arts there are a class of men apt to confound a keen appreciation for a power of producing. Such was my condition. To be convinced of an error is generally very difficult (when we have committed it ourselves); to confess an error, almost painful. Nevertheless, I seldom went out forgetting my sketch-book, which, by the way, I hid as jealously, and looked over as frequently, as a young lady does her first love letter.

One day, whilst strolling in a beautiful garden near Rome, I thought that I might produce pictures with words, if I could not do so with the pencil or the brush. "Why," said I, "should not a man deliberately sit down before an object and endeavour to give the tone, form, and sentiment of that object, as well with the parts of speech as with the parts of colour?" Thus I went on speculating, and thinking I had made a discovery, as if there were no such thing as poetry in the world! But surely we do not write poetry, as painters paint pictures—direct from nature. Poets work more from recollection. They are always telling a dream about what they have seen. I was de-

termined to try if there was anything to be got out of word-painting, direct from nature. I began with the stump of a tree, a window, a vase; just as people do when they begin to learn drawing. I found there was much beauty in objects which poets in their pride had neglected; refused to write about or think about. Many a beautiful pebble is passed over by the hunter for gems. I made many little sketches, which I thought very good. If we did not nurse, and love, and make grow, our early efforts, we should have nothing but infancy in all the arts. Let no man smile at "early efforts;" they are, perhaps, the most joy-creating of all things in a life dedicated to art. When we have acquired the knowledge of difficulties, we have cut the wings of the mind; never again will it fly up into high heaven, like the lark, and sing boldly and loudly, full of confidence and hope, believing all the world is delighted to listen; no, conscious defects will make that mind tremble, and its voice tremble too—feel itself small and even ugly. Self-knowledge is a looking-glass, which, if we were to speak the truth, we are all of us half afraid to look into.

I soon ascertained, beyond form and colour, objects suggested reflection; then I found my sketches, after a time, accompanied by thoughts which grew out of things. After all, I fancied that this must be a new mode of verse writing! for, be it known, I found my little attempts ever wandering into rhythm. I fell into a melody of words as unconsciously as winds become musical when they play about a stringed instrument.

I next began to add rhymes to my word-sketches, which gave a pleasing finish, although they created a difficulty. There are very few pictures that do not look better for a frame. Weak and foolish verses are more tolerable when they are musical. If you do not avail yourself of the caps and bells of art, you should possess the attributes of a great sculptor, whose crea-

tions are in themselves so beautiful, that any addition in the way of ornament positively frets the understanding and annoys the eye. I found myself writing, eventually, the Spenserian stanza. I knew this pleasing prison, in which the "Faerie Queene" lives like a gaudy bird in a golden cage, is not without its detractions. The frequent recurrence of the rhyme will sometimes impose a weak line; and dialogue is difficult to work when you have so many periods and corresponding sounds to look after. But all this is perhaps compensated for in the Spenserian stanza by a completeness, dignity, and melody, which must be ever pleasing to the readers of poetry, and which is so admirably suited to descriptive passages, the prominent features in this poem.

I had no idea at the period of my studies that I should ever write a long poem, and solemnly present it to the world. The continual failures of others acted for a long time like friendly warnings. There is nothing under heaven which the world treats with so much silent contempt as indifferent verse. Bad pictures are hung up and looked at; bad music is listened to, and sometimes admired; bad sculpture is good for a garden; but indifferent poetry, what is that good for? The world will forgive many weaknesses, and even crimes, in a man, before it will forgive his silly verses.

Practical people tell you the world cares little about poetry in our days. I cannot believe such assertions, because poetry is being invented and practically used by us all throughout our lives, although we may be ashamed to own the hidden cause of everything which pleases the eye or charms the heart. Men are always writing little poems about the people they love—about nature, about the past and the future. Half the pleasure of life consists in dressing up the events of life in poetry. Some people cannot help writing, and many cannot help printing what others only think about.