

A GERMAN APOLOGUE.*

THE other day Jupiter gave Mercury a remarkable commission. Whether the God had grown older since the times of Plato and of Horace, or that the tempers of Diana and Minerva had not sweetened, or that there was something in the existing state of the world which alarmed him for the continuance of his authority, we know not; but certain it is, that great complaints had been made for some time past against three persons, whose names will surprise the reader, in conjunction with such a circumstance; to wit, the Graces.¹

One body of persons represented, that they were grown much to philosophic for their taste: another (which seemed odd) that they were much too vivacious. A third asserted (which was still more singular, considering they are goddesses) that they had no religion. Another admitted they might have some little religion, because they are the same as the Charities; but that there was nothing vital in it, and that they had been heard to speak ill of Pluto. A number of old ladies and gentlemen declared that they were no longer any such things as Graces. But the most remarkable sight was to see all the puritans and debauchees assembled together, and maintaining that the Graces were no longer modest.

By way of counter-petition to all this, a numerous body of persons, dressed in the extremest point of the fashion, declared that they knew the Graces very well, that they were the best good-natured creatures in the world, and had helped

* Author: Leigh Hunt / Transcribed by Elena Spandri; Annotated by Maria Elena Capitani.

them to dress that morning. We are sorry to say, that this petition was rejected as frivolous and vexatious. The presenters however did not appear to be disconcerted. They smiled in a manner which seemed to say that conviction ought to follow it; and their smile, like that of the whole assembly, was changed into a convulsion of laughter by a poor crazy poet, who half stalking and half tottering forward, with an old laurel on his head, asserted that he could settle the whole matter at once; and being asked in that way, replied, "*I am the three Graces.*"

The Graces were then called into court, but nobody came. Again they were called; but a dead silence prevailed over the vast assembly. Some old prophecies made Jupiter look uneasy. After waiting as long as he well could, he had them called, more solemnly, a third time. Not a Grace was to be seen. The old ladies and gentlemen could not help chuckling at this, as a proof of what they had said; but one of the most ancient of the females coming forward, and swearing she had seen them, and now say them, in the likeness of three beautiful women of her own age, in stomachers and toupees, the laugh was turned in favour of the young ones. The laugh seemed to be echoed at a great distance but three of the most charming laughs in the world; which made somebody cry out, "*There are the Graces!*" upon which he was fined in a great passion by Mr. Justice Minos,² for interrupting business. Indeed all the Judges, but one, seemed to be in a great passion; which was thought to be owing to a loyal interest they took in the anxiety of the King of Gods and Men. The one in question was in so great a passion, that he seemed to be in none at all. He was only considering all the while, how he should put the Graces to the torture, if ever he caught them.

At length Jupiter, not knowing what was to be done,

asked the opinion of the great men present, particularly of the three ordinary looking persons, who though not of the priesthood, piqued themselves upon being the holiest of his vice-gerents. Their opinion was (and it was also the unanimous opinion of the judges, of the most orthodox of the priests, of the female writers on Tartarus, and indeed of every one who had a right to give an opinion; that is to say, who had a respectable superfluity of possession, particularly of nonsense) that the three goddesses, hitherto known by the name of Graces, ought to be deprived of their name and offices, and other three ladies, properly deified for the occasion, appointed in their stead. The warrant was accordingly drawn up by three commissioners instantly nominated for that purpose; to wit, the dissipate Judge above-mentioned, one of the female writers on Tartarus, and an old Scotch lord, whose past profligacy of life, and extreme filthiness of conversation, did not hinder him from knowing what was quite right and delicate in his old age, and having a becoming zeal for it. The warrant was drawn up with a rapidity proportionate to the zeal. It purported, that whereas the three very irregular, anti-Tartar, and indecorous personages, the Charities, better known by the style and title of the Three Graces, had utterly lost, ruined, and abolished their reputations, as well by certain wicked compliances with pretended humanists and philosophers, as by certain other abominable non-compliances with their right lords, masters, and mistresses,—the said Three Graces, commonly so called, are from this day forward, in their own persons and existence, utterly abolished, done away, va-viad, driven out with uplifted hands and eyes, reprobated, non-elected, and altogether nihili-vili-pilified,—any apparent life, vitality, beauty, or entity of their notwithstanding:—And in the room of the said Three Graces, commonly so called, three certain other

Graces, hereafter to be more especially nominated, are to prevail and be received with all due worship in their stead, and to preside in particular over all elegancies, proprieties, decorums, withdrawing-rooms, female influences, prudes, prostitutes (for their better undoing) old generals, nice distinctions, in short, all that exquisite moral order of things genteel, which, in the midst of every vice, maintains, as it were, every virtue, and by the mere strength of a close, thick, and hard-grained integrity in the few, would suffice, if necessary, for the utter rottenness of virtue and felicity in all the rest:—The said three new Graces to be of equal heights, bearings and accomplishments, like the former ones; only to be dressed, instead of undressed, except when they go to court; and to be undeniably beautiful, unexceptionably orthodox, and irreversibly chaste.

For the discovery of these requisite trinal triplicities, Mercury was immediately dispatched on his travels. We luckily need not accompany him, for he sought every where, like the Squire of Dames;³ and though he was not in a dilemma, so extremely one and indivisible, as that in which the Squire is represented by the courtly poet who has related his adventures,* yet he was hampered quite enough. He could not for the life of him meet with the three ultra-qualified perfections altogether. Many ladies were undeniably beautiful, but not unexceptionably orthodox. The lovelier their style of beauty, the more heterodox they were as Tartars. A great number were undeniably beautiful, but by no means irreversibly chaste. Some who claimed the merit of being irreversibly chaste, as well as unexceptionably orthodox, were a great way off indeed from being undeniably beautiful,—not to say truly *what* they were. In short, the young

* See Faerie Queene, Book 3^d.

deity, who carried his scrupulosity of proof somewhat further, we suspect, than his employers intended, found plenty of women who pretended to all the qualifications, but none who completely stood the test of investigation. In direct proportion to their claims in some respects, they were apt to fail in others; and even when they made no pretensions at all, but were at once unaffectedly beautiful, virtuous, and chaste, Mercury found that in proportion to the trusting simplicity of their goodness, the *irreversible* part of the business stood very awkwardly in the way.

At length, to his great joy, he had accounts which he could rely on, of three persons who completely answered the description in request. Without further delay, he wrote about them to Jupiter, and proceeded to the place they lived in to claim them: when unluckily he had the mortification to find, that they had been taken away by Pluto the day before, for the Three Furies.⁴

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EDITORIAL NOTES

¹ Also known as the Charities. In Greek mythology, sister goddesses who personified charm, grace, beauty, human creativity, and fertility. Hesiod describes three Graces (Aglaea, Euphrosyne, and Thalia), but their number varies depending on the source.

² In Greek mythology, the mighty king of Crete. Minos was the son of Zeus and Europa. After his death, he became a judge of the dead in Hades.

³ A comic character in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (III. vii). This knight is assigned an unusual task by his lady, Columbell, who challenges him to seduce as many women as possible in a year's time. After being successful with three hundred ladies, he is sent forth to receive an equal number of rejections. However, in three years he finds only three virgins refusing his services and views this as a proof that women do not value chastity, the virtue upon which Book III is centred.

⁴ Also known as the Erinyes or the Eumenides. In Greek mythology, the chthonic goddesses of vengeance and retribution who punished men for crimes against the natural order.