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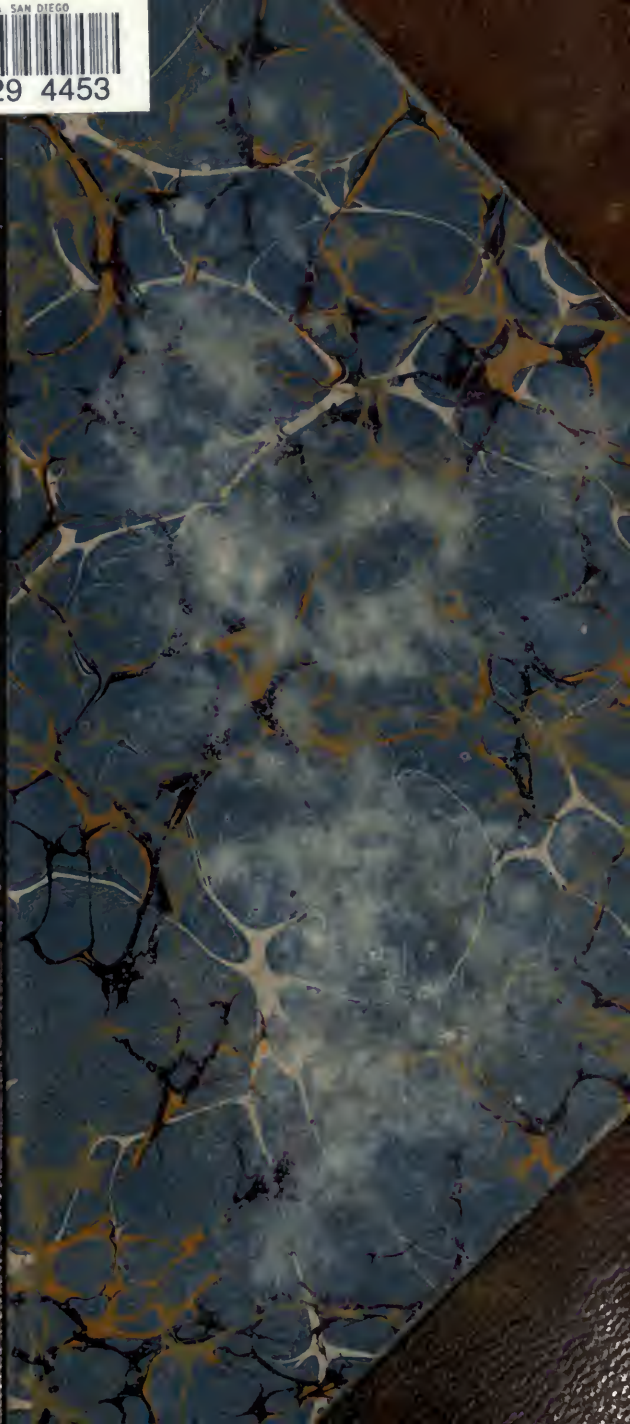
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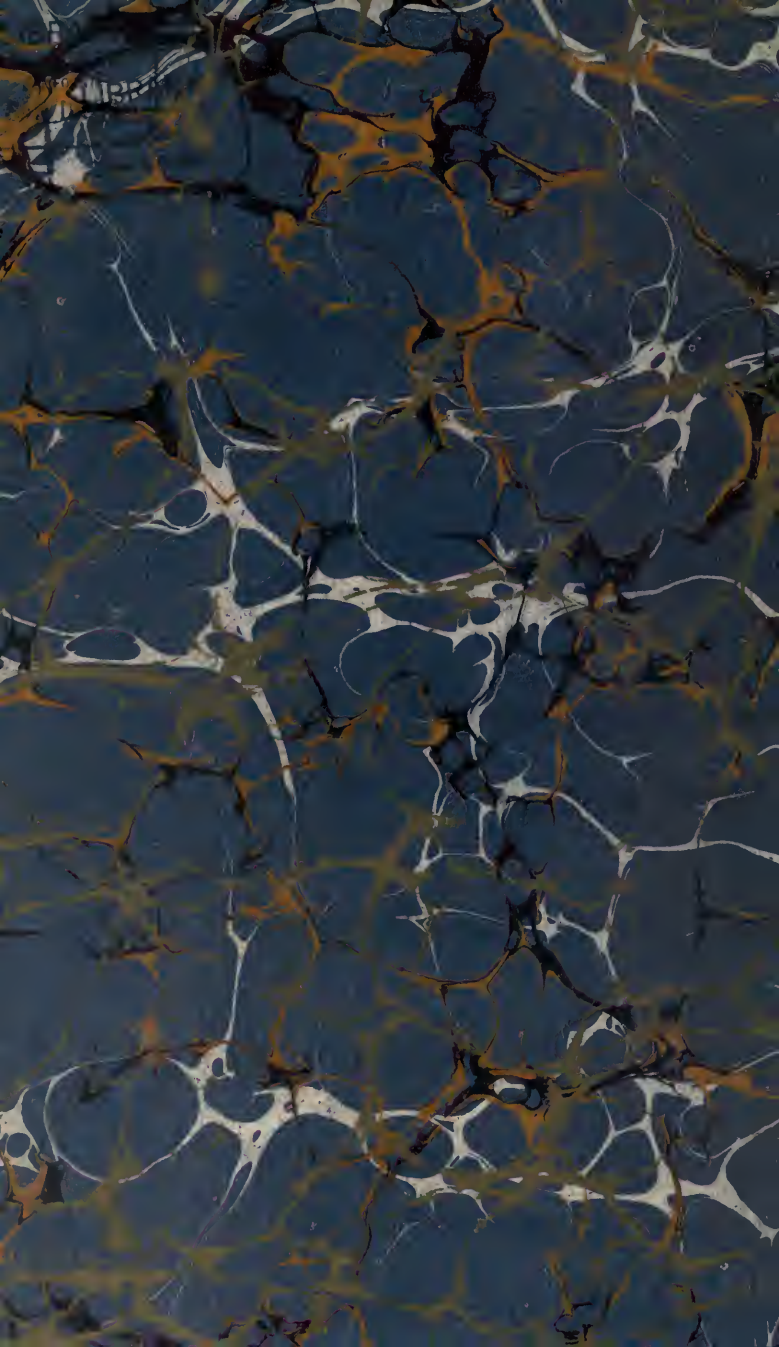
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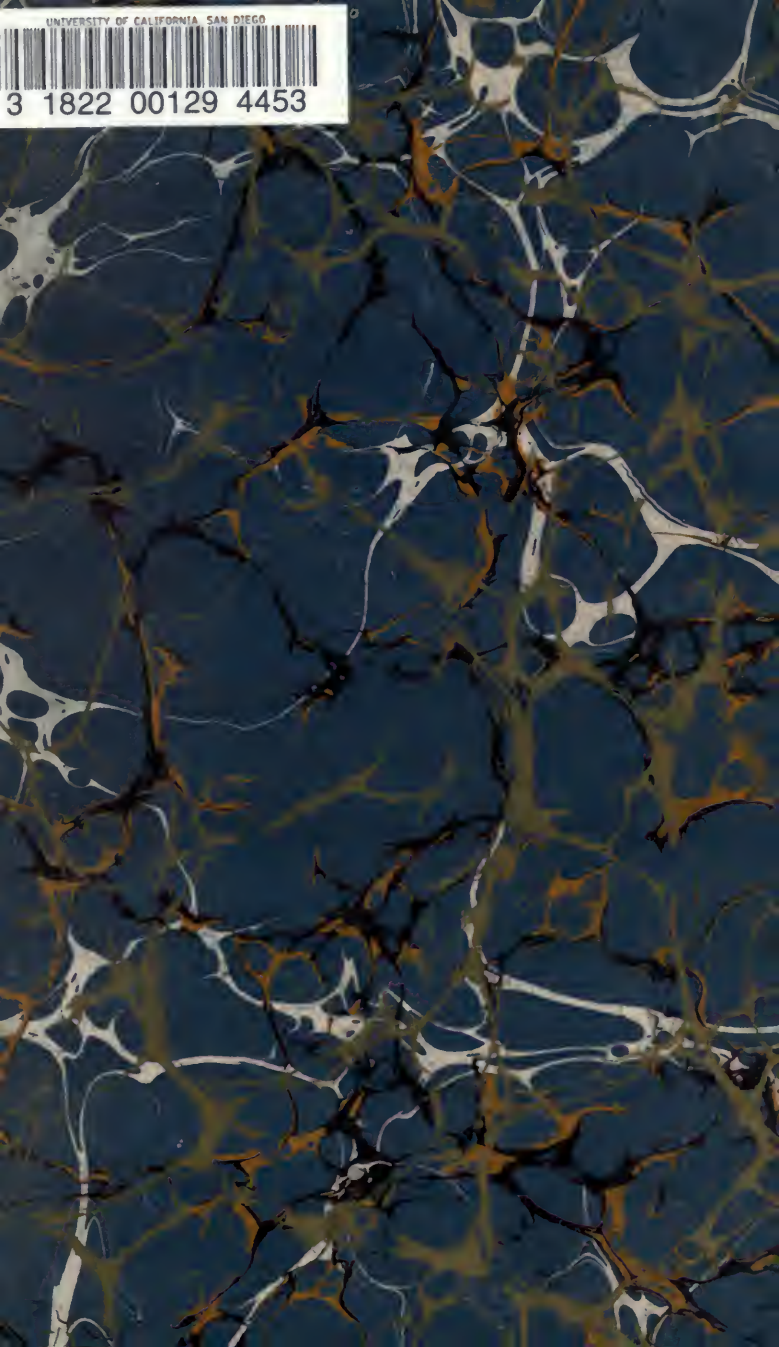




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THE
LOVES OF THE POETS.

VOL. II.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY S. AND R. BENTLEY,
Dorset Street, Fleet Street.

THE
ROMANCE OF BIOGRAPHY;
OR
MEMOIRS OF WOMEN
LOVED AND CELEBRATED BY POETS,
FROM
THE DAYS OF THE TROUBADOURS
TO THE PRESENT AGE;
A SERIES OF ANECDOTES INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE THE INFLUENCE
WHICH FEMALE BEAUTY AND VIRTUE HAVE EXERCISED OVER THE
CHARACTERS AND WRITINGS OF MEN OF GENIUS.

BY MRS. JAMESON,

*Authoress of the Diary of an Ennuyée; Lives of Celebrated Female Sovereigns;
Female Characters of Shakspeare's Plays; Beauties of the
Court of Charles the Second.*

THIRD EDITION,
IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

LONDON:
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY.

MDCCCXXXVII.



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THE LOVES OF THE POETS.

CHAPTER I.

CAREW'S CELIA.—LUCY SACHEVEREL.

FROM the reign of Charles the First may be dated that revolution in the spirit and form of our lyric poetry, which led to its subsequent degradation. The first Italian school of poetry, to which we owed our Surreys, our Spensers, and our Miltons, had now declined. The high contemplative tone of passion, the magnanimous and chivalrous homage paid to women, gradually gave way before the French taste and French gallantry, introduced, or at least encouraged and

rendered fashionable, by Henrietta Maria and her gay household. The muse of amatory poetry (I presume there *is* such a Muse, though I know not to which of the Nine the title properly applies,) no longer walked the earth star-crowned and vestal-robed, “col dir pien d’ intelletti, dolci ed alti,”—“with love upon her lips, and looks commercing with the skies;”—she suited her garb to the fashion of the times, and tripped along in guise of an Arcadian princess, half regal, half pastoral, trailing a sheep-hook crowned with flowers, and sparkling with foreign ornaments,

Pale glistening pearls and rainbow-coloured gems.

Then in the “brisk and giddy paced times” of Charles the Second, she flaunted an airy coquette, or an unblushing courtesan, (“unveiled her eyes—unclasped her zone;”) and when these sinful doings were banished, she took the hue of the new morals—new fashions—new manners,—and we find her a court prude, swimming in a hoop and red-heeled shoes, “conscious of the rich brocade,” and ogling

behind her fan ; or else in the opposite extreme, like a *bergère* in a French ballet, stuck over with sentimental common-places and artificial flowers.

This, in general terms, was the progress of the lyric muse, from the poets of Queen Elizabeth's days down to the wits of Queen Anne's. Of course, there are modifications and exceptions, which will suggest themselves to the poetical reader ; but it does not enter into the plan of this sketch to treat matters thus critically and profoundly. To return then to the days of Charles the First.

It must be confessed that the union of Italian sentiment and imagination with French vivacity and gallantry, was, in the commencement, exceedingly graceful, before all poetry was lost in wit, and gallantry sunk into licentiousness.

Carew, one of the first who distinguished himself in this style, has been most unaccountably eclipsed by the reputation of Waller, and deserved

better than to have had his name hitched into line between Sprat and Sedley ;

Sprat, Carew, Sedley, and a hundred more.*

As an amatory poet, he is far superior to Waller : he had equal smoothness and fancy, and much more variety, tenderness, and earnestness ; if his love was less ambitiously, and even less honourably placed, it was, at least, more deep seated, and far more fervent. The real name of the lady he has celebrated under the poetical appellation of Celia, is not known—it is only certain that she was no “ fabled fair,”—and that his love was repaid with falsehood.

Hard fate ! to have been once possessed
As victor of a heart,
Achieved with labour and unrest,
And then forced to depart !

From the irregular habits of Carew, it is possible he might have set the example of inconstancy ; and yet this is but a poor excuse for *her*.

* Pope.

Carew spent his life in the Court of Charles the First, who admired and loved him for his wit and amiable manners, though he reprov'd his *libertinage*. In the midst of that dissipation, which has polluted some of his poems, he was full of high poetic feeling, and a truly generous lover: for even while he woos his fair one in the most soul-moving terms of flowery adulation and tender entreaty, he puts her on her guard against his own arts, and thus sweetly pleads against himself;

Rather let the lover pine,
Than his pale cheek should assign
A perpetual blush to thine!

And his admiration of female chastity is elsewhere frequently, as well as forcibly, expressed.—With all his elegance and tenderness, Carew is never feeble; and in his laments there is nothing whining or unmanly. After lavishing at the feet of his mistress the most passionate devotion, and the most exquisite flattery, hear him rebuke her pride with all the spirit of an offended poet!

Know, Celia ! since thou art so proud,
 'Twas I that gave thee thy renown ;
 Thou hadst in the forgotten crowd
 Of common beauties, lived unknown,
 Had not my verse exhaled thy name,
 And with it impt the wings of fame.

That killing power is none of thine,
 I gave it to thy voice and eyes,
 Thy sweets, thy graces, all are mine.
 Thou art my star—shin'st in my skies ;
 Then dart not from thy borrowed sphere
 Light'ning on him, who fixed thee there.

The identity of his Celia is now lost in a name, —and she deserves it: perhaps had she appreciated the love she inspired, and been true to that she professed, she might have won her elegant lover back to virtue, and wreathed her fame with his for ever. Disappointed in the object of his idolatry, Carew plunged madly into pleasure, and thus hastened his end. He died, as Clarendon tells us, with “ deep remorse for his past excesses, and every manifestation of Christianity his best friends could desire.”

Besides his Celia, Carew has celebrated several other ladies of the Court, and particularly Lady Mary Villars; the Countess of Anglesea; Lady Carlisle, the theme of all the poets of her age, and her lovely daughter, Lady Anne Hay, on whom he wrote an elegy, which begins with some lines never surpassed in harmony and tenderness.

I heard the virgin's sigh ! I saw the sleek
 And polish'd courtier channel his fresh cheek
 With real tears; the new betrothed maid
 Smil'd not that day; the graver senate laid
 Their business by; of all the courtly throng
 Grief seal'd the heart, and silence bound the tongue !

* * * * *

We will not bathe thy corpse with a forc'd tear,
 Nor shall thy train borrow the blacks they wear;
 Such vulgar spice and gums embalm not thee,
 That art the theme of Truth, not Poetry.

Here Carew has fallen into the vulgar error, that *poetry* and *fiction* are synonymous.

Lady Anne Wentworth,* daughter of the first

* The only daughter of this Lady Anne Wentworth, married Sir W. Noel, and was the ancestress of Lady Byron, the widow of the poet.

Earl of Cleveland, who, after making terrible havoc in the heart of the Lord Chief Justice Finch, married Lord Lovelace, is another of Carew's fair heroines. For her marriage he wrote the epithalamium,

Break not the slumbers of the bride, &c.

As Carew is not a *popular* poet, nor often found in a lady's library, I add a few extracts of peculiar beauty.

TO CELIA.

Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
When June is past, the fading rose ;
For in your beauties orient dee
Those flowers as in their causes sleep.

Ask me no more, whither do stray
The golden atoms of the day ;
For in pure love, Heaven did prepare
Those powders to enrich your hair.

Ask me no more, whither doth haste
The nightingale, when May is past ;
For in your sweet dividing throat
She winters, and keeps warm her note.

Ask me no more, where those stars light
That downwards fall in dead of night ;

For in your eyes they sit—and there
Fix'd become, as in their sphere.

Ask me no more, if east or west,
The phœnix builds her spicy nest ;
For unto you at last she flies,
And in your fragrant bosom dies.

Ladies, fly from Love's smooth tale,
Oaths steep'd in tears do oft prevail ;
Grief is infectious, and the air,
Inflam'd with sighs, will blast the fair :
Then stop your ears when lovers cry,
Lest yourself weep, when no soft eye
Shall with a sorrowing tear repay
That pity which you cast away.

And when thou breath'st, the winds are ready straight
To filch it from thee ; and do therefore wait
Close at thy lips, and snatching it from thence,
Bear it to heaven, where 'tis Jove's frankincense.
Fair goddess, since thy feature makes thee one,
Yet be not such for these respects alone ;
But as you are divine in outward view,
So be within as fair, as good, as true.

Hark ! how the bashful morn in vain
 Courts the amorous marigold
 With sighing blasts and weeping vain ;
 Yet she refuses to unfold.
 But when the planet of the day
 Approacheth with his powerful ray,
 Then she spreads, then she receives,
 His warmer beams into her virgin leaves.

So shalt thou thrive in love, fond boy ;
 If thy tears and sighs discover
 Thy grief, thou never shalt enjoy
 The just reward of a bold lover :
 But when with moving accents thou
 Shall constant faith and service vow,
 Thy Celia shall receive those charms
 With open ears, and with unfolded arms.

* * * * *

The gallant and accomplished Colonel Lovelace was, I believe, a relation of the Lord Lovelace who married Lady Anne Wentworth, and the friend and contemporary of Carew. His fate and history would form the groundwork of a romance ; and in his person and character he was formed to be the hero of one. He was as fearlessly brave as a knight-errant ; so handsome in

person, that he could not appear without inspiring admiration; a polished courtier; an elegant scholar; and to crown all, a lover and a poet. He wrote a volume of poems, dedicated to the praises of Lucy Sacheverel, with whom he had exchanged vows of everlasting love. Her poetical appellation, according to the affected taste of the day, was *Lucasta*. When the civil wars broke out, Lovelace devoted his life and fortunes to the service of the King; and on joining the army, he wrote that beautiful song to his mistress, which has been so often quoted,—

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, dear! so much,
Lov'd I not honour more.

The rest of his life was a series of the most cruel misfortunes. He was imprisoned on account of his enthusiastic and chivalrous loyalty; but no dungeon could subdue his buoyant spirit. His song "to Althea from Prison," is full of grace and animation, and breathes the very soul of love and honour.

When Love, with unconfined wings,
 Hovers within my gates,
And my divine Althea brings
 To whisper at the grates;

When I lie tangled in her hair,
 And fettered to her eye,
The birds that wanton in the air,
 Know no such liberty.

Stone walls do not a prison make,
 Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
 That for a hermitage.

If I have freedom in my love,
 And in my soul am free,—
Angels alone that soar above
 Enjoy such liberty.

Lovelace afterwards commanded a regiment at the siege of Dunkirk, where he was severely, and, as it was supposed, mortally wounded. False tidings of his death were brought to England; and when he returned, he found his Lucy (“O most wicked haste !”) married to another; it was a blow he never recovered. He had spent nearly his whole patrimony in the King’s service, and now became utterly reckless. After wandering about London in obscurity and penury, dissipating his scanty resources in riot with his brother cavaliers, and in drinking the health of the exiled King and confusion to Cromwell, this idol of women and envy of men,—the beautiful, brave, high-born, and accomplished Lovelace, died miserably in a little lodging in Shoe Lane. He was only in his thirty-ninth year.

The mother of Lucy Sacheverel was Lucy, daughter of Sir Henry Hastings, ancestor to the present Marquis of Hastings. How could she so belie her noble blood? I would excuse her were it possible, for she must have been a fine creature to have inspired and appreciated such a sentiment

as that contained in the first song ; but facts cry aloud against her. Her plighted hand was not transferred to another, when time had sanctified and mellowed regret ; but with a cruel and unfeminine precipitancy. Since then her lover has bequeathed her name to immortality, he is sufficiently avenged. Let her stand forth condemned and scorned for ever, as faithless, heartless,—light as air, false as water, and rash as fire.—I abjure her.

CHAPTER II.

WALLER'S SACHARISSA.

THE courtly Waller, like the lady in the Maids' Tragedy, loved with his ambition,—not with his eyes; still less with his heart. A critic, in designating the poets of that time, says truly that “Waller still lives in Sacharissa:” he lives in her name more than she does in his poetry; he gave that name a charm and a celebrity which has survived the admiration his verses inspired, and which has assisted to preserve them and himself from oblivion. If Sacharissa had not been a real and an interesting object, Waller's poetical praises had died with her, and she with them. He wants earnestness; his lines were not inspired by love, and they give “no echo to the

seat where love is throned." Instead of passion and poetry, we have gallantry and flattery; gallantry, which was beneath the dignity of its object; and flattery, which was yet more superfluous,—it was painting the lily and throwing perfume on the violet.

Waller's Sacharissa was the Lady Dorothea Sydney, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Leicester, and born in 1620. At the time he thought fit to make her the object of his homage, she was about eighteen, beautiful, accomplished, and admired. Waller was handsome, rich, a wit, and five-and-twenty. He had ever an excellent opinion of himself, and a prudent care of his worldly interests. He was a great poet, in days when Spenser was forgotten, Milton neglected, and Pope unborn. He began by addressing to her the lines on her picture,

Such was Philoclea and such Dorus' flame.*

* Alluding to the two heroines of Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia*; Sacharissa was the grandniece of that *preux chevalier*, and hence the frequent allusions to his name and fame.

Then we have the poems written at Penshurst,
—in this strain,—

Ye lofty beeches ! tell this matchles dame,
That if together ye fed all one flame,
It could not equalise the hundredth part
Of what her eyes have kindled in my heart, &c.

The lady was content to be the theme of a fashionable poet : but when he presumed farther, she crushed all hopes with the most undisguised aversion and disdain : thereupon he rails,—thus—

To thee a wild and eruel soul is given,
More deaf than trees, and prouder than the heaven ;
Love's foe profest ! why dost thou falsely feign
Thyself a Sydney ? From which noble strain
He sprung that could so far exalt the name
Of love, and warm a nation with his flame.*

His mortified vanity turned for consolation to Amoret, (Lady Sophia Murray,) the intimate companion of Sacharissa. He describes the friendship between these two beautiful girls very gracefully.

* Alluding to Sir Philip Sydney.

Tell me, lovely, loving pair !
 Why so kind, and so severe ?
 Why so careless of our care
 Only to yourselves so dear ?

* * *

Not the silver doves that fly
 Yoked to Cytherea's car ;
 Not the wings that lift so high,
 And convey her son so far,
 Are so lovely, sweet and fair,
 Or do more ennobled love,
 Are so choicely matched a pair,
 Or with more consent do move.

And they are very beautifully contrasted in the
 lines to Amoret—

If sweet Amoret complains,
 I have sense of all her pains ;
 But for Sacharissa, I
 Do not only grieve, but die !

* * *

'Tis amazement more than love,
 Which her radiant eyes do move ;
 If less splendour wait on thine,
 Yet they so benignly shine,

I would turn my dazzled sight
To behold their milder light.

* * *

Amoret! as sweet and good
As the most delicious food,
Which but tasted does impart
Life and gladness to the heart.
Sacharissa's beauty's wine,
Which to madness doth incline,
Such a liquor as no brain
That is mortal, can sustain.

But Lady Sophia, though of a softer disposition, and not carrying in her mild eyes the scornful and destructive light which sparkled in those of Sacharissa, was not to be "berhymed" into love any more than her fair friend. She applauded, but she repelled; she smiled, but she was cold. Waller consoled himself by marrying a city widow, worth thirty thousand pounds.

The truth is, that with all his wit and his elegance of fancy, of which there are some inimitable examples,—as the application of the story of Daphne, and of the fable of the wound-

ed eagle; the lines on Sacharissa's girdle; the graceful little song, "Go, lovely Rose," to which I need only allude, and many others,—Waller has failed in convincing us of his sincerity. As Rosalind says, "Cupid might have clapped him on the shoulder, but we could warrant him heart-whole." All along our sympathy is rather with the proud beauty, than with the irritable self-complacent poet. Sacharissa might have been proud, but she was not arrogant; her manners were gentle and retiring; and her disposition rather led her to shun than to seek publicity and admiration.

Such cheerful modesty, such humble state,
 Moves certain love, but with as doubtful fate;
 As when beyond our greedy reach, we see
 Inviting fruit on too sublime a tree.*

The address to Sacharissa's *femme-de-chambre*, beginning, "Fair fellow-servant," is not to be compared with Tasso's ode to the Countess of

* Lines on her picture.

Scandiano's maid, but contains some most elegant lines.

You the soft season know, when best her mind
 May be to pity, or to love inclined :
 In some well-chosen hour supply his fear,
 Whose hopeless love durst never tempt the ear
 Of that stern goddess ; you, her priest, declare
 What offerings may propitiate the fair :
 Rich orient pearl, bright stones that ne'er decay,
 Or polished lines, that longer last than they.

* * * * *

But since her eyes, her teeth, her lip excels
 All that is found in mines or fishes' shells,
 Her nobler part as far exceeding these,
 None but immortal gifts her mind should please.

These lines impress us with the image of a very imperious and disdainful beauty ; yet such was not the character of Sacharissa's person or mind.* Nor is it necessary to imagine her such, to account for her rejection of Waller, and her indifference to his flattery. There was a meanness about the

* Sacharissa, the poetical name Waller himself gave her, signifies *sweetness*.

man : he wanted not birth alone, but all the high and generous qualities which must have been required to recommend him to a woman, who, with the blood and the pride of the Sydneys, inherited their large heart and noble spirit. We are not surprised when she turned from the poet to give her hand to Henry Spencer, Earl of Sunderland, one of the most interesting and heroic characters of that time. He was then only nineteen, and she was about the same age. This marriage was celebrated with great splendour at Penshurst, July 30, 1639.

Waller, who had professed that his hope

Should ne'er rise higher

Than for a pardon that he dared admire,

pressed forward with his congratulations in verse and prose, and wrote the following letter, full of pleasant imprecations, to Lady Lucy Sydney, the younger sister of Sacharissa. It will be allowed that it argues more wit and good nature than love or sorrow ; and that he was resolved that the

willow should sit as gracefully and lightly on his brow, as the myrtle or the bays.

“ To my Lady Lucy Sydney, on the marriage of my Lady Dorothea, her Sister.

“ MADAM.—In this common joy, at Penshurst, I know none to whom complaints may come less unseasonable than to your Ladyship,—the loss of a bedfellow being almost equal to that of a mistress ; and therefore you ought, at least, to pardon, if you consent not to the imprecations of the deserted, which just Heaven, no doubt, will hear.

“ May my Lady Dorothea, if we may yet call her so, suffer as much, and have the like passion, for this young Lord, whom she has preferred to the rest of mankind, as others have had for her ; and may this love, before the year come about, make her taste of the first curse imposed on woman-kind—the pains of becoming a mother. May her first-born be none of her own sex, nor so like her, but that he may resemble her Lord as much as herself.

‘ May she, that always affected silence and retiredness, have the house filled with the noise and number of her children, and hereafter of her grand-children, and then may she arrive at that great curse, so much declined by fair ladies,—*old age*. May she live to be very old, and yet seem young—be told so by her glass—and have no aches to inform her of the truth: and when she shall appear to be mortal, may her Lord not mourn for her, but go hand-in-hand with her to that place, where, we are told, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, that being there divorced, we may all have an equal interest in her again. My revenge being immortal, I wish that all this may also befall their posterity to the world’s end and afterwards.

“ To you, Madam, I wish all good things, and that this loss may, in good time, be happily supplied with a more constant bedfellow of the other sex.

“ Madam, I humbly kiss your hands, and beg pardon for this trouble from your Ladyship’s most humble Servant,

E. WALLER.”

Lady Sunderland had been married about three years ; she and her youthful husband lived in the tenderest union, and she was already the happy mother of two fair infants, a son and a daughter, —when the civil wars broke out, and Lord Sunderland followed the King to the field. In the Sydney papers are some beautiful letters to his wife, written from the camp before Oxford. The last of these, which is in a strain of playful and affectionate gaiety, thus concludes,—“ Pray bless Poppet for me ! * and tell her I would have wrote to her, but that, upon mature deliberation, I found it uncivil to return an answer to a lady in another character than her own, which I am not yet learned enough to do.—I beseech you to present his service to my Lady, † who is most passionately and perfectly yours, &c.

“ SUNDERLAND.”

* His infant daughter, then about two years old, afterwards Marchioness of Halifax.

† The Countess's mother, Lady Leicester, who was then with her at Althorpe.

Three days afterwards this tender and gallant heart had ceased to beat: he was killed in the battle of Newbury, at the age of three-and-twenty. His unhappy wife, on hearing the news of his death, was prematurely taken ill, and delivered of an infant, which died almost immediately after its birth. She recovered, however, from a dangerous and protracted illness, through the affectionate and unceasing attentions of her mother, Lady Leicester, who never quitted her for several months. Her father wrote her a letter of condolence, which would serve as a model for all letters on similar occasions. "I know," he says, "that it is to no purpose to advise you not to grieve; that is not my intention: for such a loss as yours, cannot be received indifferently by a nature so tender and sensible as yours," &c. After touching lightly and delicately on the obvious sources of consolation, he reminds her, that her duty to the dead requires her to be careful of herself, and not hazard her very existence by the indulgence of grief. "You offend him whom you loved, if you hurt that person

whom he loved; remember how apprehensive he was of your danger, how grieved for any thing that troubled you! I know you lived happily together, so as nobody but yourself could measure the contentment of it. I rejoiced at it, and did thank God for making me one of the means to procure it for you," &c.*

Those who have known deep sorrow, and felt what it is to shrink with shattered nerves and a wounded spirit from the busy hand of consolation, fretting where it cannot heal, will appreciate such a letter as this.

Lady Sunderland, on her recovery, retired from the world, and centering all her affections in her children, seemed to live only for them. She resided, after her widowhood, at Althorpe, where she occupied herself with improving the house and gardens. The fine hall and staircase of that noble seat, which are deservedly admired for their architectural beauty, were planned and erected by her. After the lapse of

* Sydney's Memorials, vol. ii. p. 271.

about thirteen years, her father, Lord Leicester, prevailed on her to choose one from among the numerous suitors who sought her hand: he dreaded, lest on his death, she should be left unprotected, with her infant children, in those evil times; and she married, in obedience to his wish, Sir Robert Smythe, of Sutton, who was her second cousin, and had long been attached to her. She lived to see her eldest son, the second Earl of Sunderland, a man of transcendant talents, but versatile principles, at the head of the government, and had the happiness to close her eyes before he had abused his admirable abilities, to the vilest purposes of party and court intrigue. The Earl was appointed principal Secretary of State in 1682: his mother died in 1683.

There is a fine portrait of Sacharissa at Blenheim, of which there are many engravings. It must have been painted by Vandyke, shortly after her marriage, and before the death of her husband. If the withered branch, to which she is pointing, be supposed to allude to her widowhood, it must have been added afterwards, as Vandyke

died in 1641, and Lord Sunderland in 1643. In the gallery at Althorpe, there are three pictures of this celebrated woman. One represents her in a hat, and at the age of fifteen or sixteen, gay, girlish, and blooming: the second, far more interesting, was painted about the time of her first marriage: it is exceedingly sweet and lady-like. The features are delicate, with redundant light brown air, and eyes and eyebrows of a darker hue; the bust and hands very exquisite: on the whole, however, the high breeding of the face and air is more conspicuous than the beauty of the person. These two portraits are by Vandyke; nor ought I to forget to mention that the painter himself was supposed to have indulged a respectful but ardent passion for Lady Sunderland, and to have painted her portrait literally *con amore*.*

A third picture represents her about the time of her second marriage: the expression wholly changed,—cold, faded, sad, but still sweet-look-

* See State Poems, vol. iii. p. 396.

ing and delicate. One might fancy her contemplating with a sick heart, the portrait of Lord Sunderland, the lover and husband of her early youth, and that of her unfortunate but celebrated brother, Algernon Sydney; both which hang on the opposite side of the gallery.

The present Duke of Marlborough, and the present Earl Spencer, are the lineal descendants of Waller's Sacharissa.

One little incident, somewhat prosaic indeed, proves how little heart there was in Waller's poetical attachment to this beautiful and admirable woman. When Lady Sunderland, after a retirement of thirty years, re-appeared in the court she had once adorned, she met Waller at Lady Wharton's, and addressing him with a smiling courtesy, she reminded him of their youthful days:—"When," said she, "will you write such fine verses on me again?"—"Madam," replied Waller, "when your Ladyship is young and handsome again." This was contemptible and coarse,—the sentiment was not that of a well-

bred or a feeling man, far less that of a lover or a poet,—no!

Love is not love,

That alters where it alteration finds.

One would think that the sight of a woman, whom he had last seen in the full bloom of youth and glow of happiness,—who had endured, since they parted, such extremity of affliction, as far more than avenged his wounded vanity, might have awakened some tender thoughts, and called forth a gentler reply. When some one expressed surprise to Petrarch, that Laura, no longer young, had still power to charm and inspire him, he answered, “*Piaga per allentar d’ arco non sana,*” —“The wound is not healed though the bow be unbent.” This was in a finer spirit.

Something in the same character, as his reply to Lady Sunderland, was Waller’s famous repartee, when Charles the Second told him that his lines on Oliver Cromwell were better than those written on his royal self. “Please your Majesty, we poets succeed better in fiction than

in truth." Nothing could be more admirably *apropos*, more witty, more courtier-like: it was only *false*, and in a poor, time-serving spirit. It showed as much meanness of soul as presence of mind. What true poet, who felt as a poet, would have said this?

CHAPTER III.

BEAUTIES AND POETS.

NEARLY contemporary with Waller's Sacharissa lived several women of high rank, distinguished as munificent patronesses of poetry, and favourite themes of poets, for the time being. There was the Countess of Pembroke, celebrated by Ben Jonson,

The subject of all verse,
Sydney's sister, Pembroke's mother.

There was the famous Lucy Percy, Countess of Carlisle, very clever, and very fantastic, who aspired to be the Aspasia, the De Rambouillet of her day, and did not quite succeed. She was celebrated by almost all the contemporary poets,

and even in French, by Voiture. There was Lucy Harrington, Countess of Bedford, who, notwithstanding the accusation of vanity and extravagance which has been brought against her, was an amiable woman, and munificently rewarded, in presents and pensions, the incense of the poets around her. I know not what her Ladyship may have paid for the following exquisite lines by Ben Jonson; but the reader will agree with me, that it could not have been *too* much.

ON LUCY COUNTESS OF BEDFORD.

This morning, timely rapt with holy fire,
 I thought to form unto my zealous muse
 What kind of creature I could most desire
 To honour, serve, and love; as poets use:
 I meant to make her fair, and free, and wise,
 Of greatest blood, and yet more good than great.
 I meant the day-star should not brighter rise,
 Nor lend like influence from his ancient seat.
 I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet,
 Hating that solemn vice of greatness, *pride*;
 I meant each softest virtue there should meet,
 Fit in that softer bosom to reside.

Only a learned, and a manly soul

I purpos'd her ; that should, with even powers,
The rock, the spindle, and the sheers controul

Of destiny, and spin her own free hours.

Such when I meant to feign, and wished to see,

My muse bade Bedford write,—and that was she.

There was also the “ beautiful and every way excellent” Lady Anne Rich,* the daughter-in-law of her who was so loved by Sir Philip Sydney ; and the memorable and magnificent—but somewhat masculine—Anne Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, Pembroke, and Dorset, who erected monuments to Spenser, Drayton, and Daniel ; and above them all, though living a little later, the Queen herself, Henrietta Maria, whose feminine

* Daughter of the first Earl of Devonshire, of the Cavendish family. She was celebrated by Sidney Godolphin in some very sweet lines, which contain a lovely female portrait. Waller's verses on her sudden death are remarkable for a signal instance of the Bathos,

That horrid word, at once like lightning spread,

Struck all our ears,—*the Lady Rich is dead !*

caprices, French graces, and brilliant eyes, rendered her a very splendid and fruitful theme for the poets of the time.*

There was at this time a kind of traffic between rich beauties and poor poets. The ladies who, in earlier ages, were proud in proportion to the quantity of blood spilt in honour of their charms, were now seized with a passion for being be-rhymed. Surrey, and his Geraldine, began this taste in England by introducing the school of Petrarch: and Sir Philip Sydney had entreated women to listen to those poets who promised them immortality,—“ For thus doing, ye shall be most fair, most wise, most rich, most every thing!—ye shall dwell upon superlatives:” † and women believed accordingly. In spite of the satirist, I do maintain, that the love of praise and the love of pleasing are paramount in our sex,

* See Waller, Carew, D’Avenant: the latter has paid her some exquisite compliments.

† Sir Philip Sydney’s Works, “ Defence of Poesie.”

both to the love of pleasure and the love of sway.

This connection between the high-born beauties and the poets was at first delightful, and honourable to both: but, in time, it became degraded and abused. The fees paid for dedications, odes, and sonnets, were any thing but sentimental:—can we wonder if, under such circumstances, the profession of a poet “was connected with personal abasement, which made it disreputable?”* or, that women, while they required the tribute, despised those who paid it,—and were paid for it?—not in sweet looks, soft smiles, and kind wishes, but with silver and gold, a cover at her ladyship’s table “below the salt,” or a bottle of sack from my lord’s cellar. It followed, as a thing of course, that our amatory and lyric poetry declined, and instead of the genuine rapture of tenderness, the glow of imagination, and all “the purple light of love,” we have too often only a heap of glit-

* Scott’s Life of Dryden, p. 89.

tering and empty compliment and metaphysical conceits.—It was a miserable state of things.

It must be confessed that the aspiring loves of some of our poets have not proved auspicious even when successful. Dryden married Lady Elizabeth Howard, the daughter of the Earl of Berkshire: but not “all the blood of all the Howards” could make her either wise or amiable: he had better have married a milkmaid. She was weak in intellect, and violent in temper. Sir Walter Scott observes, very feelingly, that “The the wife of one who is to gain his livelihood by poetry, or by any labour (if any there be,) equally exhausting, must either have taste enough to relish her husband’s performances, or good nature sufficient to pardon his infirmities.” It was Dryden’s misfortune, that Lady Elizabeth had neither one nor the other.

Of all our really great poets, Dryden is the one least indebted to woman, and to whom, in return, women are least indebted: he is almost devoid of *sentiment* in the true meaning of the word.—“His

idea of the female character was low;" his homage to beauty was not of that kind which beauty should be proud to receive.* When he attempted the praise of women, it was in a strain of fulsome, far-fetched, laboured adulation, which betrayed his insincerity; but his genius was at home when we were the subject of licentious tales and coarse satire.

It was through this inherent want of refinement and true respect for our sex, that he deformed Boccaccio's lovely tale of Gismunda; and as the Italian novelist has sins enough of his own to answer for, Dryden might have left him the beauties of this tender story, unsullied by the profane coarseness of his own taste. In his tragedies, his heroines on stilts, and his drawcansir heroes, whine, rant, strut and rage, and tear passion to tatters—to very rags; but love, such as it exists in gentle, pure, unselfish bosoms—love, such as it glows in

* With the exception of the dedication of his *Palamon and Arcite* to the young and beautiful Duchess of Ormonde (Lady Anne Somerset, daughter of the Duke of Beaufort.)

the pages of Shakspeare and Spenser, Petrarch and Tasso,—such love

As doth become mortality
Glancing at heaven,

he could not imagine or appreciate, far less express or describe. He could pourtray a Cleopatra; but he could not conceive a Juliet. His ideas of our sex seem to have been formed from a profligate actress,* and a silly, wayward, provoking wife; and we have avenged ourselves,—for Dryden is not the poet of women; and, of all our English classics, is the least honoured in a lady's library.

Dryden was the original of the famous repartee to be found, I believe, in every jest book: shortly after his marriage, Lady Elizabeth, being rather annoyed at her husband's very studious habits, wished herself *a book*, that she might have a little more of his attention.—“Yes, my dear,” replied Dryden, “an almanack.”—“Why an almanack?” asked the wife innocently.—“Because then, my

* Mrs. Reeves, his mistress: she afterwards became a nun.

dear, I should change you once a year." The laugh, of course, is on the side of the wit; but Lady Elizabeth was a young spoiled beauty of rank, married to a man she loved; and her wish, methinks, was very feminine and natural: if it was spoken with petulance and bitterness, it deserved the repartee; if with tenderness and playfulness, the wit of the reply can scarcely excuse its ill-nature.

Addison married the Countess of Warwick. Poor man! I believe his patrician bride did every thing but beat him. His courtship had been long, timid, and anxious; and at length, the lady was persuaded to marry him, on terms much like those on which a Turkish Princess is espoused, to whom the Sultan is reported to pronounce, "Daughter, I give thee this man to be thy slave."* They were only three years married, and those were years of bitterness.

Young, the author of the *Night Thoughts*, married Lady Elizabeth Lee, the daughter of the Earl

* Johnson's Life of Addison.

of Litchfield, and grand-daughter of the too famous, or more properly, infamous Duchess of Cleveland:—the marriage was not a happy one. I think, however, in the two last instances, the ladies were not entirely to blame.

But these, it will be said, are the wives of poets, not the loves of the poets ; and the phrases are not synonymus,—*au contraire*. This is a question to be asked and examined ; and I proceed to examine it accordingly. But as I am about to take the field on new ground, it will require a new chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

CONJUGAL POETRY.

IF it be generally true, that Love, to be poetical, must be wreathed with the willow and the cypress, as well as the laurel and the myrtle,—still it is not *always* true. It is not, happily, a necessary condition, that a passion, to be constant, must be unfortunate; that faithful lovers must needs be wretched; that conjugal tenderness and “domestic doings” are ever dull and invariably prosaic. The witty invectives of some of our poets, whose domestic misery stung them into satirists, and blasphemers of a happiness denied to them, are familiar in the memory—ready on

the lips of common-place scoffers. But of matrimonial poetics, in a far different style, we have instances sufficient to put to shame such heartless raillery; that there are not more, is owing to the reason which Klopstock has given, when writing of his angelic Meta. "A man," said he, "should speak of his wife as seldom and with as much modesty as of himself."

A woman is not under the same restraint in speaking of her husband; and this distinction arises from the relative position of the two sexes. It is a species of vain-glory to boast of a possession; but we may exult, unreprieved, in the virtues of him who disposes of our fate. Our inferiority has here given to us, as women, so high and dear a privilege, that it is a pity we have been so seldom called on to exert it.

The first instance of conjugal poetry which occurs to me, will perhaps startle the female reader, for it is no other than the gallant Ovid himself. One of the epistles, written during his banishment to Pontus, is addressed to his wife Perilla, and very tenderly alludes to their mutual

affection, and to the grief she must have suffered during his absence.

And thou, whom young I left when leaving Rome,
Thou, by my woes art haply old become :
Grant, heaven ! that such I may behold thy face,
And thy changed cheek, with dear loved kisses trace ;
Fold thy diminished person, and exclaim,
Regret for me has thinned this beauteous frame.

Here then we have the most abandoned libertine of his profligate times reduced at last in his old age, in disgrace and exile, to throw himself, for sympathy and consolation, into the arms of a tender and amiable wife ; and this, after spending his life and talents in deluding the tenderness, corrupting the virtue, and reviling the characters of women. In truth, half a dozen volumes in praise of our sex could scarce say more than this.

Every one, I believe, recollects the striking story of Paulina, the wife of Seneca. When the order was brought from Nero that he should die, she insisted upon dying with him, and by the same operation. She accordingly prepared to be bled to death ; but fainting away in the midst of her

sufferings, Seneca commanded her wounds to be bound up, and conjured her to live. She lived therefore; but excessive weakness and loss of blood gave her, during the short remainder of her life, that spectral appearance which has caused her conjugal fidelity and her pallid hue to pass into a proverb,—“As pale as Seneca’s Paulina;” and be it remembered, that Paulina was at this time young in comparison of her husband, who was old, and singularly ugly.

This picturesque story of Paulina affects us in our younger years; but at a later period we are more likely to sympathise with the wife of Lucan, Polla Argentaria, who beheld her husband perish by the same death as his uncle Seneca, and, through love for his fame, consented to survive him. She appears to have been the original after whom he drew his beautiful portrait of Cornelia, the wife of Pompey. Lucan had left the manuscript of the *Pharsalia* in an imperfect state; and his wife, who had been in its progress his amanuensis, his counsellor and confidant, and therefore

best knew his wishes and intentions, undertook to revise and copy it with her own hand. During the rest of her life, which was devoted to this dear and pious task, she had the bust of Lucan always placed beside her couch, and his works lying before her: and in the form in which Polla Argentaria left it, his great poem has descended to our times.

I have read also, though I confess my acquaintance with the classics is but limited, of a certain Latin poetess Sulpicia, who celebrated her husband Calenas: and the poet Ausonius composed many fine verses in praise of a beautiful and virtuous wife, whose name I forget.*

But I feel I am treading unsafe ground, rendered so both by my ignorance, and by my prejudices as a woman. Generally speaking, the heroines of classical poetry and history are not much to my taste; in their best virtues they were a little masculine, and in their vices, so completely

* Elton's Specimens.

unsexed, that one would rather not think of them—speak of them—far less write of them.

* * * * *

The earliest instance I can recollect of modern conjugal poetry, is taken from a country, and a class, and a time where one would scarce look for high poetic excellence inspired by conjugal tenderness. It is that of a Frenchwoman of high rank, in the fifteenth century, when France was barbarised by the prevalence of misery, profligacy, and bloodshed, in every revolting form.

Marguèrite-Eléonore-Clotilde de Surville, of the noble family of Vallon Chalys, was the wife of Berenger de Surville, and lived in those disastrous times which immediately succeeded the battle of Agincourt. She was born in 1405, and educated in the court of the Count de Foix, where she gave an early proof of literary and poetical talent, by translating, when eleven years old, one of Petrarch's Canzoni, with a harmony of style wonderful, not only for her age, but for the times in which she lived. At the age of sixteen she married the Chevalier de Surville, then, like herself, in the

bloom of youth, and to whom she was passionately attached. In those days, no man of noble blood, who had a feeling for the misery of his country, or a hearth and home to defend, could avoid taking an active part in the scenes of barbarous strife around him; and De Surville, shortly after his marriage, followed his heroic sovereign, Charles the Seventh, to the field. During his absence, his wife addressed to him the most beautiful effusions of conjugal tenderness to be found, I think, in the compass of poetry. In the time of Clotilde, French verse was not bound down by those severe laws and artificial restraints by which it has since been shackled: we have none of the prettinesses, the epigrammatic turns, the sparkling points, and elaborate graces, which were the fashion in the days of Louis Quatorze. Boileau would have shrugged up his shoulders, and elevated his eyebrows, at the rudeness of the style; but Molière, who preferred

J'aime mieux ma mie, oh gai !

to all the *fautes galanteries* of his contemporary

bels esprits, would have been enchanted with the naïve tenderness, the freshness and flow of youthful feeling which breathe through the poetry of Clotilde. The antique simplicity of the old French lends it such an additional charm, that though in making a few extracts, I have ventured to modernize the spelling, I have not attempted to alter a word of the original.

Clotilde has entitled her first epistle “*Heroïde à mon époux Bérenger* ;” and as it is dated in 1422, she could not have been more than seventeen when it was written. The commencement recalls the superscription of the first letter of Heloise to Abelard.

Clotilde, au sien ami, douce mande accolade !

A son époux, salut, respect, amour !

Ah, tandis qu’explorée et de cœur si malade,

Te quier * la nuit, te redemande au jour—

Que deviens ? où cours tu ? Loin de ta bien-aimée,

Où les destins, entraînent donc tes pas ?

’Faut que le dise, hèles ! s’en crois la renommée

De bién long temps ne te reverrai pas ?

* Querir.

She then describes her lonely state, her grief for his absence, her pining for his return. She laments the horrors of war which have torn him from her ; but in a strain of eloquent poetry, and in the spirit of a high-souled woman, to whom her husband's honour was dear as his life, she calls on him to perform all that his duty as a brave knight, and his loyalty to his sovereign require. She reminds him, with enthusiasm, of the motto of French chivalry, “ mourir plutôt que trahir son devoir ;” then suddenly breaking off, with a graceful and wife-like modesty, she wonders at her own presumption thus to address her lord, her husband, the son of a race of heroes,—

Mais que dis ! ah d'où vient qu'orgueilleuse t'advise !

Toi, escolier ! toi, l'enfant des heros

Pardonne maintes soucis à celle qui t'adore—

A tant d'amour, est permis quelque effroi.

She describes herself looking out from the tower of her castle to watch the return of his banner ; she tells him how she again and again visits the scenes endeared by the remembrance of their mutual happiness. The most beautiful

touches of description are here mingled with the fond expressions of feminine tenderness.

Là, me dis-je, ai reçu sa dernière caresse,
 Et jusqu'aux os, soudain, me sens brûler.
 Ici les ung ormeil, cerclé par aubespine
 Que doux printemps jà* couronnait de fleurs,
 Me dit adieu—Sanglots suffoquent ma poitrine,
 Et dans mes yeux roulent torrents de pleurs.

* * * * *

D'autresfois, écartant ces cruelles images,
 Crois m'enfonçant au plus dense des bois,
 Mêler des rossignols aux amoureuse ramages,
 Entre tes bras, mon amoureux voix :
 Me semble ouïr, échappant de ta bouche rosée,
 Ces mots gentils, qui me font tressaillir,
 Ainz† vois au même instant que me suis abusée
 Et soupirant, suis prête à défaillir !

After indulging in other regrets, expressed with rather more naïveté than suits the present taste, she bursts into an eloquent invective against the English invaders,‡ and the factious nobles of

* Jà—jadis (the old French *ja* is the Italian *già*).

† Ainz :—cependant (the Italian *anzi*).

‡ She calls them “the Vultures of Albion.”

France, whose crimes and violence detained her husband from her arms.

Quand reverrai, dis-moi, ton si duisant* visage ?

Quand te pourrai face à face mirer ?

T'enlacer tellement à mon frément† corsage,

Que toi, ni moi, n'en puissions respirer ?

and she concludes with this tender *envoi* :

Où que suives ton roi, ne mets ta douce amie

En tel oubli, qu'ignore où git ce lieu :

Jusqu'alors en souci, de calme n'aura mie,—

Plus ne t'en dis—que t'en souviennne ! adieu !

Clotilde became a mother before the return of her husband ; and the delicious moment in which she first placed her infant in his father's arms, suggested the verses she has entitled “ *Ballade à mon époux, lors, quand tournait après un an d'absence, mis en ses bras notre fils enfançon.*”

The pretty burthen of this little ballad has often been quoted.

Faut être deux pour avoir du plaisir,

Plaisir ne l'est qu'autant qu'on le partage !

* Duisant, *séduisant*.

† Frémissant.

But, says the mother,

Un tiers si doux ne fait tort à plaisir ?

and should her husband be again torn from her, she will console herself in his absence, by teaching her boy to lisp his father's name.

Gentil époux ! si Mars et ton courage
 Plus contraignaient ta Clotilde à gémir,
 De lui montrer en son petit langage,
 A t'appeller ferai tout mon plaisir—
 Plaisir ne l'est qu'autant qu'on le partage !

Among some other little poems, which place the conjugal and maternal character of Clotilde in a most charming light, I must notice one more for its tender and heartfelt beauty. It is entitled “*Ballade à mon premier né,*” and is addressed to her child, apparently in the absence of its father.

O chère enfantelet, vrai portrait de ton père !
 Dors sur le sein que ta bouche a pressé !
 Dors petit !—clos, ami, sur le sein de ta mère,
 Tien doux œillet, par le somme oppressé.

Bel ami—chère petit ! que ta pupille tendre,
 Goute un sommeil que plus n'est fait pour moi :
 Je veille pour te voir, te nourrir, te défendre,
 Ainz qu' il est doux ne veiller que pour toi !

Contemplating him asleep, she says,

N'était ce teint fleuri des couleurs de la pomme,
 Ne le diriez vous dans les bras de la mort ?

Then, shuddering at the idea she had conjured up,
 she breaks forth into a passionate apostrophe to
 her sleeping child,

Arrête, chère enfant ! j'en frémis toute entière—
 Reveille toi ! chasse un fatal propos !
 Mon fils . . . pour un moment —ah revois la lumière!
 Au prix du tien, rends-moi tout mon repos !
 Douce erreur ! il dormait . . . c'est assez, je respire.
 Songes légers, flattez son doux sommeil ;
 Ah ! quand verrai celui pour qui mon cœur soupire,
 Au miens cotés jouir de son réveil ?

* * *

Quand reverrai celui dont as reçu la vie ?
 Mon jeune époux, le plus beau des humains
 Oui—déjà crois voir ta mère, aux cieux ravie,
 Que tends vers lui tes innocentes mains.

Comme ira se duisant à ta première caresse !
 Au miens baisers com' t'ira disputant !
 Ainz ne compte, à toi seul, d'épuiser sa tendresse,—
 A sa Clotilde en garde bien autant !

Along the margin of the original MS. of this poem, was written an additional stanza, in the same hand, and quite worthy of the rest.

Voilà ses traits ... son air ... voilà tout ce que j'aime !
 Feu de son œil, et roses de son teint
 D'où vient m'en ébahir ? *autre qu'en tout lui même,*
Pût-il jamais éclore de mon sein ?

This is beautiful and true ; beautiful, because it is true. There is nothing of fancy nor of art, the intense feeling gushes, warm and strong, from the heart of the writer, and it comes home to the heart of the reader, filling it with sweetness. —Am I wrong in supposing that the occasional obscurity of the old French will not disguise the beauty of the sentiment from the young wife or mother, whose eye may glance over this page ?

It is painful, it is pitiful, to draw the veil of death and sorrow over this sweet picture.

What is this world ? what asken men to have ?
Now with his love—now in his cold grave,
Alone, withouten any companie !*

De Surville closed his brief career of happiness and glory (and what more than these could he have asked of heaven ?) at the seige of Orleans, where he fought under the banner of Joan of Arc.† He was a gallant and a loyal knight ; so were hundreds of others who then strewed the desolated fields of France : and De Surville had fallen undistinguished amid the general havoc of all that was noble and brave, if the love and genius of his wife had not immortalised him.

Clotilde, after her loss, resided in the château of her husband, in the Lyonnais, devoting herself to littérature and the education of her son : and it is very remarkable, considering the times in which she lived, that she neither married again, nor en-

* Chaucer.

† He perished in 1429, leaving his widow in her twenty-fourth year.

tered a religious house. The fame of her poetical talents, which she continued to cultivate in her retirement, rendered her, at length, an object of celebrity and interest. The Duke of Orleans happened one day to repeat some of her verses to Margaret of Scotland, the first wife of Louis the Eleventh; and that accomplished patroness of poetry and poets wrote her an invitation to attend her at court, which Clotilde modestly declined. The Queen then sent her, as a token of her admiration and friendship, a wreath of laurel, surmounted with a bouquet of daisies, (Marguèrites, in allusion to the name of both,) the leaves of which were wrought in silver and the flowers in gold, with this inscription: “Marguèrite d’Ecosse à Marguèrite d’Helicon.” We are told that Alain Chartier, envious perhaps of these distinctions, wrote a satirical *quatrain*, in which he accused Clotilde of being deficient in *l’air de cour*, and that she replied to him, and defended herself in a very spirited *rondeau*. Nothing more is known of the life of this interesting woman, but that she had the misfortune to survive her son as well as

her husband; and dying at the advanced age of ninety, in 1495, she was buried with them in the same tomb.*

* *Les Poètes Français jusqu'à Malherbes*, par Augin. A good edition of the works of Clotilde de Surville was published at Paris in 1802, and another in 1804. I believe both have become scarce. Her *Poësies* consist of pastorals, ballads, songs, epistles, and the fragment of an epic poem, of which the MS. is lost. Of her merit there is but one opinion. She is confessedly the greatest poetical genius which France could boast in a period of two hundred years; that is, from the decline of the Provençal poetry, till about 1500.

CHAPTER V.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

VITTORIA COLONNA.

HALF a century later, we find the name of an Italian poetess, as interesting as our Clotilde de Surville, and far more illustrious. Vittoria Colonna was not thrown, with all her eminent gifts and captivating graces, among a rude people in a rude age; but all favourable influences, of time and circumstances, and fortune, conspired, with native talent, to make her as celebrated as she was truly admirable. She was the wife of that Marquis of Pescara, who has earned himself a name in the busiest and bloodiest page of history:—of that Pescara who commanded the armies of Charles

the Fifth in Italy, and won the battle of Pavia, where Francis the First was taken prisoner. But great as was Pescara as a statesman and a military commander, he is far more interesting as the husband of Vittoria Colonna, and the laurels he reaped in the battle-field, are perishable and worthless, compared to those which his admirable wife wreathed around his brow. So thought Ariosto; who tell us, that if Alexander envied Achilles the fame he had acquired in the songs of Homer, how much more had he envied Pescara those strains in which his gifted consort had exalted his fame above that of all contemporary heroes? and not only rendered herself immortal;

Col dolce stil, di che il miglior non odo,
 Ma può qualunque, di cui parli o scriva
 Trar dal sepolcro, e fa ch' eterno viva.

He prefers her to Artemisia, for a reason rather quaintly expressed,—

— Anzi

Tanto maggior, quanto è più assai bell' opra,
 Che por sotterra un uom, trarlo di sopra.

“So much more praise it is, to raise a man above the earth, than to bury him under it.” He compares her successively to all the famed heroines of Greece and Rome,—to Laodamia, to Portia, to Arria, to Argia, to Evadne,—who died with or for their husbands; and concludes,

Quanto onore a Vittoria è più dovuto
 Che di Lete, e del Rio che nove volte
 L' ombre circonda, ha tratto il suo consorte,
 Malgrado delle parche, e della morte.*

In fact, at a period when Italy could boast of a constellation of female talent, such as never before or since adorned any one country at the same time, and besides a number of women accomplished in languages, philosophy, and the abstruser branches of learning, reckoned sixty poetesses, nearly contemporary, there was not one to be compared with Vittoria Colonna,—herself the theme of song; and upon whom her enthusiastic countrymen have lavished all the high-sounding superlatives of a language, so rich in

* Orlando Furioso, canto 37.

expressive and sonorous epithets, that it seems to multiply fame and magnify praise. We find Vittoria designated in Italian biography, as *Diva*, divina, maravigliosa, elettissima, illustrissima, virtuosissima, dottissima, castissima, gloriosissima, &c.

But immortality on earth, as in heaven, must be purchased at a certain price; and Vittoria, rich in all the gifts which heaven, and nature, and fortune combined, ever lavished on one of her sex, paid for her celebrity with her happiness: for thus it has ever been, and must ever be, in this world of ours, “où les plus belles choses ont le pire destin.”

Her descent was illustrious on both sides. She was the daughter of the Grand Constable Fabrizio Colonna, and of Anna di Montefeltro, daughter of the Duke of Urbino, and was born about 1490. At four years old she was destined to seal the friendship which existed between her own family and that of d'Avalo, by a union with the young Count d'Avalo, afterwards Marquis

of Pescara, who was exactly her own age. Such infant marriages are contracted at a fearful risk; yet, if auspicious, the habit of loving from an early age, and the feeling of settled appropriation, prevents the affections from wandering, and plant a mutual happiness upon a foundation much surer than that of fancy or impulse. It was so in this instance,

Conforme era l' etate

Ma 'l pensier più conforme.

Vittoria, from her childish years, displayed the most extraordinary talents, combined with all the personal charms and sweet proprieties more characteristic of her sex. When not more than fifteen or sixteen, she was already distinguished among her countrywomen, and sought even by sovereign princes. The Duke of Savoy and the Duke of Braganza made overtures to obtain her hand; the Pope himself interfered in behalf of one of these princes; but both were rejected. Vittoria, accustomed to consider herself as the destined bride of young d'Avalo, cultivated for

him alone those talents and graces which others admired and coveted, and resolved to wait till her youthful lover was old enough to demand the ratification of their infant vows. She says of herself,

Appena avean gli spirti intera vita,
Quando il mio cor proscrisse ogn' altro oggetto.

Pescara had not the studious habits or literary talents of his betrothed bride; but his beauty of person, his martial accomplishments, and his brave and noble nature, were precisely calculated to impress her poetical imagination, as contrasted with her own gentler and more contemplative character. He loved her too with the most enthusiastic adoration; he even prevailed on their mutual parents to anticipate the period fixed for their nuptials; and at the age of seventeen they were solemnly united.

The first four years after their marriage were chiefly spent in a delightful retreat in the island of Ischia, where Pescara had a palace and domain. Here, far from the world, and devoted to each

other, and to the most elegant pursuits, they seem to have revelled in such bliss as poets fancy and romancers feign. Hence the frequent allusions to the island of Ischia, in Vittoria's later poems, as a spot beloved by her husband, and the scene of their youthful happiness. One thing alone was wanting to complete this happiness: Heaven denied them children. She laments this disappointment in the 22d Sonnet, where she says, that "since she may not be the mother of sons, who shall inherit their father's glory, yet she will at least, by uniting her name with his in verse, become the mother of his illustrious deeds and lofty fame."

Pescara, whose active and martial genius led him to take a conspicuous part in the wars which then agitated Italy, at length quitted his wife to join the army of the Emperor. Vittoria, with tears, resigned him to his duties. On his departure she presented him with many tokens of love, and among the rest, with a banner, and a dressing-gown richly embroidered; on the latter she had worked with her own hand, in silken charac-

ters, the motto, “Nunquam minus otiosus quam cum otiosus erat.”* She also presented him with some branches of palm, “In segno di felice augurio;” but her bright anticipations were at first cruelly disappointed. Pescara, then in his twenty-second year, commanded as general of cavalry at the battle of Ravenna, where he was taken prisoner, and detained at Milan. While in confinement, he amused his solitude by showing his Vittoria that he had not forgotten their mutual studies and early happiness at Ischia. He composed an essay or dialogue on Love, which he addressed to her; and which, we are told, was remarkable for its eloquence and spirit as a composition, as well as for the most high-toned delicacy of sentiment. He was not liberated till the following year.

Vittoria had taken for her *devise*, such was the fashion of the day, a little Cupid within a circle formed by a serpent, with the motto, “Quem peperit virtus prudentia servet amorem,”—“The love which virtue inspired, discretion shall guard;” and during her husband’s absence,

* “Never less idle than when idle.”

she lived in retirement, principally in her loved retreat in the island of Ischia, devoting her time to literature, and to the composition of those beautiful Sonnets in which she celebrated the exploits and virtues of her husband. He, whenever his military or political duties allowed of a short absence from the theatre of war, flew to rejoin her; and these short and delicious meetings, and the continual dangers to which he was exposed, seem to have kept alive, through many long years, all the romance and fervour of their early love. In the 79th Sonnet, Vittoria so beautifully alludes to one of these meetings, that I am tempted to extract it, in preference to others better known, and by many esteemed superior as compositions.

Qui fece il mio bel sol a noi ritorno,
 Di Regie spoglie carco, e ricche prede :
 Ahi ! con quanto dolor, l'occhio rivede
 Quei lochi, ov' ei mi fea già il giorno !

Di mille glorie allor cinto d' intorno,
 E d' onor vero, alla più altiera sede
 Facean delle opre udite intera fede
 L' ardito volto, il parlar saggio adorno.

Vinto da prieghi miei, poi mi mostrava
 Le belle cicatrici, e 'l tempo, e 'l modo
 Delle vittorie sue tante, e sì chiare.

Quanta pena or mi da, gioja mi dava ;
 E in questo, e in quel pensier, piangendo gode
 Tra poche dolci, e assai lagrime amare.

This description of her husband returning, loaded with spoils and honours;—of her fond admiration, mingled with a feminine awe, of his warlike demeanor;—of his yielding, half reluctant, to her tender entreaties, and showing her the wounds he had received in battle;—then the bitter thoughts of his danger and absence, mingling with, and interrupting these delicious recollections of happiness,—are all as true to feeling as they are beautiful in poetry.

After a short career of glory, Pescara was at length appointed commander-in-chief of the Imperial armies, and gained the memorable battle of Pavia. Feared by his enemies, and adored by his soldiers, his power was at this time so great, that many attempts were made to shake his fidelity to the Emperor. Even the kingdom of Naples was

offered to him if he would detach himself from the party of Charles the Fifth. Pescara was not without ambition, though without “the ill that should attend it.” He wavered—he consulted his wife;—he expressed his wish to place her on a throne she was so fitted to adorn. That admirable and high-minded woman wrote to confirm him in the path of honour, and besought him not to sell his faith and truth, and his loyalty to the cause in which he had embarked, for a kingdom. “For me,” she said, “believe that I do not desire to be the wife of a King; I am more proud to be the wife of that great captain, who in war, by his valour, and in peace, by his magnanimity, has vanquished the greatest monarchs.”*

On receiving this letter, Pescara hastened to shake off the subtle tempters round him; but he had previously become so far entangled, that he

* “Non desidero d’esser moglie d’un re; bensi di quel gran capitano, il quale non solamente in guerra con valor, ma ancora in pace con la magnanimità ha saputo vincere i re più graude.” (Vita di Vittoria Colonna, da Giambattista Rota.)

did not escape without some impeachment of his before stainless honour. The bitter consciousness of this, and the effects of some desperate wounds he had received at the battle of Pavia, which broke out afresh, put a period to his life at Milan, in his thirty-fifth year.*

The Marchesana was at Naples when the news of his danger arrived. She immediately set out to join him; but was met at Viterbo by a courier, bearing the tidings of his death. On hearing this intelligence, she fainted away; and being brought a little to herself, sank into a stupor of grief, which alarmed her attendants for her reason or her life. Seasonable tears at length came to her relief; but her sorrow, for a long, long time, admitted no alleviation. She retired, after her first overwhelming anguish had subsided, to her favourite residence in the isle of Ischia, where she spent, almost uninterruptedly, the first seven years of her widowhood.

* See in Robertson's Charles V. an account of the generous conduct of Pescara to the Chevalier Bayard.

Being only in her thirty-fifth year, in the prime of her life and beauty, and splendidly dowered, it was supposed that she would marry again, and many of the Princes of Italy sought her hand; her brothers urged it; but she replied to their entreaties and remonstrances, with a mixture of dignity and tenderness, that “Though her noble husband might be by others reputed dead, he still lived to her, and to her heart.”* And in one of her poems, she alludes to these attempts to shake her constancy. “I will preserve,” she says, “the title of a faithful wife to my beloved,—a title dear to me beyond every other: and on this island-rock, † once so dear to *him*, will I wait patiently, till time brings the end of all my griefs, as once of all my joys.”

D' arder sempre piangendo non mi doglio!
 Forse avrò di fedele il titol vero,
 Caro a me sopra ogn' altro eterno onore.

* Che il suo sole, quantunque dagli altri fosse riputato morte, appresso di lei sempre vivea. (Vita.)

† Ischia.

Non cambierò la fè,—ne questo scoglio
 Ch' al *mio sol* piacque, ove finire spero
 Come le dolci già, quest' amare ore!*

This Sonnet was written in the seventh year of her widowhood. She says elsewhere, that her heart having once been so nobly bestowed, disdains a meaner chain; and that her love had not ceased with the death of its object.—

Di così nobil fiamma amore mi cinse,
 Ch' essendo spenta, in me viva l' ardore.

There is another, addressed to the poet Molza, in which she alludes to the fate of his parents, who, by a singular providence, both expired in the same day and hour: such a fate appeared to her worthy of envy; and she laments very tenderly that Heaven had doomed her to survive him with whom her heart lay buried. There are others addressed to Cardinal Bembo, in which she thus excuses herself for making Pescara the subject of her verse.

* Sonnet 74.

Scrivo sol per sfogar l' interna doglia ;
 La pura fe, l' ardor, l' intensa pena
 Mi scusa appo ciascun ; che 'l grave pianto
 E tal, che tempo, ne raggion l' affrena.

There is also a Canzone by Vittoria, full of poetry and feeling, in which she alludes to the loss of that beauty which once she was proud to possess, because it was dear in her husband's sight. "Look down upon me," she exclaims, "from thy seat of glory ! look down upon me with those eyes that ever turned with tenderness on mine ! Behold, how misery has changed me ; how all that once was beauty is fled !—and yet I am—I am the same !"—(Io son—io son ben dessa !)—But no translation—none at least that I could execute—would do justice to the deep pathos, the feminine feeling, and the eloquent simplicity of this beautiful and celebrated poem. The reader will find it in Mathias's collection.*

After the lapse of several years, her mind, elevated by the very nature of her grief, took a

* Componimenti Lirici, vol. i. 144.

strong devotional turn: and from this time, we find her poetry entirely consecrated to sacred subjects.

The first of these *Rime spirituali* is exquisitely beautiful. She allows that the anguish she had felt on the death of her noble husband, was not alleviated, but rather nourished and kept alive in all its first poignancy, by constantly dwelling on the theme of his virtues and her own regrets; that the thirst of fame, and the possession of glory, could not cure the pining sickness of her heart; and that she now turned to Heaven as a last and best resource against sorrow.*

* L'honneur d'avoir été, entre toutes les poètes, la première à composer un recueil de poésies sacrées, appartient, toute entière, à Vittoria Colonna. (See Gingucné.) Her masterpieces, in this style, are said to be the sonnet on the death of our Saviour.—

“ Gli Angeli eletti al gran bene infinito;”

and the hymn

“ Padre Eterno del cielo !”

which is sublime: it may be found in Mathias's Collection, vol. iii.

Poichè 'l mio casto amor, gran tempo tenne
 L' alma di fama accesa, ed ella un angue
 In sen nudrio, per cui dolente or languè,—
 Volta al Signor, onde il remedio venne.

* * * *

Chiamar qui non convien Parnasso o Delo ;
 Ch' ad altra acqua s' aspira, ad altro monte
 Si poggia, u' piede uman per se non sale.

Not the least of Vittoria's titles to fame, was the intense adoration with which she inspired Michel Angelo. Condivi says he was enamoured of her divine talents. "In particolare egli amò grandemente la Marchesana di Pescara, del cui divino spirito era innamorato:" and he makes use of a strong expression to describe the admiration and friendship she felt for him in return. She was fifteen years younger than Michel Angelo, who not only employed his pencil and his chisel for her pleasure, or at her suggestion, but has left among his poems several which are addressed to her, and which breathe that deep and fervent, yet pure and reverential love she was as worthy to inspire as he was to feel.

I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of adding here one of the Sonnets, addressed by Michel Angelo to the Marchesana of Pescara, as translated by Wordsworth, in a peal of grand harmony, almost as *literally* faithful to the expression as to the spirit of the original.

SONNET.

Yes! hope may with my strong desire keep pace,
And I be undeluded, unbetrayed;
For if of our affections none find grace
In sight of Heaven, then, wherefore had God made
The world which we inhabit? Better plea
Love cannot have, than that in loving thee
Glory to that eternal peace is paid,
Who such divinity to thee imparts
As hallows and makes pure all gentle hearts.
His hope is treacherous only whose love dies
With beauty, which is varying every hour:
But, in chaste hearts, uninfluenced by the power
Of outward change, there blooms a deathless flower,
That breathes on earth the air of Paradise.

He stood by her in her last moments; and when her lofty and gentle spirit had forsaken its fair

tenement, he raised her hand and kissed it with a sacred respect. He afterwards expressed to an intimate friend his regret, that being oppressed by the awful feelings of that moment, he had not, for the first and last time, pressed his lips to hers.

Vittoria had another passionate admirer in Galeazzo di Tarsia, Count of Belmonte in Calabria, and an excellent poet of that time.* His attachment was as poetical, but apparently not quite so Platonic, as that of Michel Angelo. His beautiful Canzone beginning,

A qual pietra sommiglia
La mia bella Colonna,

contains lines rather more impassioned than the modest and grave Vittoria could have approved: for example—

Con lei foss' io da che si parte il sole,
E non ci vedesse altri che le stelle,
—Solo una notte—e mai non fosse l' Alba!

* Died 1535.

Marini and Bernardo Tasso were also numbered among her poets and admirers.

Vittoria Colonna died at Rome, in 1547. She was suspected of favouring in secret the reformed doctrines; but I do not know on what authority Roscoe mentions this. Her noble birth, her admirable beauty, her illustrious marriage, her splendid genius, (which made her the worship of genius—and the theme of poets,) have rendered her one of the most remarkable of women;—as her sorrows, her conjugal virtues, her innocence of heart, and elegance of mind, have rendered her one of the most interesting.

Where could she fix on mortal ground
Those tender thoughts and high?
Now peace, the woman's heart hath found,
And joy, the poet's eye!*

Antiquity may boast its heroines; but it required virtues of a higher order to be a Vittoria Colonna, or a Lady Russel, than to be a Portia

* Mrs. Hemans.

or an Arria. How much more graceful, and even more sublime, is the moral strength, the silent enduring heroism of the Christian, than the stern, impatient defiance of destiny, which showed so imposing in the heathen! How much more difficult is it sometimes to live than to die!

Più val d' ogni vittoria un bel soffrire.

Or as Campbell has expressed nearly the same sentiment,

To bear, is to conquer our fate!

CHAPTER VI.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

VERONICA GAMBARA.

VITTORIA COLONNA, and her famed friend and contemporary, Veronica, Countess of Correggio, are inseparable names in the history of Italian literature, as living at the same time, and equally ornaments of their sex. They resembled each other in poetical talent, in their domestic sorrows and conjugal virtues: in every other respect the contrast is striking. Vittoria, with all her genius, seems to have been as lovely, gentle, and feminine a creature as ever wore the form of woman.

No lily—no—nor fragrant hyacinth,
Had half such softness, sweetness, blessedness.

Veronica, on the contrary, was one,

—to whose masculine spirit

To touch the stars had seemed an easy flight.

She added to her talents and virtues, strong passions, — and happily also sufficient energy of mind to govern and direct them. She had not Vittoria's personal charms: it is said, that if her face had equalled her form, she would have been one of the most beautiful women of her time; but her features were irregular, and her grand commanding figure, which in her youth was admired for its perfect proportions, grew large and heavy as she advanced in life. She retained, however, to the last, the animation of her countenance, the dignity of her deportment, and powers of conversation so fascinating, that none ever approached her without admiration, or quitted her society without regret.

Her verses have not the polished harmony and the graceful suavity of Vittoria's; but more vigour of expression, and more vivacity of colouring. Their defects were equally opposed:

the simplicity of Veronica sometimes borders upon harshness and carelessness; the uniform sweetness of Vittoria is sometimes too elaborate and artificial.

Veronica Gambara was born in 1485. Her *fortunate* parents, as her biographer expresses it,* were Count Gian Francisco Gambara, and Alda Pia. In her twenty-fifth year, when already distinguished as a poetess, and a woman of great and various learning, she married Ghiberto Count of Correggio, to whom she appears to have been attached with all the enthusiasm of her character, and by whom she was tenderly loved in return. After the birth of her second son, she was seized with a dangerous disorder, of what nature we are not told. The physicians informed her husband that they did not despair of her recovery, but that the remedies they should be forced to employ would probably preclude all hope of her becoming again a mother. The Count, who had always wished for a numerous offspring, ordered

* Zamboni.

them to employ these remedies instantly, and save her to him at every other risk. She recovered; but the effects upon her constitution were such as had been predicted.

Like Vittoria Colonna, she made the personal qualities and renown of her husband the principal subjects of her verse. She dwells particularly on his fine dark eyes, expressing very gracefully the various feelings they excited in her heart, whether clouded with thought, or serene with happiness, or sparkling with affection.* She devotes six Sonnets and a Madrigal to this subject; and if we may believe his poetical and admiring wife, these “occhi stellante” could combine more variety of expression in a single glance than ever did eyes before or since.

Lieti, mesti, superbi, unili, altieri,
 Vi mostrate in un punto ; onde di speme
 E di timor m' empiete.—

* “ Molto vagamente spiegando i varj e differenti effetti che andavano cagionando nel di lei core, a misura che essi eran torbidi, o lieti, o sereni ”—*See her Life by Zamboni.*

There is great power and pathos in one of her poems, written on his absence.

O Stella! O Fato! del mio mal si avaro!
 Ch' l mio ben m' allontani, anzi m' involi—
 Fia mai quel di ch' io lo riveggia o mora? *

Veronica lost her husband, after nine years of the happiest union.† He gave her an incontrovertible proof of his attachment and boundless confidence, by leaving her his sole executrix, with the government of Correggio, and the guardianship of his children during their minority. Her grief on this occasion threw her into a dangerous and protracted fever, which during the rest of her life attacked her periodically. She says in one of her poems, that nothing but the fear of not meeting her beloved husband in Paradise prevented her from dying with him. She not only vowed herself to a perpetual widowhood, but to a perpetual mourning; and the extreme vivacity of her imagination was displayed in the strange

* Sonnet 16.

† Ghiberto da Correggio died 1518.

trappings of woe with which she was henceforth surrounded. She lived in apartments hung and furnished with black, and from which every object of luxury was banished: her liveries, her coach, her horses, were of the same funereal hue. There is extant a curious letter addressed by her to Ludovico Rossi, in which she entreats her dear Messer Ludovico, by all their mutual friendship, to procure, at any price, a certain black horse, to complete her set of carriage horses—"più che notte oscuri, conformi, proprio a miei travagli." Over the door of her sleeping-room she inscribed the distich which Virgil has put into the mouth of Dido.

Ille meos, primus qui me sibi junxit, amores
Abstulit: ille habeat secum servetque sepulchro!

He who once had my vows, shall ever have,
Beloved on earth and worshipped in the grave!

But, unlike Dido, she did not "profess too much." She kept her word. Neither did she neglect her duties; but more fortunate in one respect than her fair and elegant friend the

Marchesana, she had two sons, to whose education she paid the utmost attention, while she administered the government of Correggio with equal firmness and gentleness. Her husband had left a daughter,* whom she educated and married with a noble dower. Her eldest son, Hypolito, became a celebrated military commander; her youngest and favourite son, Girolamo, was created a cardinal. Wherever Veronica loved, it seems to have been with the same passionate *abandon* which distinguished her character in every thing. Writing to a friend to recommend her son to his kind offices, she assures him that “he (her son) is not only a part of herself—but rather *herself*. Remember,” she says, “Ch’egli è la Veronica medesima,”—a strong and tender expression.

We find her in correspondence with all the most illustrious characters, political and literary, of that time; and chiefly with Ariosto, Bembo, Molza, Sanazzaro, and Vittoria Colonna. Ariosto

* Constance; by his first wife, Violante di Mirandola.

has paid her an elegant compliment in the last canto of the *Orlando Furioso*. She is one among the company of beautiful and accomplished women and noble knights, who hail the poet, at the conclusion of his work, as a long-travelled mariner is welcomed to the shore :

Veronica da Gambarà e con loro
Si grata a Febo, e al santo aonio coro.

This was distinction enough to immortalize her, if she had not already immortalized herself.

Veronica was not a prolific poetess; but the few Sonnets she has left, have a vigour, a truth and simplicity, not often met with among the *rimatori* of that rhyming age. She has written fewer good poems than Vittoria Colonna, but among them, two which are reckoned superior to Vittoria's best,—one addressed to the rival monarchs, Charles the Fifth and Francis the First, exhorting them to give peace to Italy, and unite their forces to protect civilized Europe from the incursions of the infidels; the other, which is exquisitely tender and picturesque, was composed

on revisiting her native place Brescia, after the death of her husband.

Poi che per mia ventura a veder torno, &c.

It may be found in the collection of Mathias.

Veronica da Gambarara died in 1550, and was buried by her husband.

It should seem that poetical talents and conjugal truth and tenderness were inherent in the family of Veronica. Her niece, Camilla Valentini, the authoress of some very sweet poems, which are to be found in various *Scelte*, married the Count del Verme, who died after a union of several years. She had flung herself, in a transport of grief, on the body of her husband; and when her attendants attempted to remove her, they found her—dead! Even in that moment of anguish her heart had broken.

O judge her gently, who so deeply loved!

Her, who in reason's sp.ite, without a crime,

Was in a trance of passion thus removed!

* * * * *

I have been detained too long in "the sweet

South ;” yet, before we quit it for the present, I must allude to one or two names which cannot be entirely passed over, as belonging to the period of which we have been speaking—the golden age of Italy and of literature.

Bernardino Rota, who died in 1575, a poet of considerable power and pathos, has left a volume of poems, “*In vita e in morte di Porzia Capece ;*” she was a beautiful woman of Naples, whom he loved and afterwards married, and who was snatched from him in the pride of her youth and beauty. Among his Sonnets, I find one peculiarly striking, though far from being the best. The picture it presents, with all its affecting accompaniments, and the feelings commemorated, are obviously taken from nature and reality. The poet—the husband—approaches to contemplate the lifeless form of his Portia, and weeping, he draws from her pale cold hand the nuptial ring, which he had himself placed on her finger with all the fond anticipations of love and hope—the pledge of a union which death alone could dissolve : and now, with a breaking heart, he transfers it to his own. Such is the

subject of this striking poem, which, with some few faults against taste, is still singularly picturesque and eloquent, particularly the last six lines.—

SONETTO.

Questa scolpita in oro, amica fede,
 Che santo amor nel tuo bel dito pose,
 O prima a me delle terrene cose !
 Donna ! caro mio pregio,—alta mercede—
 Ben fu da te serbata ; e ben si vede
 Che al comun' voler' sempre rispose,
 Del dì ch' il ciel nel mio pensier' t' ascose,
 E quanto puote dar, tutto mi diede !

Ecco ch' io la t' invola—ecco ne spoglio
 Il freddo avorio che l' ornava ; e vesto
 La mia, più assai che la tua, mano esangue.
 Dolce mio furto ! finchè vivo io voglio
 Che tu stia meco—ne le sia molesto
 Ch' or di pianto ti bagni,—e poi di sangue!

LITERAL TRANSLATION.

“ This circlet of sculptured gold—this pledge which sacred affection placed on that fair hand—O Lady ! dearest to me of all earthly things,—my sweet possession and my lovely prize,—well and faithfully didst thou preserve it ! the bond of a mutual

love and mutual faith, even from that hour when Heaven bestowed on me all it could bestow of bliss. Now then—O now do I take it from thee! and thus do I withdraw it from the cold ivory of that hand which so adorned and honoured it. I place it on mine own, now chill, and damp, and pale as thine.—O beloved theft!—While I live thou shalt never part from me. Ah! be not offended if thus I stain thee with these tears,—and soon perhaps with life drops from my heart.”

* * * *

Castiglione, besides being celebrated as the finest gentleman of his day, and the author of that code of all noble and knightly accomplishments, of perfect courtesy and gentle bearing—“*Il Cortigiano*,” must have a place among our conjugal poets. He had married in 1516, Hypolita di Torrello, whose accomplishments, beauty, and illustrious birth, rendered her worthy of him. It appears, however, that her family, who were of Mantua, could not bear to part with her,* and that after her marriage, she remained in that city, while Castiglione was ambassador at Rome. This separation gave rise to a very impassioned cor-

* Serassi.—*Vita di Baldassare Castiglione*.

respondence ; and the tender regrets and remonstrances scattered through her letters, he transposed into a very beautiful poem, in the form of an epistle from his wife. It may be found in the appendix to Roscoe's Leo X. (No. 196.) Hypolita died in giving birth to a daughter, after a union of little more than three years, and left Castiglione for some time inconsolable. We are particularly told of the sympathy of the Pope and the Cardinals on this occasion, and that Leo condoled with him in a manner equally unusual and substantial, by bestowing on him immediately a pension of two hundred gold crowns.

CHAPTER VII.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

STORY OF DR. DONNE AND HIS WIFE.

MY next instance of conjugal poetry is taken from the literary history of our own country, and founded on as true and touching a piece of romance as ever was taken from the page of real life.

Dr. Donne, once so celebrated as a writer, now so neglected, is more interesting for his matrimonial history, and for one little poem addressed to his wife, than for all his learned, metaphysical, and theological productions. As a poet, it is probable that even readers of poetry know little of him, except from the lines at the bottom of the pages in Pope's version, or rather translation, of

his Satires, the very recollection of which is enough to "set one's ears on edge," and verify Coleridge's witty and imitative couplet.—

Donne—whose muse on dromedary trots,—
Twists iron pokers into true love knots.

It is this inconceivable harshness of versification, which has caused Donne to be so little read, except by those who make our old poetry their study. One of these critics has truly observed, that "there is scarce a writer in our language who has so thoroughly mixed up the good and the bad together." What is good, is the result of truth, of passion, of a strong mind, and a brilliant wit: what is bad, is the effect of a most perverse taste, and total want of harmony. No sooner has he kindled the fancy with a splendid thought, than it is as instantly quenched in a cloud of cold and obscure conceits: no sooner has he touched the heart with a feeling or sentiment, true to nature and powerfully expressed, than we are chilled or disgusted by pedantry or coarseness.

The events of Donne's various life, and the

romantic love he inspired and felt, make us recur to his works, with an interest and a curiosity, which while they give a value to every beauty we can discover, render his faults more glaring,—more provoking,—more intolerable.

In his youth he lavished a considerable fortune in dissipation, in travelling, and, it may be added, in the acquisition of great and various learning. He then entered the service of Lord Chancellor Ellesmere, as secretary. Under the same roof resided Lady Ellesmere's niece, Anne Moore, a lovely and amiable woman. She was about nineteen, and Donne was about thirty, handsome, lively, and polished by travel and study. They met constantly, and the result was a mutual attachment of the most ardent and romantic character. As they were continually together, and always in presence of watchful relations ("ambushed round with household spies," as he expresses it,) it could not long be concealed. "The friends of both parties," says Walton, "used much diligence and many arguments to kill or cool their affections for each other, but in vain:"

and the lady's father, Sir George Moore, "knowing prevention to be the best part of wisdom," came up to town in all haste, and carried off his daughter into the country. But his preventive wisdom came too late: the lovers had been secretly married three weeks before.

This precipitate step was perhaps excusable, from the known violence and sternness of Sir George's character. His daughter was well aware that his consent would never be voluntary: she preferred marrying without it, to marrying against it; and trusted to obtain his forgiveness when there was no remedy:—a common mode of reasoning, I believe, in such cases. Never perhaps was a youthful error of this description more bitterly punished—more deeply expiated—and so little repented of!

The Earl of Northumberland undertook to break the matter to Sir George, to reason with him on the subject; and to represent the excellent qualities of his son-in-law, and the duty of forgiveness, as a wise man, a father, and Christian. His intention was benevolent, and we have reason

to regret that his speech or letter has not been preserved; for (such is human inconsistency!) this very Earl of Northumberland never could forgive his own daughter a similar disobedience,* but followed it with his curse, which he was with difficulty prevailed on to retract. His mediation failed: Sir George, on learning that his precautions came too late, burst into a transport of rage, the effect of which resembled insanity. He had sufficient interest in the arbitrary court of James, to procure the imprisonment of Donne and the witnesses of his daughter's marriage; and he insisted that his brother-in-law should dismiss the young man from his office,—his only support. Lord Ellesmere yielded with extreme reluctance, saying, “he parted with such a friend and such a secretary, as were a fitter servant for a King.” Donne, in sending this news to his wife, signs his name with the quaint oddity, which was so characteristic of his mind,—*John Donne, Anne Donne,*

* Lady Lucy Percy, afterwards the famous Countess of Carlisle, mentioned in page 33.

—*undone* : and *undone* they truly were. As soon as he was released he claimed his wife ; but it was many months before they were allowed to meet.

Have we for this kept guard, like spy o'er spy ?
 Had correspondence whilst the foe stood by ?
 Stolen (more to sweeten them) our many blisses
 Of meetings, conference, embracements, kisses ?
 Shadow'd with negligence our best respects ?
 Varied our language through all dialects
 Of becks, winks, looks ; and often under boards,
 Spoke dialogues, with our feet far from our words ?
 And after all this passed purgatory,
 Must sad divorce make us the vulgar story ?*

At length this unkind father in some degree relented ; he suffered his daughter and her husband to live together, but he refused to contribute to their support ; and they were reduced to the greatest distress. Donne had nothing. “ His wife had been curiously and plentifully educated ; both their natures generous, accustomed to confer, not to receive courtesies ;” and when he looked on her who was to be the partner of his lot, he was filled

* Donne's poems.

with such sadness and apprehension as he could never have felt for himself alone.*

In this situation they were invited into the house of a generous kinsman (Sir Francis Woolley), who maintained them and their increasing family for several years, "to their mutual content" and undiminished friendship. † Volumes could not say more in praise of both than this singular connection:—to bestow favours, so long continued and of such magnitude, with a grace which made them sit lightly on those who received them, and to preserve, under the weight of such obligation, dignity, independence, and happiness, bespeaks uncommon greatness of spirit and goodness of heart and temper on all sides.

This close and domestic intimacy was dissolved only by the death of Sir Francis, who had previously procured a kind of reconciliation with the father of Mrs. Donne, and an allowance of about eighty pounds a year. They fell again into debt,

* Walton's Lives.

† Walton's Life of Donne.—Chalmers's Biography.

and into misery; and “doubtless,” says old Walton, with a quaint, yet eloquent simplicity, “their marriage had been attended with a heavy repentance, if God had not blessed them with so mutual and cordial affections, as, in the midst of their sufferings, made their bread of sorrow taste more pleasantly than the banquets of dull and low-spirited* people.” We find in some of Donne’s letters, the most heart-rending pictures of family distress, mingled with the tenderest touches of devoted affection for his amiable wife. “I write,” he says, “from the fire-side in my parlour, and in the noise of three gamesome children, and by the side of her, whom, because I have transplanted into a wretched fortune, I must labour to disguise that from her by all such honest devices, as giving her my company and discourse,” &c. &c.

And in another letter he describes himself, with all his family sick, his wife stupified by her own and her children’s sufferings, without money to

* i. e. low-minded.

purchase medicine,—“and if God should ease us with burials, I know not how to perform even that; but I flatter myself that I am dying too, for I cannot waste faster than by such griefs.—From my hospital. “JOHN DONNE.”

This is the language of despair; but love was stronger than despair, and supported this affectionate couple through all their trials. Add to mutual love the spirit of high honour and conscious desert; for in the midst of this sad, and almost sordid misery and penury, Donne, whose talents his contemporaries acknowledged with admiration, refused to take orders and accept a benefice, from a scruple of conscience, on account of the irregular life he had led in his youthful years.

But in their extremity, Providence raised them up another munificent friend. Sir Robert Drury received the whole family into his house, treated Donne with the most cordial respect and affection, and some time afterwards invited him to accompany him abroad.

Donne had been married to his wife seven years, during which they had suffered every variety of

wretchedness, except the greatest of all,—that of being separated. The idea of this first parting was beyond her fortitude; she said, her “divining soul boded her some ill in his absence,” and with tears she entreated him not to leave her. Her affectionate husband yielded; but Sir Robert Drury was urgent, and would not be refused. Donne represented to his wife all that honour and gratitude required of him; and she, too really tender, and too devoted to be selfish and unreasonable, yielded with “an unwilling willingness;” yet, womanlike, she thought she could not bear a pain she had never tried, and was seized with the romantic idea of following him in the disguise of a page.* In a delicate and amiable woman, and a mother, it could have been but a momentary thought, suggested in the frenzy of anguish. It inspired, however, the following beautiful dissuasion, which her husband addressed to her.

By our first strange and fatal interview;
By all desires which thereof did ensue;

* Chalmers's Biography.

By our long-striving hopes ; by that remorse
Which my words' masculine persuasive force
Begot in thee, and by the memory
Of hurts which spies and rivals threaten'd me,—
I calmly beg : but by thy father's wrath,
By all pains which want and divorcement hath,
I conjure thee ;—and all the oaths which I
And thou have sworn to seal joint constancy,
I here unswear, and overswear them thus :
Thou shalt not love by means so dangerous.
Temper, O fair Love ! Love's impetuous rage ;
Be my true mistress, not my feigned page.
'll go, and by thy kind leave, leave behind
Thee, only worthy to nurse in my mind
Thirst to come back. O ! if thou die before,
My soul from other lands to thee shall soar :
Thy (else almighty) beauty cannot move
Rage from the seas, not thy love teach them love,
Nor tame wild Boreas' harshness : thou hast read
How roughly he in pieces shivered
Fair Orithea, whom he swore he loved.
Fall ill or good, 'tis madness to have proved
Dangers unurg'd : feed on this flattery,
That absent lovers one in th' other be.
Dissemble nothing,—not a boy,—nor change
Thy body's habit nor mind : be not strange

To thyself only : all will spy in thy face
A blushing, womanly, discovering grace.
When I am gone dream me some happiness,
Nor let thy looks our long hid love confess :
Nor praise nor dispraise me ; nor bless nor curse
Openly love's force ; nor in bed fright thy nurse
With midnight startings, crying out, Oh ! oh !
Nurse, oh ! my love is slain ! I saw him go
O'er the white Alps alone ; I saw him, I,
Assailed, ta'en, fight, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die !
Augur me better chance, except dread Jove
Think it enough for me to have had thy love.

I would not have the heart of one who could read these lines, and think only of their rugged style, and faults of taste and expression. The superior power of truth and sentiment have immortalised this little poem, and the occasion which gave it birth. The wife and husband parted, and he left with her another little poem, which he calls a “*Valediction, forbidding to mourn.*”

When Donne was at Paris, and still suffering under the grief of this separation, he saw, or fancied he saw, the apparition of his wife pass through the room in which he sat, her hair di-

shevelled and hanging down upon her shoulders, her face pale and mournful, and carrying in her arms a dead infant. Sir Robert Drury found him a few minutes afterwards in such a state of horror, and his mind so impressed with the reality of this vision, that an express was immediately sent off to England, to inquire after the health of Mrs. Donne. She had been seized, after the departure of her husband, with a premature confinement; had been at the point of death; but was then out of danger, and recovering.

This incident has been related by all Donne's biographers, by some with infinite solemnity, by others with sneering incredulity. I can speak from experience, of the power of the imagination to impress us with a palpable sense of what is *not*, and cannot be; and it seems to me that, in a man of Donne's ardent, melancholy temperament, brooding day and night on the one sad idea, a high state of nervous excitement is sufficient to account for this impression, without having recourse to supernatural agency, or absolute disbelief.

Donne, after several years of study, was pre-

vailed on to enter holy orders; and about four years afterwards, his amiable wife died in her twelfth confinement.* His grief was so overwhelming, that his old friend Walton thinks it necessary thus to apologise for him:—"Nor is it hard to think (being that passions may be both changed and heightened by accidents,) but that the abundant affection which was once betwixt him and her, who had so long been the delight of his eyes and the companion of his youth; her, with whom he had divided so many pleasant sorrows and contented fears, as common people are not capable of, should be changed into a commensurable grief." He roused himself at length to his duties; and preaching his first sermon at St. Clement's Church, in the Strand, where his beloved wife lay buried, he took for his text, Jer. iii. v. 1,—“Lo! I am the man that hath seen affliction;” and sent all his congregation home in tears.

* * * * *

* In 1617.

Among Donne's earlier poetry may be distinguished the following little song, which has so much more harmony and elegance than his other pieces, that it is scarcely a fair specimen of his style. It was long popular, and I can remember when a child, hearing it sung to very beautiful music.

Send home my long stray'd eyes to me,
 Which, oh! too long have dwelt on thee!
 But if from thee they've learnt such ill,
 Such forced fashions
 And false passions,
 That they be
 Made by thee

Fit for no good sight—keep them still!

Send home my harmless heart again,
 Which no unworthy thought could stain!
 But if it hath been taught by thine
 To make jestings
 Of protestings,
 To forget both
 Its word and troth,
 Keep it still—'tis none of mine!

Perhaps it may interest some readers to add,

that Donne's famous lines, which have been quoted *ad infinitum*,—

The pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
Ye might have almost said her body thought !

were not written on his wife, but on Elizabeth Drury, the only daughter of his patron and friend, Sir Robert Drury. She was the richest heiress in England, the wealth of her father being considered almost incalculable ; and this, added to her singular beauty, and extraordinary talents and acquirements, rendered her so popularly interesting, that she was considered a fit match for Henry, Prince of Wales. She died in her sixteenth year.

Dr. Donne and his wife were maternal ancestors of the Poet Cowper.

CHAPTER VII.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

HABINGTON'S CASTARA.

ONE of the most elegant monuments ever raised by genius to conjugal affection, was Habington's Castara.

William Habington, who ranks among the most graceful of our old minor poets, was a gentleman of an ancient Roman Catholic family in Worcestershire, and born in 1605.* On his return from his travels, he saw and loved Lucy Herbert, the

* It was the mother of William Habington who addressed to her brother, Lord Mounteagle, that extraordinary letter which led to the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot.

daughter of Lord Powis, and granddaughter of the Earl of Northumberland. She was far his superior in birth, being descended, on both sides, from the noblest blood in England; and her haughty relations at first opposed their union. It was, however, merely that degree of opposition, without which the "course of true love would have run *too smooth*." It was just sufficient to pique the ardour of the lover, and prove the worth and constancy of her he loved. The history of their attachment has none of the painful interest which hangs round that of Donne and his wife: it is a picture of pure and peaceful happiness, and of mutual tenderness, on which the imagination dwells with a soft complacency and unalloyed pleasure; with nothing of romance but what was borrowed from the elegant mind and playful fancy, which heightened and embellished the delightful reality.

If Habington had not been born a poet, a tombstone in an obscure country church would have been the only memorial of himself and his Castara. "She it was who animated his ima-

gination with tenderness and elegance, and filled it with images of beauty, purified by her feminine delicacy from all grosser alloy." In return, he may be allowed to exult in the immortality he has given her.

Thy vows are heard ! and thy Castara's name
 Is writ as fair i' the register of fame,
 As the ancient beauties which translated are
 By poets up to Heaven—each there a star.
 * * * * *
 Fix'd in Love's firmament no star shall shine
 So nobly fair, so purely chaste as thine !

The collection of poems which Habington dedicated to his Castara, is divided into two parts : those written before his marriage he has entitled "The Mistress," those written subsequently, "The Wife."

He has prefixed to the whole an introduction in prose, written with some quaintness, but more feeling and elegance, in which he claims for himself the honour of being the first *conjugal* poet in our language. To use his own words : "Though I appear to strive against the stream of the best wits in erecting the same altar to chastity and

love, I will, for one, adventure to do well without a precedent."

Habington had, however, been anticipated, as we have seen, by some of the Italian poets whom he has imitated: he has a little of the *récherche* and affectation of their school, and is not untinctured by the false taste of his day. He has not great power, nor much pathos; but these defects are redeemed by a delicacy of expression uncommon at that time; by the interest he has thrown round a love as pure as its object, and by the most exquisite touches of fancy, sentiment, and tenderness.

Without expressly naming his wife in his prefatory remarks, he alludes to her very beautifully, and exults, with a modest triumph, in the value of his rich possession.

"How unhappy soever I may be in the elocution, I am sure the theme is worthy enough.
* * * Nor was my invention ever sinister from the straight way of chastity; and when love builds upon *that* rock, it may safely contemn the battery of the waves, and the threatenings of the

wind. Since time, that makes a mockery of the finest structures, shall itself be ruined before *that* be demolished. Thus was the foundation laid; and though my eye, in its survey, was satisfied even to curiosity, yet did not my search rest there. The alabaster, ivory, porphyry, jet, that lent an admirable beauty to the outward building, entertained me with but half pleasure, since they stood there only to make sport for ruin. But when my soul grew acquainted with the owner of that mansion, I found that oratory was dumb when it began to speake her."

He then describes her wisdom; her wit; her innocence,—“so unvitiated by conversation with the world, that the subtle-witted of her sex would have termed it ignorance;” her modesty “so timorous, it represented a besieged city standing watchfully on her guard: in a word, all those virtues which should restore woman to her primitive state of virtue, fully adorned her.” He then prettily apologises for this indiscreet rhetoric on such a subject. “Such,” he says, “I fancied her; for to say she is, or was such, were to play

the merchant, and boast too much of the value of the jewel I possess, but have no mind to part with."

He concludes with this just, yet modest appreciation of himself:—"If not too indulgent to what is mine own, I think even these verses will have that proportion in the world's opinion, that heaven hath allotted me in fortune,—not so high as to be wondered at, nor so low as to be contemned."

In the description of "the MISTRESS," are some little touches inimitably graceful and complimentary. Though couched in general terms, it is of course a portrait of Lucy Herbert, such as she appeared to him in the days of their courtship, and fondly recalled and dwelt upon, when she had been many years a wife and a mother. He represents her "as fair as Nature intended her, helpt, perhaps, to a more pleasing grace by the sweetness of education, not by the sleight of art." This discrimination is delicately drawn.—He continues, "she is young; for a woman, past the delicacy of her spring, may well move to virtue by respect, never by beauty to affection. In her

carriage, sober, thinking her youth expressteth life enough, without the giddy motion fashion of late hath taken up.”--(This was early in the reign of the grave and correct Charles the First. What would Habington have said of the flaunting, fluttering, voluble beauties of Charles the Second's time?)

He extols the melody of her voice, her knowledge of music, and her grace in the dance: above all, he dwells on her retiring modesty, the favourite theme of his praise in prose and verse, which seems to have been the most striking part of her character, and her greatest charm in the eyes of her lover. He concludes, with the beautiful sentiment I have chosen as a motto to this little book.—“ Only she, who hath as great a share in virtue as in beauty, deserves a noble love to serve her, and a free poesie to speak her!”

The poems are all short, generally in the form of *sonnets*, if that name can be properly applied to all poems of fourteen lines, whatever the rhyth-

mical arrangement. The subjects of these, and their quaint expressive titles, form a kind of chronicle of their loves, in which every little incident is commemorated. Thus we have, “to Castara, inquiring why I loved her.”—“To Castara, softly singing to herself.” “To Castara, leaving him on the approach of night.”—

What should we fear, Castara ! the cool air
That's fallen in love, and wantons in thy hair,
Will not betray our whispers :—should I steal
A nectar'd kiss, the wind dares not reveal
The treasure I possess !

“To Castara, on being debarred her presence,”
(probably by her father, Lord Powis.)—

Banish'd from you, I charged the nimble wind,
My unseen messenger, to speak my mind
In amorous whispers to you !

“Upon her intended journey into the country.”
—“Upon Seymors,” (a house near Marlow, where Castara resided with her parents, and where, it appears, he was not allowed to visit her.)—“On

a trembling kiss she had granted him on her departure." The commencement of this is beautiful :

The Arabian wind, whose breathing gently blows
 Purple to the violet, blushes to the rose,
 Did never yield an odour such as this !
 Why are you then so thrifty of a kiss,
 Authorized even by custom? Why doth fear
 So tremble on your lip, my lip being near ?

Then we have, "to Castara, on visiting her in the night."—This alludes to a meeting of the lovers, at a time they were debarred from each other's society.

The following are more exquisitely graceful than any thing in Waller, yet much in his style.

TO ROSES IN THE BOSOM OF CASTARA.

Ye blushing virgins happy are
 In the chaste nunnery of her breast ;
 For he 'd profane so chaste a fair
 Who e'er should call it Cupid's nest.

Transplanted thus, how bright ye grow !

How rich a perfume do ye yield !

In some close garden, cowslips so

Are sweeter than i' the open field.

In those white cloisters live secure,

From the rude blasts of wanton breath ;

Each hour more innocent and pure,

Till ye shall wither into death. .

Then that which living gave ye room,

Your glorious sepulchre shall be ;

There needs no marble for a tomb,—

That breast hath marble been to me !

The epistle to Castara's mother, Lady Eleanor Powis, who appears to have looked kindly on their love, contains some very beautiful lines, in which he asserts the disinterestedness of his affection for Castara, rich as she is in fortune, and derived from the blood of Charlemagne.

My love is envious ! would Castara were

The daughter of some mountain cottager,

Who, with his toil worn out, could dying leave

Her no more dower than what she did receive

From bounteous Nature ; her would I then lead
 To the temple, rich in her own wealth ; her head
 Crowned with her hair's fair treasure ; diamonds in
 Her brighter eyes ; soft ermines in her skin,
 Each India in her cheek, &c.

This first part closes with “ the description of Castara,” which is extended to several stanzas, of unequal merit. The following compose in themselves a sweet picture :

Like the violet, which alone
 Prospers in some happy shade,
 My Castara lives unknown,
 To no looser eye betray'd.
 For she's to herself untrue
 Who delights i' the public view.

* * * * *

Such her beauty, as no arts
 Have enrich'd with borrow'd grace
 Her high birth no pride imparts,
 For she blushes in her place.
 Folly boasts a glorious blood—
 She is noblest, being good !

* * * * *

She her throne makes reason climb,
While wild passions captive lie;
And each article of time
Her pure thoughts to heaven fly.
All her vows religious be—
And her love she vows to me!

The second part of these poems, dedicated to Castara as “the WIFE,” have not less variety and beauty, though there were, of course, fewer incidents to record. The first Sonnet, “to Castara, now possest of her in marriage,” beginning “This day is ours,” &c. has more fancy and poetry than tenderness. The lines to Lord Powis, the father of Castara, on the same occasion, are more beautiful and earnest, yet rich in fanciful imagery. Lord Powis, it must be remembered, had opposed their union, and had been, with difficulty, induced to give his consent. The following lines refer to this; and Habington asserts the purity and unselfishness of his attachment.

Nor grieve, my Lord, 'tis perfected. Before
Afflicted seas sought refuge on the shore,
From the angry north wind; ere the astonish'd spring

Heard in the air the feathered people sing ;
 Ere time had motion, or the sun obtained
 His province o'er the day—this was ordained.
 Nor think in her I courted wealth or blood,
 Or more uncertain hopes ; for had I stood
 On the highest ground of fortune,—the world known,
 No greatness but what waited on my throne—
 And she had only had that face and mind,
 I with myself, had th' earth to her resigned.
 In virtue there's an empire !

Here I rest,
 As all things to my power subdued ; to me
 There's nought beyond this, the whole world is SHE !

On the anniversary of their wedding-day, he
 thus addresses her :—

LOVE'S ANNIVERSARY.

Thou art return'd (great light) to that blest hour
 In which I first by marriage, (sacred power!)
 Joined with Castara hearts ; and as the same
 Thy lustre is, as then,—so is our flame ;
 Which had increased, but that by Love's decree,
 'Twas such at first, it ne'er could greater be.
 But tell me, (glorious lamp,) in thy survey
 Of things below thee, what did not decay

By age to weakness ? I since that have seen
The rose bud forth and fade, the tree grow green,
And wither wrinkled. Even thyself dost yield
 Something to time, and to thy grave fall nigher ;
But virtuous love is one sweet endless fire.

“ To Castara, on the knowledge of love,” is peculiarly elegant ; it was, probably, suggested by some speculative topics of conversation, discussed in the literary circle he had drawn round him at Hindlip.*

Where sleeps the north wind when the south inspires
Life in the Spring, and gathers into quires
The scatter'd nightingales ; whose subtle ears
Heard first the harmonious language of the spheres ;
Whence hath the stone magnetic force t' allure
Th' enamour'd iron ; from a seed impure,
Or natural, did first the mandrake grow ;
What power in the ocean makes it flow ;
What strange materials is the azure sky
Compacted of ; of what its brightest eye
The ever flaming sun ; what people are
In th' unknown world ; what worlds in every star :—

* The family seat of the Habingtons, in Worcestershire.

Let curious fancies at these secrets rove ;
 Castara, what we know we'll practise—lov

The “ Lines on her fainting ;” those on “ The
 fear of death,”—

Why should we fear to melt away in death ?
 May we but die together ! &c.

On her sigh,—

Were but that sigh a penitential breath
 That thou art mine, it would blow with it death,
 T' inclose me in my marble, where I'd be
 Slave to the tyrant worms to set thee free !

His self-congratulation on his own happiness, in
 his epistle to his uncle, Lord Morley ; are all in
 the same strain of gentle and elegant feeling.
 The following are among the last addressed to
 his wife.

Give me a heart, where no impure
 Disorder'd passions rage ;
 Which jealousy doth not obscure,
 Nor vanity t' expense engage ;
 Not wooed to madness by quaint oathes,
 Or the fine rhetorick of cloathes ;

Which not the softness of the age
To vice or folly doth decline ;
Give me that heart, Castara, for 'tis thine.

Take thou a heart, where no new look
Provokes new appetite ;
With no fresh charm of beauty took,
Or wanton stratagem of wit ;
Not idly wandering here and there,
Led by an am'rous eye or ear ;
Aiming each beauteous mark to hit ;
Which virtue doth to one confine :
Take thou that heart, Castara, for 'tis mine.

It was owing to his affection for his wife, as well as his own retired and studious habits, that Habington lived through the civil wars without taking any active part on either side. It should seem that, at such a period, no man of a lofty and generous spirit could have avoided joining the party or principles, either of Falkland and Grandison, or of Hampden and Hutchinson. But Habington's family had already suffered, in fortune and in fame, by their interference with State matters ; and without, in any degree, implicating

himself with either party, he passed through those stormy and eventful times,

As one who dreams

Of idleness, in groves Elysian ;

and died in the first year of the Protectorate, 1654. I cannot discover the date of Castara's death ; but she died some years before her husband, leaving only one son.

There is one among the poems of the second part of Castara, which I cannot pass without remark ; it is the Elegy which Habington addressed to his wife, on the death of her friend, Venetia Digby, the consort of the famous Sir Kenelm Digby. She was the most beautiful woman of her time : even Lord Clarendon steps aside from the gravity of history, to mention " her extraordinary beauty, and as extraordinary fame." Her picture at Windsor is, indeed, more like a vision of ideal loveliness, than any form that ever trod the earth.* She was descended

* There are also four pictures of her at Strawberry Hill, and one of her mother, Lady Lucy Percy, exquisitely beautiful. At

from the Percies and the Stanleys, and was first cousin to Habington's Castara, their mothers being sisters. The magnificent spirit of her enamoured husband, surrounded her with the most gorgeous adornments that ever were invented by vanity or luxury: and thus she was, one day, found dead on her couch, her hand supporting her head, in the attitude of one asleep. Habington's description exactly agrees with the picture at Althorpe, painted after her death by Vandyke.

What's honour but a hatchment? what is here
Of Percy left, or Stanley, names most dear
To virtue?

Or what avails her that she once was led
A glorious bride to valiant Digby's bed?

She, when whatever rare
The either Indies boast, lay richly spread
For her to wear, lay on her pillow *dead!*

There is no piercing the mystery which hangs round the story of this beautiful creature: that Gothurst, there is a picture of her, and a bust, which, after her death, her husband placed in his chamber, with this tender and beautiful inscription

Uxorem amare vivam, voluptas; defunctam, religio.

a stigma rested on her character, and that she was exculpated from it, whatever it might be, seems proved, by the doves and serpents introduced into several portraits of her; the first, emblematical of her innocence, and the latter, of her triumph over slander: and not less, by these lines of Habington. If Venetia Digby had been, as Aubrey and others insinuate, abandoned to profligacy, and a victim to her husband's jealousy, Habington would scarce have considered her noble descent and relationship to his Castara as a matter of pride; or her death as a subject of tender condolence; or the awful manner of it a peculiar blessing of heaven, and the reward of her virtues.

Come likewise, my Castara, and behold
What blessings ancient prophecy foretold,
Bestow'd on her in death; she past away
So sweetly from the world as if her clay
Lay only down to slumber. Then forbear
To let on her blest ashes fall a tear;
Or if thou'rt too much woman, softly weep,
Lest grief disturb the silence of her sleep!

The author of the introduction to the curious Memoirs of Sir Kenelm Digby, has proved the absolute falsehood of some of Aubrey's assertions, and infers the improbability of others. But these beautiful lines by Habington, seem to have escaped his notice; and they are not slight evidence in Venetia's favour. On the whole, the mystery remains unexplained; a cloud has settled for ever on the true story of this extraordinary creature. Neither the pen nor the sword of her husband could entirely clear her fame in her own age: he could only terrify slander into silence, and it died away into an indistinct murmur, of which the echo alone has reached our time.—But this is enough:—the echo of an *echo* could whisper into naught a woman's fair name. The idea of a creature so formed in the prodigality of nature; so completely and faultlessly beautiful; so nobly born and allied; so capable (as she showed herself on various occasions,) of high generous feeling,* of

* Memoirs of Sir Kenelm Digby, pp. 211, 224. Introduction, p. 27.

delicacy,* of fortitude, † of tenderness; ‡ de-
praved by her own vices, or “done to death by
slandrous tongues,” is equally painful and heart-
sickening. The image of the aspic trailing its
slime and its venom over the bosom of Cleopatra,
is not more abhorrent.

* Memoirs, pp. 205, 213. Introduction, p. 28.

† Memoirs, p. 254.

‡ Memoirs, p. 305.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

THE TWO ZAPPI.

WE find among the minor poets of Italy, a charming, and I believe a singular instance of a husband and a wife, both highly gifted, devoting their talents to celebrate each other. These were Giambattista Zappi,* the famous Roman advocate, and his wife Faustina, the daughter of Carlo Maratti, the painter.

Zappi, after completing his legal studies at Bologna, came to reside at Rome, where he distinguished himself in his profession, and was one

* Born at Imola, 1668 ; died at Rome, 1719.

of the founders of the academy of the Arcadii. Faustina Maratti was many years younger than her husband, and extremely beautiful: she was her father's favourite model for his Madonnas, Muses, and Vestal Virgins. From a description of her, in an Epithalamium* on her marriage, it appears that her eyes and hair were jet black, her features regular, and her complexion pale and delicate; a style of beauty which, in its perfection, is almost peculiar to Italy. To the mutual tenderness of these married lovers, we owe some of the most elegant among the lighter Italian lyrics. Zappi, in a Sonnet addressed to his wife some time after their union, reminds her, with a tender exultation, of the moment they first met; when she swept by him in all the pride of beauty, careless or unconscious of his admiration,—and he bowed low before her, scarcely daring to lift his eyes on the charms that were destined to bless

* See the Epithalamium on her marriage with Zappi, prefixed to their works.

him; "Who," he says, "would then have whispered me, the day will come when you will smile to remember her disdain, for all this blaze of beauty was created for you alone!" or would have said to her, "Know you who is destined to touch that virgin heart? Even he, whom you now pass by without even a look! Such are the miracles of love!"

La prima volta ch'io m'avenni in quella
Ninfa, che il cor m'accese, e ancor l'accende,
Io dissi, è donna o dea, ninfa si bella?
Giunse dal prato, o pur dal ciel discende?

La fronte inchinò in umil atto, ed ella
La mercè pur d'un sguardo a me non rende;
Qual vagheggiata in cielo, o luna, o stella,
Che segue altera il suo viaggio, e splende.

Chi detto avesse a me, "costei ti sprezza,
Ma un dì ti riderai del suo rigore!
Che nacque sol per te tanta bellezza."

Chi detto avesse ad ella: "Il tuo bel core
Sai chi l'avrà? Costui ch'or non t'apprezza"
Or negate i miracoli d'Amore!

The first Sonnet in Faustina's Canzoniere,

Dolce sollievo delle umane cure,
 is an eulogium on her husband, and describes her own confiding tenderness. It is full of grace and sweetness, and feminine feeling :

Soave cortesia, vezzosi accenti,
 Virtù, senno, valor d'alma gentile,
 Spogliato hanno 'l mio cor d'ogni timore;

Or tu gli affetti miei puri innocenti
 Pasci cortese, e non cangiar tuo stile
 Dolce sollievo de' miei mali, amore !

Others are of a melancholy character; and one or two allude to the death of an infant son, whom she tenderly laments. But the most finished of all her poems is a Sonnet addressed to a lady whom her husband had formerly loved;* the sentiment of which is truly beautiful and feminine: never was jealousy so amiably, or so delicately

* Probably the same he had celebrated under the name of Filli, and who married another. Zappi's Sonnet to this lady, "Ardo per Filli," is elaborately elegant; sparkling and pointed as a pyramid of gems.

expressed. There is something very dramatic and picturesque in the apostrophe which Faustina addresses to her rival, and in the image of the lady "casting down her large bright eyes:" as well as affecting in the abrupt recoil of feeling in the last lines.

SONETTO.

Donna ! che tanto al mio bel sol piacesti !
 Che ancor de' pregi tuoi parla sovente,
 Lodando, ora il bel crine, ora il ridente
 Tuo labbro, ed ora i saggi detti onesti.

Dimmi, quando le voci a lui volgesti
 Tacque egli mai, qual uom che nulla sente ?
 O le turbate luci alteramente,
 (Come a me volge) a te volger vedesti ?

De tuoi bei lumi, a le due chiare faci
 Io so ch' egli arse un tempo, e so che allora—
 Ma tu declini al suol gli occhi vivaci !

Veggio il rossor che le tue guance infiora ;
 Parla, rispondi ! Ah non rispondi ! taci
 Taci ! se mi vuoi dir ch' ei t' ama ancora !

TRANSLATION.

Lady, that once so charm'd my life's fair Sun,*
 That of thy beauties still he talketh oft,—
 Thy mouth, fair hair, and words discreet and soft.
 Speak! when thou look'dst, was he from silence won?
 Or, did he turn those sweet and troubled eyes
 On thee, and gaze as now on me he gazeth?
 (For ah! I know *thy* love was then the prize,
 And then he *felt* the grace that still he praiseth.)
 But why dost thou those beaming glances turn
 Thus downwards? Ha! I see (against thy will)
 All o'er thy cheek the crimsoning blushes burn.
 Speak out! oh answer me!—yet, no, no,—stay!
 Be dumb, be silent, if thou need'st must say
 That he who once adored thee, loves thee still.†

Neither Zappi nor his wife were authors by profession: her poems are few; and all seem to flow from some incident or feeling, which awakened her genius, and caused that “craving of the heart and the fancy to break out into voluntary song, which men call inspiration.” She became a member of

* “Il mio bel sol” is a poetical term of endearment, which it is not easy to reduce gracefully into English.

† Translated by a friend.

the Arcadia, under the pastoral name of Aglaura Cidonia; and it is remarkable, that though she survived her husband many years, I cannot find any poem referring to her loss, nor of a subsequent date: neither did she marry again, though in the prime of her life and beauty.

Zappi was a great and celebrated lawyer, and his legal skill raised him to an office of trust, under the Pontificate of Clement XI. In one of his Sonnets, which has great sweetness and picturesque effect, he compares himself to the Venetian Gondolier, who in the calm or the storm pours forth his songs on the Lagune, careless of blame or praise, asking no auditors but the silent seas and the quiet moon, and seeking only to “unburthen his full soul” in lays of love and joy—

Il Gondolier, sebben la notte imbruna,
Remo non posa, e fende il mar spumante;
Lieto cantando a un bel raggio di Luna—
“Intanto Erminia infra l'ombrese piante.”

That Zappi could be sublime, is proved by his well-known Sonnet on the Moses of Michel Angelo; but his forte is the graceful and the gay.

His Anacreontics, and particularly his little drinking song,

Come farò? Farò così!

are very elegant, and almost equal to Chiabrera. It is difficult to sympathize with English drinking songs, and all the vulgar associations of flowing bowls, taverns, three times three, and the table in a roar. An Italian *Brindisi* transports us at once among flasks and vineyards, guitars and dances, a dinner *al fresco*, a group *à la Stothard*. It is all the difference between the ivy-crowned Bacchus, and the bloated Silenus. “Bumper, Squire Jones,” or, “Waiter, bring clean glasses,” do not *sound* so well as

Damigella

Tutta bella

Versa, versa, il bel vino! &c.

CHAPTER IX.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

LORD LYTTTELTON.

LORD Lyttelton has told us in a very sweet line,

How much the *wife* is dearer than the *bride*.

But his Lucy Fortescue deserves more than a mere allusion, *en passant*. That Lord Lyttelton is still remembered and read as a poet, is solely for her sake: it is she who has made the shades of Hagley classic ground, and hallowed its precincts by the remembrance of the fair and gentle being, the tender woman, wife, and mother, who in the prime of youth and loveliness, melted like a

creature of air and light from her husband's arms,

“And left him on this earth disconsolate!”

That the verses she inspired are still popular, is owing to the power of *truth*, which has here given lasting interest to what were otherwise *mediocre*. Lord Lyttelton was not much of a poet; but his love was real; its object was real, beautiful, and good: thus buoyed up, in spite of his own faults and the change of taste, he has survived the rest of the rhyming gentry of his time, who wrote epigrams on fans and shoe-buckles,—songs to the Duchess of *this* and the Countess of *that*—and elegies to Miras, Delias, and Chloes.

Lucy Fortescue, daughter of Hugh Fortescue, Esq. of Devonshire, and grand-daughter of Lord Aylmer, was born in 1718. She was about two-and-twenty when Lord Lyttelton first became attached to her, and he was in his thirty-first year: in person and character she realized all he had imagined in his “Advice to Belinda.”*

* See his Poems.

Without, all beauty—and all peace within.

* * * * *

Blest is the maid, and worthy to be blest,
 Whose soul, entire by him she loves possest,
 Feels every vanity in fondness lost,
 And asks no power, but that of pleasing most :
 Her's is the bliss, in just return to prove
 The honest warmth of undissembled love ;
 For her, inconstant man might cease to range,
 And gratitude forbid desire to change.

To the more peculiar attributes of her sex—
 beauty and tenderness,—she united all the advan-
 tages of manner,—

Polite as she in courts had ever been ;

and wit—the only wit that becomes a woman,—

That temperately bright
 With inoffensive light
 All pleasing shone, nor ever past
 The decent bounds that wisdom's sober hand
 And sweet benevolence's mild command,
 And bashful modesty before it cast.

Her education was uncommon for the time ; for
then, a woman, who to youth and elegance and
 beauty united a familiar acquaintance with the

literature of her own country, French, Italian, and the classics, was distinguished among her sex. She had many suitors, and her choice was equally to her own honour and that of her lover. Lord Lyttelton was not rich; his father, Sir Thomas Lyttelton, being still alive. He had perhaps never dreamed of the coronet which late in life descended on his brow: and far from possessing a captivating exterior, he was extremely plain in person, “of a feeble, ill-compacted figure, and a meagre sallow countenance.”* But talents, elegance of mind, and devoted affection, had the influence they ought to have, and generally do possess, in the mind of a woman. We are told that our sex’s “earliest, latest care,—our heart’s supreme ambition,” is “to be fair.” Even Madame de Stael would have given half her talents for half Madame Recamier’s beauty! and why? because the passion of our sex is to please and to be loved; and men have taught us, that in nine cases out of ten we are valued merely for

* Johnson’s Life of Lord Lyttelton.

our personal advantages: they can scarce believe that women, generally speaking, are so indifferent to the mere exterior of a man,—that it has so little power to interest their vanity or affections. Let there be something for their hearts to honour, and their weakness to repose on, and feeling and imagination supply the rest. In this respect, the “gentle lady married to the Moor,” who saw her lover’s visage in his mind, is the type of our sex;—the instances are without number. The Frenchman triumphs a little too much *en petit maitre*, who sings,

Grands Dieux, combien elle est jolie!

Et moi, je suis, je suis si laid!

He might have spared his exultation: if he had sense, and spirit, and tenderness, he had all that is necessary to please a woman, who is worthy to be pleased.

Personal vanity in a woman, however misdirected, arises from the idea, that our power with those we wish to charm, is founded on beauty as a female attribute; it is never indulged but with a reference to another—it is a *means*, not an *end*. Personal vanity in a man is sheer unmingled

egotism, and an unfailing subject of ridicule and contempt with all women—be they wise or foolish.

To return from this long *tirade* to Lucy Fortescue.—After the usual fears and hopes, the impatience and anxious suspense of a long courtship,* Lord Lyttelton won his Lucy, and thought himself blest—and was so. Five revolving years of happiness seemed pledges of its continuance, and “the wheels of pleasure moved without the aid of hope:”—it was at the conclusion of the fifth year, he wrote the lines on the anniversary of his marriage, in which he exults in his felicity, and in the possession of a treasure, which even then, though he knew it not, was fading in his arms.

Whence then this strange increase of joy?
He, only he can tell, who matched like me,
(If such another happy man there be,)

* See in his Poems,—the lines beginning

On Thames's banks a gentle youth
For Lucy sighed with matchless truth,

And

Your shape, your lips, your eyes are still the same.

Has by his own experience tried
How much the *wife* is dearer than the *bride*!

Six months afterwards, his Lucy was seized with the illness of which she died in her twenty-ninth year, leaving three infants, the eldest not four years old.* As there are people who strangely unite, as inseparable, the ideas of fiction and rhyme, and doubt the sincerity of her husband's grief, because he wrote a monody on her memory, he shall speak for himself in prose. The following is an extract from his letter to his father, written two days before her death.

“ I believe God supports me above my own strength, for the sake of my friends who are concerned for me, and in return for the resignation with which I endeavour to submit to his will. If

* Her son was that eccentric and profligate Lord Lyttelton, whose supernatural death-bed horrors have been the subject of so much speculation. He left no children.

The present Earl of Mountnorris, (so distinguished for his Oriental travels when Lord Valentia,) is the grandson of Lucy Fortescue.

it please Him, in his infinite mercy, to restore my dear wife to me, I shall most thankfully acknowledge his goodness; if not, I shall most humbly endure his chastisement, which I have too much deserved. These are the sentiments with which my mind is replete; but as it is still a most bitter cup, how my body will bear it, if it must not pass from me, it is impossible for me to foretell; but I hope the best.—Jan. 17th, 1747.”

I imagine Dr. Johnson meant a sneer at Lord Lyttelton, when he says laconically,—“ his wife died, and he *solaced* himself by writing a long monody on her memory.”—In these days we might naturally exclaim against a widowed husband who should *solace* himself by apostrophes to the Muses and Graces, and bring in the whole Aonian choir, — Pindus and Castalia, Aganippe’s fount, and Thespian vales; the Clitumnus and the Illisus, and such Pagan and classical embroidery.—What should we have thought of Lord Byron’s famous “ Fare thee well,” if conceived in this style?—but such was the poetical vocabulary of

Lord Lyttelton's day: and that he had not sufficient genius and originality to rise above it, is no argument against the sincerity of his grief. Petrarch and his Laura (*apropos* to all that has ever been sung or said of love for five hundred years) are called, in a very common-place strain, from their "Elysian bowers;" and then follow some lines of real and touching beauty, because they owe nothing to art or effort, but are the immediate result of truth and feeling. He is still apostrophising Petrarch.

What were, alas! thy woes compar'd to mine!
To thee thy mistress in the blissful band
Of Hymen never gave her hand;
The joys of wedded love were never thine!
 In thy domestic care
 She never bore a share;
 Nor with endearing art
 Would heal thy wounded heart
Of every secret grief that fester'd there:
Nor did her fond affection on the bed
Of sickness watch thee, and thy languid head

Whole nights on her unwearied arm sustain,
 And charm away the sense of pain :
 Nor did she crown your mutual flame
 With pledges dear, and with a father's tender name.

* * * * *

How in the world, to me a desert grown,
 Abandon'd and alone,
 Without my sweet companion can I live ?
 Without her lovely smile,
 The dear reward of every virtuous toil,
 What pleasures now can pall'd Ambition give ?

One would wish to think that Lord Lyttelton was faithful to the memory of his Lucy : but he was neither more nor less than man ; and in the impatience of grief, or unable to live without that domestic happiness to which his charming wife had accustomed him, he married again, about two years after her death, and too precipitately. His second choice was Elizabeth Rich, eldest daughter of Sir Robert Rich. Perhaps he expected too much ; and how few women could have replaced Lucy Fortescue ! The experiment

proved a most unfortunate one, and added bitterness to his regrets. He devoted the rest of his life to politics and literature.

About ten years after his second marriage, Lord Lyttelton made a tour into Wales with a gay party. On some occasion, while they stood contemplating a scene of uncommon picturesque beauty, he turned to a friend, and asked him, with enthusiasm, whether it was possible to behold a more pleasing sight? Yes, answered the other—the countenance of the woman one loves! Lord Lyttelton shrunk, as if probed to the quick; and after a moment's silence, replied pensively—“*once*, I thought so!” *

Lord Lyttelton brings to mind his friend and patron, Frederick Prince of Wales (grandfather of the present King). From the impression which *history* has given of his character, no one, I believe, would suspect him of being a poet, though he was known as the patron of poets. He sometimes amused himself with writing French and English songs, &c. in imitation of the Regent

* Lord Lyttelton's Works, 4to.

Duc d'Orleans. But, assuredly, it was not in imitation of the Regent he chose his own wife for the principal subject of his ditties. In the same manner, and in the same worthy spirit of imitation of the same worthy person, he tried hard to be a libertine, and laid siege to the virtue of sundry maids of honour; preferring all the time, in his inmost soul, his own wife to the handsomest among her attendants. His flirtations with Lady Archibald Hamilton and Miss Vane had not half the grace or sincerity of some of his effusions to the Princess, whom he tenderly loved, and used to call, with a sort of pastoral gallantry, "ma Sylvie." One of his songs has been preserved by that delicious retailer of court-gossip, Horace Walpole; and I copy it from the Appendix to his Memoirs, without agreeing in his flippant censure.

SONG.

'Tis not the languid brightness of thine eyes,
That swim with pleasure and delight,
Nor those fair heavenly arches which arise
O'er each of them, to shade their light:—

'Tis not that hair which plays with every wind,
 And loves to wanton o'er thy face,
 Now straying o'er thy forehead, now behind
 Retiring with insidious grace:—

* * *

'Tis not the living colours over each,
 By Nature's finest pencil wrought,
 To shame the fresh-blown rose and blooming peach,
 And mock the happiest painter's thought ;
 But 'tis that gentle mind, that ardent love
 So kindly answering my desire,—
 That grace with which you look, and speak, and move!
 That thus have set my soul on fire.

To Dr. Parnell's* love for his wife (Anne Minchin), we owe two of the most charming songs in our language ; “ My life hath been so wondrous free,” and that most beautiful lyric, “ When your beauty appears,” which, as it is less known, I give entire,

When your beauty appears
 In its graces and airs,
 All bright as an angel new dropt from the skies,
 At distance I gaze, and am aw'd by my fears,
 So strangely you dazzle my eyes.

Born in Dublin, 1679 ; died 1717.

But when without art,
Your kind thoughts you impart,
When your love runs in blushes through every vein;
When it darts from your eyes, when it pants at your
heart,

Then I know that you're woman again.

“There's a passion and pride,

In our sex,” she replied ;

“And thus, might I gratify both, I would do,—

Still an angel appear to each lover beside,

But still be a woman for you !”

This amiable and beloved wife died after a union of five or six years, and left her husband broken-hearted. Her sweetness and loveliness, and the general sympathy caused by her death, drew a touch of deep feeling from the pen of Swift, who mentions the event in his journal to Stella: every one, he says, grieved for her husband, “they were so happy together.” Poor Parnell did not, in his bereavement, try Lord Lyttelton's specifics: he did not write an elegy, nor a monody, nor did he marry again;—and, unfortunately for himself, he could not subdue his mind

to religious resignation. His grief and his nervous irritability proved too much for his reason: he felt what all have felt under the influence of piercing anguish,—a dread, a horror of being left alone: he flew to society; when that was not at hand, he sought relief from excesses which his constitution would not bear, and died, unhappy man! in the prime of life; “a martyr,” as Goldsmith tells us, “to conjugal fidelity.”

CHAPTER X.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

KLOPSTOCK AND META.

THEN is there not the German Klopstock and his Meta,—his lovely, devoted, angelic Meta? As the subject of some of her husband's most delightful and popular poems, both before and after her marriage,—when living, she formed his happiness on earth; and when, as he tenderly imagined, she watched over his happiness from heaven—how pass her lightly over in a work like this? Yet how do her justice, but by borrowing her own sweet words? or referring the reader at once to the memoirs and fragments of her letters, which never saw the light till sixty years after her death?—for in her there was no vain-glory, no effort, no display. A feeling so hallowed lingers round the memory of

this angelic creature, that it is rather a subject to blend with our most sacred and most serious thoughts,—to muse over in hours when the heart communes with itself and is still, than to dress out in words, and mingle with the ideas of earthly fame and happiness. Other loves might be poetical, but the love of Klopstock and his Meta was in itself *poetry*. They were mutually possessed with the idea, that they had been predestined to each other from the beginning of time, and that their meeting on earth was merely a kind of incidental prelude to an eternal and indivisible union in heaven : and shall we blame their fond faith ?

It is a gentle and affectionate thought,
That in immeasurable heights above us,
Even at our birth, the wreath of love was woven
With sparkling stars for flowers !*

All the sweetest images that ever were grouped together by fancy, dreaming over the golden age ; beauty, innocence, and happiness ; the fervour

* Coleridge's Wallenstein.

of youthful love, the rapture of corresponding affection; undoubting faith and undissembled truth;—these were so bound together, so exalted by the highest and holiest associations, so confirmed in the serenity of conscious virtue, so sanctified by religious enthusiasm; and in the midst of all human blessedness, so wrapt up in futurity,—that the grave was not the close, but the completion and the consummation of their happiness. The garland which poesy has suspended on the grave of Meta, was wreathed by no fabled muse; it is not of laurel, “meed of conqueror and sage;” nor of roses blooming and withering among their thorns; nor of myrtle shrinking and dying away before the blast: but of flowers gathered in Paradise, pure and bright, and breathing of their native Eden; which never caught one blighting stain of earth, and though dewed with tears,—“tears such as angels shed!”

* * * * *

The name of Klopstock forms an epoch in the history of poetry. Goëthe, Schiller, Wieland, have since adorned German literature; but Klop-

stock was the first to impress on the poetry of his country the stamp of nationality. He was a man of great and original genius,—gifted with an extraordinary degree of sensibility and imagination ; but these being united to the most enthusiastic religious feeling, elevated and never misled him. His life was devoted to the three noblest sentiments that can fill and animate the human soul,—religion, patriotism and love. To these, from early youth, he devoted his faculties and consecrated his talents. He had, even in his boyhood, resolved to write a poem, “ which should do honour to God, his country, and himself ;” and he produced the *Messiah*. It would be difficult to describe the enthusiasm this work excited when the first three cantos appeared in 1746. “ If poetry had its saints,” says Madame de Stael, “ then Klopstock would be at the head of the calendar ;” and she adds, with a burst of her own eloquence, “ Ah, qu’il est beau le talent, quand on ne l’a jamais profané ! quand il n’a servi qu’à revèler aux hommes, sous la forme attrayante des beaux arts, les sentiments généreux, et les espe-

rances religieuses obscurcies au fond de leur cœur !”

Such was Klopstock as a poet. As a man, he is described as one of the most amiable and affectionate of human beings ;—“ good in all the foldings of his heart,” as his sweet wife expressed it ; free from all petty vanity, egotism, and worldly ambition. He was pleasing, though not handsome in person, with fine blue animated eyes.* The tone of his voice was at first low and hesitating, but soft and persuasive ; and he always ended by captivating the entire attention of those he addressed. He was, to his latest moments, fond of the society of women, and an object of their peculiar tenderness and veneration.

* Bodmer, after the publication of the *Messiah*, invited the author to his house in Switzerland. He had imaged to himself a most sublime idea of the man who could write such a poem, and had fancied him like one of the sages and prophets of the Old Testament. His astonishment, when he saw a slight-made, elegant-looking young man leap gaily from his carriage, with sparkling eyes and a smiling countenance, has been pleasantly described.

Klopstock's first serious attachment was to his cousin, the beautiful Fanny Schmidt, the sister of his intimate friend and brother poet, Schmidt. He loved her constantly for several years. His correspondence with Bodmer gives us an interesting picture of a fine mind struggling with native timidity, and of the absolute terror with which this gentle and beautiful girl could inspire him, till his heart seemed to wither and sicken within him from her supposed indifference. The uncertainty of his future prospects, and his sublime idea of the merits and beauties of her he loved, kept him silent; nor did he ever venture to declare his passion, except in the beautiful odes and songs which she inspired. Speaking of one of those to his friend Bodmer, he says, "She who could best reward it, has not seen it; so timid does her apparent insensibility make me."

Whether this insensibility was more than apparent is not perfectly clear: the memoirs of Klopstock are not quite accurate or satisfactory in this part of his history. It should seem from the published correspondence, that his love was distinctly

avowed, though he never had courage to make a direct offer of himself. Fanny Schmidt appears to have been a superior woman in point of mind, and full of admiration for his genius. She writes to him in terms of friendship and kindness, but she leaves him, after three years' attachment on his part, still in doubt whether her heart remain untouched,—and even whether she *had* a heart to be touched. He intimates, but with a tender and guarded delicacy, that he had reason to complain of her coquetry;* and, with the sensibility of a proud but wounded heart, he was anxious to prove to himself that his romantic tenderness had not been unworthily bestowed. “All the peace and consolation of my after life depends on knowing whether Fanny *really* has a heart?—a heart that *could* have sympathised with mine?”† He had commissioned his friend Gleim to plead his cause, to sound her heart in its inmost depths; and in return, received the intelligence of her approaching union with another. “When (as he expresses

* Klopstock's letters, p. 145.

† Klopstock's Letters.

it) not a hope was left to be destroyed," he became calm; but he suffered at first acutely; and this ill-fated attachment tinged with a deep gloom nearly four years of his life. While in suspense, he continually repeats his conviction that he can never love again. "Had I never seen her, I might have attached myself to another object, and perhaps have known the felicity of mutual love! But now it is impossible; my heart is steeled to every tender impression." The sentiment was natural; but, fortunately for himself, he was deceived.

In passing through Hamburgh, in April 1751, and while he was still under the influence of this heart-wearing attachment to Fanny, he was introduced to Meta Möller. The impression she made on him is thus described, in a letter to his friend and confidant, Gleim.

"You may perhaps have heard Gisecke mention Margaret Möller of Hamburgh. I was lately introduced to this girl, and passed in her society most of the time I lately spent at Hamburgh. I found her, in every sense of the word,

so lovely, so amiable, so full of attractions, that I could at times scarcely forbear to give her the name which is to me the dearest in existence. I was often with her alone; and in those moments of unreserved intercourse, was insensibly led to communicate my melancholy story. Could you have seen her in those moments, my Gleim! how she looked and listened,—and how often she interrupted me, and how tenderly she wept! and if you knew how much she is my friend; and yet it was not for *her* that I had so long suffered. What a heart must she possess to be thus touched for a stranger! At this thought I am almost tempted to make a comparison; but then does a mist gather before mine eyes, and if I probe my heart, I feel that I am more unhappy than ever.” Again he writes from Copenhagen, “I have re-read the little Möller’s letters; sweet artless creature she is! She has already written to me four times, and writes in a style so exquisitely natural! Were you to see this lovely girl, and read her letters, you would scarce conceive it possible that she should be mistress of the French, Eng-

lish, and Italian languages, and even conversant with Greek and Italian literature." But it were wronging both, to give the history and result of this attachment to Meta in any language but her own. Since the publication of Richardson's correspondence, the letters addressed to him, in English, by Meta Klopstock, have become generally known; but this account would be incomplete were they wholly omitted; and those who have read them before, will not be displeased at the opportunity of re-perusing them: her sweet lisping English is worth volumes of eloquence.

"You will know all what concerns me. Love, dear Sir, is all what me concerns, and love shall be all what I will tell you in this letter. In one happy night I read my husband's poem—the Messiah. I was extremely touched with it. The next day I asked one of his friends who was the author of this poem? and this was the first time I heard Klopstock's name. I believe I fell immediately in love with him; at the least, my thoughts were ever with him filled, especially be-

cause his friend told me very much of his character. But I had no hopes ever to see him, when quite unexpectedly I heard that he should pass through Hamburg. I wrote immediately to the same friend, for procuring by his means that I might see the author of the Messiah, when in Hamburg. He told him that a certain girl in Hamburg wished to see him, and, for all recommendation, showed him some letters in which I made bold to criticize Klopstock's verses. Klopstock came, and came to me. I must confess, that, though greatly prepossessed of his qualities, I never thought him the amiable youth that I found him. This made its effect. After having seen him two hours, I was obliged to pass the evening in company, which never had been so wearisome to me. I could not speak; I could not play; I thought I saw nothing but Klopstock. I saw him the next day, and the following, and we were very seriously friends; on the fourth day he departed. It was a strong hour, the hour of his departure. He wrote soon after, and from that time our correspondence began to be a very

diligent one. I sincerely believed my love to be friendship. I spoke with my friends of nothing but Klopstock, and showed his letters. They rallied me, and said I was in love. I rallied them again, and said they must have a very friendshipless heart, if they had no idea of friendship to a man as well as a woman. Thus it continued eight months, in which time my friends found as much love in Klopstock's letters as in me. I perceived it likewise, but I would not believe it. At the last, Klopstock said plainly that he loved; and I startled as for a wrong thing. I answered that it was no love, but friendship, as it was what I felt for him; we had not seen one another enough to love; as if love must have more time than friendship! This was sincerely my meaning; and I had this meaning till Klopstock came again to Hamburg. This he did a year after we had seen one another the first time. We saw, we were friends; we loved, and we believed that we loved; and a short time after I could even tell Klopstock that I loved. But we were obliged to part again, and wait two years for our wedding.

My mother would not let me marry a stranger. I could marry without her consentment, as by the death of my father my fortune depended not on her; but this was an horrible idea for me; and thank Heaven that I have prevailed by prayers! At this time, knowing Klopstock, she loves him as her son, and thanks God that she has not persisted. We married, and I am the happiest wife in the world. In some few months it will be four years that I am so happy; and still I dote upon Klopstock as if he was my bridegroom. If you knew my husband, you would not wonder. If you knew his poem, I could describe him very briefly, in saying he is in all respects what he is as a poet. This I can say with all wifely modesty; I am all raptures when I do it. And as happy as I am in love, so happy am I in friendship;—in my mother, two elder sisters, and five other women. How rich I am! Sir, you have willed that I should speak of myself, but I fear that I have done it too much. Yet you see how it interests me.”

I have somewhere seen or heard it observed, that there is nothing in the *Romeo and Juliet* more finely imagined or more true to nature than *Romeo's* previous love for another. It is while writhing under the coldness and scorn of his proud, inaccessible *Rosaline*, she who had "for-sworn to love," that he meets the soft glances of *Juliet*, whose eyes "do comfort, and not burn;" and he takes refuge in her bosom, for she

Doth grace for grace, and love for love allow ;
The other did not so.

With such a grateful and gratified feeling must *Klopstock* have gathered to his arms the devoted *Meta*, who came, with healing on her lips, to suck forth the venom of a recent wound. He has himself beautifully expressed this in one of the poems addressed to her, and which he has entitled the *Recantation*. He describes the anguish he had suffered from an unrequited affection, and the day-spring of renovated hope and rapture which now dawned in his heart.

At length, beyond my hope the night retires,
'Tis past, and all my long lost joys awake,
Smiling they wake, my long forgotten joys,
O, how I wonder at my altered fate! &c.

and exults in the charms and tenderness of her who had wiped away his tears, and whom he had first “taught to love.”

I taught thee first to love, and seeking thee,
I learned what true love was; it raised my heart
From earth to heaven, and now, through Eden's groves,
With thee it leads me on in endless joy.

This little poem has been translated by Elizabeth Smith, with one or two of the graceful little songs addressed to Meta, under the name of *Cidli*. This is the appellation given to Jairus' daughter in the “Messiah;” and Meta, who was fond of the character, probably chose it for herself. The first cantos of this poem had been published long before his marriage, and it was continued after his union with Meta, and at her side. Nothing can be more charming than the picture of domestic affection and happiness contained in the following passage of one of her letters to

Richardson:—apparently, she had improved in English, since the last was written.—“It will be a delightful occupation for me to make you more acquainted with my husband’s poem. Nobody can do it better than I, being the person who knows the most of that which is not published; being always present at the birth of the young verses, which begin by fragments here and there, of a subject of which his soul is just then filled. He has many great fragments of the whole work ready. You may think that persons who love as we do, have no need of two chambers; we are always in the same: I, with my little work,—still—still—only regarding sometimes my husband’s sweet face, which is so venerable at that time, with tears of devotion, and all the sublimity of the subject. My husband reading me his young verses, and suffering my criticisms.”

And for the task of criticism, Meta was peculiarly fitted, not less by her fine cultivated mind and feminine delicacy of taste, than by her affectionate enthusiasm for her husband’s glory.

“How much,” says Klopstock, writing after her death, “how much do I lose in her even in this respect! How perfect was her taste, how exquisitely fine her feelings! she observed every thing, even to the slightest turn of the thought. I had only to look at her, and could see in her face when a syllable pleased or displeased her: and when I led her to explain the reason of her remarks, no demonstration could be more true, more accurate, or more appropriate to the subject. But in general this gave us very little trouble, for we understood each other when we had scarcely begun to explain our ideas.”

And that not a stain of the selfish or earthly should rest on the bright purity of her mind and heart, it must be remarked that we cannot trace in all her letters, whether before or after marriage, the slightest feeling of jealousy or doubt, though the woman lived whom Klopstock had once exalted into a divinity, and though she loved her husband with the most impassioned enthusiasm. She expresses frankly her admiration of the odes and songs addressed to Fanny :

and her only sentiment seems to be a mixture of grief and astonishment, that any woman could be so insensible as not to love Klopstock, or so cruel as to give him pain.

Though in her letters to Richardson she speaks with rapture of her hopes of becoming a mother, as all that was wanting to complete her happiness,* she had long prepared herself for a fatal termination to those hopes. Her constant presentiment of approaching death, she concealed, in tenderness to her husband. When we consider the fond and entire confidence which existed between them, this must have cost no small effort of fortitude: “she was formed,” said Klopstock,

* “I not being able to travel yet, my husband has been obliged to make a voyage to Copenhagen. He is yet absent; a cloud over my happiness! He will soon return; but what does that help? he is yet equally absent. We write to each other every post; but what are letters to presence? But I will speak no more of this little cloud, I will only tell my happiness. But I cannot tell you how I rejoice!—A son of my dear Klopstock’s! O, when shall I have him?”—*Memoirs*, p. 99.

“to say, like Arria, ‘My Pætus,’ ’tis not painful:” but her husband pressed her not to allow any secret feeling to prey on her mind; and then, with gratitude for his “permission to speak,” she avowed her apprehensions, and at the same time her strong and animated trust in religion. This whole letter, to which I must refer the reader, (for any attempt I should make to copy it entire, would certainly be illegible,) is one of the most beautiful pieces of tender eloquence that ever fell from a woman’s pen: and that is saying much. She is writing to her husband during a short absence. “I well know,” she says, “that all hours are not alike, and particularly the last, since death, in my situation, must be far from an easy death; but let the last hour make no impression on you. You know too well how much the body then presses down the soul. Let God give what he will, I shall still be happy. A longer life with you, or eternal life with Him! But can you as easily part from me as I from you? You are to remain in this world, in a world without *me*! You know I have always wished to be the survivor,

because I well know it is the hardest to endure ; but perhaps it is the will of God that you should be left ; and perhaps you have most strength.”

This last letter is dated September 10th, 1754. Her confinement took place in November following ; and after the most cruel and protracted sufferings, it became too certain that both must perish,—mother and child.

Klopstock stood beside her, and endeavoured, as well as the agony of his feelings would permit, to pray with her and to support her. He praised her fortitude :—“ You have endured like an angel ! God has been with you ! he *will* be with you ! were I so wretched as not to be a Christian, I should now become one.” He added with strong emotion, “ Be my guardian angel, if God permit !” She replied tenderly, “ You have ever been mine !” He repeated his request more fervently : she answered with a look of undying love, “ Who would not be so !” He hastened from the room, unable to endure more. After he was gone, her sister,* who attended her through her sufferings,

* Elizabeth Schmidt, married to the brother of Fanny Schmidt.

said to her, "God will help you!"—"Yes, to heaven!" replied the saint. After a faint struggle, she added, "It is over!" her head sunk on the pillow, and while her eyes, until glazed by death, were fixed tenderly on her sister,—thus with the faith of a Christian, and the courage of a martyr, she resigned into the hands of her Creator, a life which had been so blameless and so blessed, so intimate with love and joy, that only such a death could crown it, by proving what an angel a woman *can* be, in doing, feeling, and suffering.*

* * * * *

It was by many expected that Klopstock would have made the loss of his Meta the subject of a poem; but he early declared his resolution not to do this, nor to add to the collection of odes and songs formerly addressed to her. He gives his

* Meta was buried with her infant in her arms, at Ottenson, near Altona. She had expressed a wish to have two passages from the Messiah, descriptive of the resurrection, inscribed on her coffin, but one only was engraved:—

“Seed sown by God to ripen for the harvest.”

See Memoirs, p. 197.

reasons for this silence. “ I think that before the public a man should speak of his wife with the same modesty as of himself ; and this principle would destroy the enthusiasm required in poetry. The reader too, not without reason, would feel himself justified in refusing implicit credit to the fond eulogium written on one beloved ; and my love for her who made me the happiest among men, is too sincere to let me allow my readers to call it in question.” Yet in a little poem* addressed afterwards to his friend Schmidt, and probably not intended for publication, he alludes to his loss, in a tone of deep feeling, and complains of the recollections which distract his sleepless nights.

Again the form of my lost wife I see,
She lies before me, and she dies again ;
Again she smiles on me, again she dies,
Her eyes now close, and comfort me no more.

* Translated by Elizabeth Smith, of whom it has been truly said, that she resembled Meta, and to whom we are indebted for her first introduction to English readers.

He indulged the fond thought that she hovered,
a guardian spirit, near him still,—

O if thou love me yet, by heavenly laws
Condemn me not! I am a man and mourn,—
Support me though unseen!

And he foretells that, even in distant ages,—“in times perhaps more virtuous than ours,” his grief would be remembered, and the name of his Meta revered. And shall it not be so?—it must—it will:—as long as truth, virtue, tenderness, dwell in woman’s breast—so long shall Meta be dear to her sex; for she has honoured us among men on earth, and among saints in Heaven!

And now, how shall I fill up this sketch? Let us pause for a moment, and suppose the fate of Meta and Klopstock reversed, and that *she* had been called, according to her own tender and unselfish wish, to be the survivor. Under such a terrible dispensation, her angelic meekness and sublime faith would at first have supported her; she would have rejoiced in the cer-

tainty of her husband's blessedness, and in the yearning of her heart she would have tried to fancy him ever present with her in spirit; she would have collected together his works, and have occupied herself in transmitting his glory as a poet, without a blemish, to the admiration of posterity; she would have gone about all her feminine duties with a quiet patience—for it would have been *his* will; and would have smiled---and her smile would have been like the moonlight on a winter lake: and with all her thoughts loosened from the earth, to her there would never more have been good or evil, or grief, or fear, or joy: space and time would only have existed to her, as they separated her from *him*. Thus she would have lived on dyingly from day to day, and then have perished, less through regret, than through the intense longing to realize the vision of her heart, and rejoin him, without whom all concerns of life were vain, and less than nothing. And this, I am well convinced,---as far as one human being may dare to reason on the probable result of certain feelings and impulses in another,---would

have been the lot of Meta, if left on the earth alone, and desolate.

If Klopstock acted differently, let him not be too severely arraigned; he was but a man, and differently constituted. With great sensibility, he possessed, by nature, an elasticity of spirit which could rebound, as it were, from the very depths of grief: his sorrow, intense at first, found many outward resources:—he could speak, he could write; his vivacity of imagination pictured to him Meta happy; and his habitual religious feeling made him acquiesce in his own privation; he could please himself with visiting her grave, and every year he planted it with white lilies, “because the lily was the most exalted among flowers, and she was the most exalted among women.”* He had many friends, to whom the confiding simplicity of his character had endeared him: all his life he seems to have clung to friendship as a child clings to the breast of the mother; he was accustomed to seek and find relief in sympathy; and sympathy, deeply

* Memoirs.

felt and strongly expressed, was all around him. With his high intellect and profound feeling, there was ever a child-like buoyancy in the mind of Klopstock, which gained him the title of *der ewigen jungling*—"The ever young, or the youth for ever."* His mind never fell into "the sear and yellow leaf," it was a perpetual spring: the flowers grew and withered, and blossomed again,—a never-failing succession of fragrance and beauty; when the rose wounded him, he gathered the lily; when the lily died on his bosom, he cherished the myrtle. And he was most happy in such a character, for in him it was allied to the highest virtue and genius, and equally remote from weakness and selfishness.

About four years after the death of Meta, he became extremely attached to a young girl of Blackenburg, whose name was Dona; she loved and admired him in return, but naturally felt some

* Klopstock says of himself, "it is not my nature to be happy or miserable by halves: having once discarded melancholy, I am ready to welcome happiness."—*Klopstock and his Friends*, p. 164.

distrust in the warmth of his attachment; and he addressed to her a little poem, in which, tenderly alluding to Meta, he assures Dona that *she* is not less dear to him or *less* necessary to his happiness*—

And such is *man's* fidelity!

This intended marriage never took place.

Twenty-five years afterwards, when Klopstock was in his sixtieth year, he married Johanna von Wentham, a near relation of his Meta; an excellent and amiable woman, whose affectionate attention cheered the remaining years of his life.

Klopstock died at Hamburg in 1813, at the age of eighty: his remains were attended to the grave by all the magistrates, the diplomatic corps, the clergy, foreign generals, and a concourse of about fifty thousand persons. His sacred poems were

* Du zweifelst dass ich dich wie Meta liebe?

Wie Meta lieb' Ich Done dich!

Dies, saget dir mein hertz liebe vol

Mein ganzes hertz! &c.

placed on his coffin, and in the intervals of the chanting, the ministering clergyman took up the book, and read aloud the fine passage in the Messiah, describing the death of the righteous.— Happy are they who have so consecrated their genius to the honour of Him who bestowed it, that the productions of their early youth may be placed without profanation on their tomb!

He was buried under a lime-tree in the church-yard of Ottensen, by the side of his Meta and her infant,—

Seed sown by God, to ripen for the harvest.

CHAPTER XI.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

BONNIE JEAN.

IT was as Burns's *wife* as well as his early love, that Bonnie Jean lives immortalized in her poet's songs, and that her name is destined to float in music from pole to pole. When they first met, Burns was about six-and-twenty, and Jean Armour "but a young thing,"

Wi' tempting lips and roguish e'en,
 the pride, the beauty, and the favourite toast of
 the village of Mauchline, where her father lived.
 To an early period of their attachment, or to
 the fond recollection of it in after times, we owe
 some of Burns's most beautiful and impassioned
 songs,—as

Come, let me take thee to this breast,
 And pledge we ne'er shall sunder!
 And I'll spurn as vilest dust,
 The world's wealth and grandeur, &c.

“O poortith cold and restless love;” “the kind love that ’s in her e’e;” “Lewis, what reck I by thee;” and many others. I conjecture, from a passage in one of Burns’s letters, that Bonnie Jean also furnished the heroine and the subject of that admirable song, “O whistle, and I’ll come to thee, my lad,” so full of buoyant spirits and artless affection: it appears that she wished to have her name introduced into it, and that he afterwards altered the fourth line of the first verse to please her:—thus,

Thy Jeanie will venture wi’ ye, my lad ;

but this amendment has been rejected by singers and editors, as injuring the musical accentuation: the anecdote, however, and the introduction of the name, give an additional interest and a truth to the sentiment, for which I could be content to sacrifice the beauty of a single line; and methinks Jeanie had a right to dictate in this instance.*

* “A Dame whom the graces have attired in witchcraft, and whom the loves have armed with lightning—a fair one—herself the heroine of the song, insists on the amendment—and dispute her commands if you dare !”—*Burns’s Letters*.

With regard to her personal attractions, Jean was at this time a blooming girl, animated with health, affection, and gaiety: the perfect symmetry of her slender figure; her light step in the dance; the “waist sae jimp,” “the foot sae sma’,” were no fancied beauties:—she had a delightful voice, and sung with much taste and enthusiasm the ballads of her native country; among which we may imagine that the songs of her lover were not forgotten. The consequences, however, of all this dancing, singing, and loving, were not quite so poetical as they were embarrassing.

O wha could prudence think upon,
 And sic a lassie by him?
 O wha could prudence think upon,
 And sae in love as I am?

Burns had long been distinguished in his rustic neighbourhood for his talents, for his social qualities and his conquests among the maidens of his own rank. His personal appearance is thus described from memory by Sir Walter Scott:—“His form was strong and robust, his manner rustic, not clownish; with a sort of dignified simplicity, which

received part of its effect, perhaps, from one's knowledge of his extraordinary talents ; * * * his eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament ; it was large, and of a dark cast, which glowed, (I say, literally, *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling and interest ;"—“ his address to females was extremely deferential, and always with a turn either to the pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly. I have heard the late Duchess of Gordon remark this ;” *—and Allan Cunningham, speaking also from recollection, says, “ he had a very manly countenance, and a very dark complexion ; his habitual expression was intensely melancholy, but at the presence of those he loved or esteemed, his whole face beamed with affection and genius ;” †—“ his voice was very musical ; and he excelled in dancing, and all athletic sports which required strength and agility.”

Is it surprising that powers of fascination, which carried a Duchess “ off her feet,” should conquer

* Lockhart's Life of Burns, p. 153. † Life of Burns, p. 268.

the heart of a country lass of low degree? Bonnie Jean was too soft-hearted, or her lover too irresistible; and though Burns stepped forward to repair their transgression by a written acknowledgment of marriage, which, in Scotland, is sufficient to constitute a legal union, still his circumstances, and his character as a "wild lad," were such, that nothing could appease her father's indignation; and poor Jean, when humbled and weakened by the consequences of her fault and her sense of shame, was prevailed on to destroy the document of her lover's fidelity to his vows, and to reject him.

Burns was nearly heart-broken by this dereliction, and between grief and rage was driven to the verge of insanity. His first thought was to fly the country; the only alternative which presented itself, "was America or a jail;" and such were the circumstances under which he wrote his "Lament," which, though not composed in his native dialect, is poured forth with all that energy and pathos which only truth could impart.

No idly feigned poetic pains,
 My sad, love-lorn lamentings claim;
 No shepherd's pipe—Arcadian strains,
 No fabled tortures, quaint and tame :
 The plighted faith—the mutual flame—
 The oft-attested powers above—
 The promised father's tender name—
 These were the pledges of my love ! &c.

This was about 1786: two years afterwards, when the publication of his poems had given him name and fame, Burns revisited the scenes which his Jeanie had endeared to him: thus he sings exultingly,—

I'll aye ca' in by yon town,
 And by yon garden-green, again ;
 I'll aye ca' in by yon town,
 And see my bonnie Jean again !

They met in secret; a reconciliation took place; and the consequences were, that bonnie Jean, being again exposed to the indignation of her family, was literally turned out of her father's house. When the news reached Burns he was lying ill; he was lame from the consequences of an accident,

—the moment he could stir, he flew to her, went through the ceremony of marriage with her in presence of competent witnesses, and a few months afterwards he brought her to his new farm at Elliesland, and established her under his roof as his wife, and the honoured mother of his children.

It was during this *second-hand* honeymoon, happier and more endeared than many have proved in their first gloss, that Burns wrote several of the sweetest effusions ever inspired by his Jean ; even in the days of their early wooing, and when their intercourse had all the difficulty, all the romance, all the mystery, a poetical lover could desire. Thus practically controverting his own opinion, “ that conjugal love does not make such a figure in poesy as that other love,” &c.—for instance, we have that most beautiful song, composed when he left his Jean at Ayr (in the *west* of Scotland,) and had gone to prepare for her at Elliesland, near Dumfries.*

* Life of Burns, p. 247.

Of a' the airts the win' can blaw, I dearly love the west,

For there the bonnie lassie lives, the lass that I love best!

There wild woods grow and rivers row, and mony a hill between;

But day and night, my fancy's flight is ever wi' my Jean!

I see her in the dewy flowers, I see her sweet and fair—

I hear her in the tuneful birds, wi' music charm the air.

There's not a bonnie flower that springs by fountain, shaw, or
green—

There's not a bonnie bird that sings, but minds me o' my Jean.

O blaw ye westlin winds, blaw soft among the leafy trees!

Wi' gentle gale, fra' muir and dale, bring hame the laden
bees!

And bring the lassie back to me, that's aye sae sweet and clean,

Ae blink o' her wad banish care, sae lovely is my Jean!

What sighs and vows, amang the knowes, hae past between us
twa!

How fain to meet! how wae to part!—that day she gaed awa!

The powers above can only ken, to whom the heart is seen,

That none can be sae dear to me, as my sweet lovely Jean!

Nothing can be more lovely than the luxuriant, though rural imagery, the tone of placid but deep tenderness, which pervades this sweet song; and to feel all its harmony, it is not necessary to sing it—it is music in itself.

In November 1788, Mrs. Burns took up her residence at Elliesland, and entered on her duties as a wife and mistress of a family, and her husband welcomed her to her home (“her ain roof-tree,”) with the lively, energetic, but rather unquotable song, “I hae a wife o’ my ain;” and subsequently he wrote for her, “O were I on Parnassus Hill,” and that delightful little bit of simple feeling—

She is a winsome wee thing,
 She is a handsome wee thing,
 She is a bonnie wee thing,
 This sweet wee wife of mine.

I never saw a fairer,
 I never lo’ed a dearer,—
 And next my heart I’ll wear her,
 For fear my jewel tine!

and one of the finest of all his ballads, “Their groves o’ green myrtle,” which not only presents a most exquisite rural picture to the fancy, but breathes the very soul of chastened and conjugal tenderness.

I remember, as a particular instance—I suppose there are thousands—of the tenacity with which Burns seizes on the memory, and twines round the very fibres of one's heart, that when I was travelling in Italy, along that beautiful declivity above the river Clitumnus, languidly enjoying the balmy air, and gazing with no careless eye on those scenes of rich and classical beauty, over which memory and fancy had shed

A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the earth ;

even then, by some strange association, a feeling of my childish years came over me, and all the livelong day I was singing, *sotto voce*—

Their groves o' sweet myrtle let foreign lands reckon,
Where bright-beaming summers exalt the perfume ;
Far dearer to me yon lone glen o' green bracken,
Wi' the burn stealing under the long yellow broom !

Far dearer to me are yon humble broom bowers,
Where the blue-bell and gowan lurk lowly unseen,
For there, lightly tripping among the wild flowers,
A' listening the linn^et, oft wanders my Jean.

Thus the heath, and the blue-bell, and the gowan,
had superseded the orange and the myrtle on
those Elysian plains,

Where the crush'd weed sends forth a rich perfume.

And Burns and Bonnie Jean were in my heart
and on my lips, on the spot where Virgil had
sung, and Fabius and Hannibal met.

Besides celebrating her in verse, Burns has left us a description of his Bonnie Jean in prose. He writes (some months after his marriage) to his friend Miss Chalmers, — “If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation; and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the country. Mrs. Burns believes, as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit, et le plus honnête homme* in the universe; although she scarcely ever, in her life, (except reading the Scriptures and the Psalms of David in metre) spent five minutes together

on either prose or verse. I must except also a certain late publication of Scots Poems, which she has perused very devoutly, and all the ballads in the country, as she has (O, the partial lover! you will say) the finest woodnote-wild I ever heard."

After this, what becomes of the insinuation that Burns made an unhappy marriage,—that he was "compelled to invest her with the control of his life, whom he seems at first to have selected only for the gratification of a temporary inclination;" and, "that to this circumstance much of his misconduct is to be attributed?" Yet this, I believe, is a prevalent impression. Those whose hearts have glowed, and whose eyes have filled with delicious tears over the songs of Burns, have reason to be grateful to Mr. Lockhart, and to a kindred spirit, Allan Cunningham, for the generous feeling with which they have vindicated Burns and his Jean. Such aspersions are not only injurious to the dead and cruel to the living, but they do incalculable mischief:—they are food for the flippant scoffer at all that makes the

‘poetry of life.’ They unsettle in gentler bosoms all faith in love, in truth, in goodness—(alas, such disbelief comes soon enough!) they chill and revolt the heart, and “take the rose from the fair forehead of an innocent love to set a blister there.”

“That Burns,” says Lockhart, “ever sank into a toper, that his social propensities ever interfered with the discharge of the duties of his office, or that, in spite of some transitory follies, he ever ceased to be a most affectionate husband—all these charges have been insinuated, and they are all *false*. His aberrations of all kinds were occasional, not systematic; they were the aberrations of a man whose moral sense was never deadened—of one who encountered more temptations from without and from within, than the immense majority of mankind, far from having to contend against, are even able to imagine,” and who died in his thirty-sixth year, “ere he had reached that term of life up to which the passions of many have proved too strong for the control of reason, though their mortal career being re-

garded as a whole, they are honoured as among the most virtuous of mankind.'

We are told also of "the conjugal and maternal tenderness, the prudence, and the unwearied forbearance of his Jean,"—and that she had much need of forbearance is not denied; but he ever found in her affectionate arms, pardon and peace, and a sweetness that only made the sense of his occasional delinquencies sting the deeper.

She still survives to hear her name, her early love, and her youthful charms, warbled in the songs of her native land. He, on whom she bestowed her beauty and her maiden truth, dying, has left to her the mantle of his fame. What though she be now a grandmother? to the fancy, she can never grow old, or die. We can never bring her before our thoughts but as the lovely, graceful country girl, "lightly tripping among the wild flowers," and warbling, "Of a' the airs the win' can blaw,"—and this, O women, is what genius can do for you! Wherever the adventurous spirit of her countrymen transport them, from the spicy groves of India to the wild banks of the Missis-

sippi, the name of Bonnie Jean is heard, bringing back to the wanderer sweet visions of home, and of days of "Auld lang Syne." The peasant-girl sings it "at the ewe milking," and the high-born fair breathes it to her harp and her piano. As long as love and song shall survive, even those who have learned to appreciate the splendid dramatic music of Germany and Italy, who can thrill with rapture when Pasta

Queen and enchantress of the world of sound,
Pours forth her soul in song ;

or when Sontag

Carves out her dainty voice as readily
Into a thousand sweet distinguished tones,

even *they* shall still have a soul for the "Banks and braes o' bonnie Doon," still keep a corner of their hearts for truth and nature—and Burns's Bonnie Jean.

* * * * *

While my thoughts are yet with Burns,—his name before me,—my heart and my memory still under that spell of power which his genius flings

around him, I will add a few words on the subject of his supernumerary loves ; for he has celebrated few imaginary heroines. Of these rustic divinities, one of the earliest, and by far the most interesting, was Mary Campbell, (his “Highland Mary,”) the object of the deepest passion Burns ever felt; the subject of some of his loveliest songs, and of the elegy “to Mary in Heaven.”

Whatever this young girl may have been in person or condition, she must have possessed some striking qualities and charms to have inspired a passion so ardent, and regrets so lasting, in a man of Burns’s character. She was not his first love, nor his second, nor his third; for from the age of sixteen there seems to have been no interregnum in his fancy. His heart, he says, was “completely tinder, and eternally lighted up by some goddess or other.” His acquaintance with Mary Campbell began when he was about two or three and twenty: he was then residing at Mossgiel, with his brother, and she was a servant on a neighbouring farm. Their affection was reciprocal, and they were solemnly plighted to each

other. "We met," says Burns, "by appointment, on the second Sunday in May, in a sequestered spot by the banks of the Ayr, where we spent a day in taking a farewell, before she should embark for the West Highlands, to arrange matters among her friends for our projected change of life." "This adieu," say Mr. Cromek, "was performed with all those simple and striking ceremonials which rustic sentiment has devised to prolong tender emotions and to impose awe. The lovers stood on each side of a small purling brook; they laved their hands in the stream, and holding a Bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other." This very Bible has recently been discovered in the possession of Mary Campbell's sister. On the boards of the Old Testament is inscribed, in Burns's handwriting, "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, I am the Lord."—*Levit.* chap. xix. v. 12. On the boards of the New Testament, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths."—*St. Matth.* chap. v. v 33., and his

own name in both. Soon afterwards, disasters came upon him, and he thought of going to try his fortune in Jamaica. Then it was, that he wrote the simple, wild, but powerful lyric, "Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary?"

Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,

And leave old Scotia's shore?

Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,

Across the Atlantic's roar?

O sweet grows the lime and the orange,

And the apple on the pine;

But all the charms o' the Indies

Can never equal thine.

I hae sworn by the heavens to my Mary,

I hae sworn by the heavens to be true;

And sae may the heavens forget me

When I forget my vow!

O plight me your faith, my Mary!

And plight me your lily-white hand;

O plight me your faith, my Mary,

Before I leave Scotia's strand.

We hae plighted our faith, my Mary,
In mutual affection to join ;
And curst be the cause that shall part us—
The hour, and the moment of time !

As I have seen among the Alps the living stream rise, swelling and bubbling, from some cleft in the mountain's breast, then, with a broken and troubled impetuosity, rushing amain over all impediments,—then leaping, at a bound, into the abyss below ; so this song seems poured forth out of the full heart, as if a gush of passion had broken forth, that could not be restrained ; and so the feeling seems to swell and hurry through the lines, till it ends in one wild burst of energy and pathos—

And curst be the cause that shall part us—
The hour, and the moment of time !

A few months after this “ day of parting love,” on the banks of the Ayr, Mary Campbell set off from Inverary to meet her lover, as I suppose, to take leave of him ; for it should seem that no thoughts of a union could then be indulged.

Having reached Greenock, she was seized with a malignant fever, which hurried her to the grave in a few days; so that the tidings of her death reached her lover, before he could even hear of her illness. How deep and terrible was the shock to his strong and ardent mind,—how lasting the memory of this early love, is well known. Years after her death, he wrote the song of “Highland Mary.”*

O pale, pale now those rosy lips
I oft hae kiss'd so fondly!
And clos'd for aye the sparkling glance
That dwelt on me sae kindly!

And mouldering now in silent dust,
The heart that lo'ed me dearly;
But aye within my bosom's core
Shall live my Highland Mary.

* Beginning,—

“Ye banks and braes and streams around
The castle o' Montgomerie.”

As the works of Burns are probably in the hands of all who will read this little book, those who have not his finest passages by heart, can easily refer to them. I felt it therefore superfluous to give at length the songs alluded to.

The elegy to Mary in Heaven, was written about a year after his marriage, on the anniversary of the day on which he heard of the death of Mary Campbell. The account of the feelings and the circumstances under which it was composed, was taken from the recital of Bonnie Jean herself, and cannot be read without a thrill of emotion. "According to her, Burns had spent that day, though labouring under a cold, in the usual work of his harvest, and apparently in excellent spirits. But as the twilight deepened, he appeared to grow 'very sad about something,' and at length wandered out into the barn-yard, to which his wife, in her anxiety for his health, followed him, entreating him, in vain, to observe that frost had set in, and to return to his fire-side. On being again and again requested to do so, he always promised compliance, but still remained where he was, striding up and down slowly, and contemplating the sky, which was singularly clear and starry. At last, Mrs. Burns found him stretched on a heap of straw, with his eyes fixed on a beautiful planet, 'that shone like another moon,' and prevailed on

him to come in.”* He complied ; and immediately on entering the house wrote down, as they now stand, the stanzas “To Mary in Heaven.”

Mary Campbell was a poor peasant-girl, whose life had been spent in servile offices, who could just spell a verse in her Bible, and could not write at all,—who walked barefoot to that meeting on the banks of the Ayr, which her lover has recorded. But Mary Campbell will live to memory while the music and the language of her country endure. Helen of Greece and the Carthage Queen are not more surely immortalised than this plebeian girl.—The scene of parting love, on the banks of the Ayr, that spot where “the golden hours, on angel-wings,” hovered over Burns and his Mary, is classic ground ; Vacluse and Penshurst are not more lastingly consecrated : and like the copy of Virgil, in which Petrarch noted down the death of Laura, which many have made a pilgrimage but to look on, even such a relic shall be the Bible of Highland Mary. Some far-famed

* Lockhart's Life of Burns.

collection shall be proud to possess it ; and many hereafter shall gaze, with glistening eyes, on the handwriting of *him*,—who by the mere power of truth and passion, shall live in all hearts to the end of time.

* * * * *

Some other loves commemorated by Burns are not very interesting or reputable. “The lassie wi’ the lint white locks,” the heroine of many beautiful songs, was an erring sister, who, as she was the object of a poet’s admiration, shall be suffered to fade into a shadow. The subject of the song,

Had we never lov’d sae kindly—
 Had we never lov’d sae blindly—
 Never met—or never parted—
 We had ne’er been broken-hearted,

was also real, and I am afraid, a person of the same description. Of these four lines, Sir Walter Scott has said, “that they were worth a thousand romances ;” and not only so, but they are in themselves a complete romance. They are the *alpha* and *omega* of feeling ; and contain the essence of

an existence of pain and pleasure, distilled into one burning drop. Of almost all his songs, the heroines are real, though we must not suppose he was in love with them all,—that were too unconscionable; but he sometimes sought inspiration, and found it, where he could not have hoped any farther boon. In one of his letters to Mr. Thompson, for whose collection of Scottish airs he was then adapting words, he says, “Whenever I want to be more than ordinary *in song*, to be in some degree equal to your divine airs, do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation?—*tout au contraire*. I have a glorious recipe, the very one that, for his own use, was invented by the divinity of healing and poetry, when erst he piped to the flocks of Admetus,—I put myself on a regimen of admiring a fine woman.”

Thus, the original blue eyes which inspired that sweet song, “Her ee’n sae bonnie blue,” belonged to a Miss Jeffreys, now married, and living at New York. We owe “She’s fair and she’s false,” to the fickleness of a Miss Jane Stuart,

who, it is said, jilted the poet's friend, Alexander Cunningham.—“The bonnie wee thing,” was a very little, very lovely creature, a Miss Davies; and the song, it has been well said, is as brief and as beautiful as the lady herself. The heroine of “O saw ye bonnie Leslie,” is now Mrs. Cumming of Logie: Mrs. Dugald Stewart, herself a delightful poetess, inspired the pastoral song of Afton Water; and every woman has an interest in “Green grow the Rushes.” All the compliments that were ever paid us by the other sex, in prose and verse, may be summed up in Burns's line,

What signifies the life o' man, an' 't were na for the lasses O?

It were, however, an endless task to give a list of his heroines; and those who are curious about the personal history of the poet, of which his songs are “part and parcel,” must be referred to higher and more general sources of information.*

Burns used to say, after he had been intro-

* To the “Reliques of Burns, by Cromek;” to the Edition of the Scottish Songs, with notes, by Allan Cunningham; and to Lockhart's Life of Burns.

duced into society above his own rank in life, that he saw nothing in the *gentlemen* much superior to what he had been accustomed to ; but that a refined and elegant woman was a being of whom he could have formed no previous idea. This, I think, will explain, if it does not excuse, the characteristic freedom of some of his songs. His love is ardent and sincere, and it is expressed with great poetic power, and often with the most exquisite pathos ; but still it is the love of a peasant for a peasant, and he woos his rustic beauties in a style of the most entire equality and familiarity. It is not the homage of one who waited, a suppliant, on the throne of triumphant beauty. “ He drew no magic circle of lofty and romantic thought around those he loved, which could not be passed without lowering them from stations little lower than the angels.”* Still, his faults against taste and propriety are far fewer and lighter than might have been expected from his habits ; and as he acknowledged that he could have formed no idea of a woman refined by high

* Allan Cunningham.

breeding and education, we cannot be surprised if he sometimes committed solecisms of which he was scarcely aware. For instance, he met a young lady (Miss Alexander, of Ballochmyle,) walking in her father's grounds, and struck by her charms and elegance, he wrote in her honour his well known song, "The lovely lass of Ballochmyle," and sent it to her. He was astonished and offended that no notice was taken of it; but really, a young lady, educated in a due regard for the *convenances* and the *bienséances* of society, may be excused, if she was more embarrassed than flattered by the homage of a poet, who talked, at the first glance, of "clasping her to his bosom." It was rather precipitating things.

CHAPTER XII.

CONJUGAL POETRY CONTINUED.

MONTI AND HIS WIFE.

MONTI, who is lately dead, will at length be allowed to take the place which belongs to him among the great names of his country. A poet is ill calculated to play the part of a politician; and the praise and blame which have been so profusely and indiscriminately heaped on Monti while living, must be removed by time and dispassionate criticism, before justice can be done to him, either as a man or a poet. The mingled grace and energy of his style obtained him the name of *il Dante grazioso*, and he has left behind him something

striking in every possible form of composition,—lyric, dramatic, epic, and satirical.

Amid all the changes of his various life, and all the trying vicissitudes of spirits—the wear and tear of mind which attend a poet by profession, tasked to almost constant exertion, Monti possessed two enviable treasures;—a lovely and devoted wife, with a soul which could appreciate his powers and talents, and exult in his fame; and a daughter equally amiable, and yet more beautiful and highly gifted. He has immortalised both; and has left us delightful proofs of the charm and the glory which poetry can throw round the purest and most hallowed relations of domestic life.

When Monti was a young man at Rome, caressed by popes and nephews of popes, and with the most brilliant ecclesiastical preferment opening before him, all his views in life were at once *bouleversé* by a passion, which does sometimes in real life play the part assigned to it in romance—trampling on interest and ambition, and mocking at Cardinals' hats and tiaras. Monti fell into love, and fell out of the good graces of his patrons: he

threw off the habit of an *abbate*,* married his Teresa, in spite of the world and fortune ; and instead of an aspiring priest, became a great poet.

Teresa Pichler was the daughter of Pichler, the celebrated gem engraver. I have heard her described, by those who knew her in her younger years, as one of the most beautiful creatures in the world. Brought up in the studio of her father, in whom the spirit of ancient art seemed to have revived for modern times, 'Teresa's mind as well as person had caught a certain impress of antique grace, from the constant presence of beautiful and majestic forms : but her favourite study was music, in which she was a proficient ; her voice and her harp made as many conquests as her faultless figure and her bright eyes. After her marriage she did not neglect her favourite art ; and she, whose talent had charmed Zingarelli and Guglielmi, was accustomed, in their hours of domestic privacy, to soothe, to enchant, to inspire, her husband. Monti, in one of his poems, has tenderly commemorated her musical powers. He

* Worn by the young men who are intended for the Church.

calls on his wife during a period of persecution, poverty and despondency, to touch her harp, and, as she was wont, rouse his sinking spirit, and unlock the source of nobler thoughts.

Stendi, dolce amor mio ! sposa diletta !
 A quell' arpa la man ; che la soave,
 Dolce fatica di tue dite aspetta.
 Svegliami l'armonia, ch' entro le cave
 Latebre alberga del sonoro legno,
 E de' forti pensier volgi la chiave !

There is a resemblance in the *sentiment* of these verses, to some stanzas addressed by a living English poet to his wife ;—she who, like Monti's Teresa, can strike her harp, till, as a spirit caught in some spell of his own teaching, music itself seems to flutter, imprisoned among the chords,—to come at her will and breathe her thought, rather than obey her touch !—

Once more, among those rich and golden strings,
 Wander with thy white arm, dear Lady pale !
 And when at last from thy sweet discord springs
 The aerial music,—like the dreams that veil
 Earth's shadows with diviner thoughts and things,
 O let the passion and the time prevail !—

O bid thy spirit through the mazes run !

For music is like love, and must be won ! &c.*

The Italian verses have great power and beauty ; but the English lines have the superiority, not in poetry only, but in rhythmical melody. They fall on the ear like a strain from the harp which inspired them—full, and rich, and thrilling sweet,—and not to be forgotten!

To return to Monti:—no man had more completely that temperament which is supposed to accompany genius. He was fond, and devoted in his domestic relations ; but he was variable in spirits, ardent, restless, and subject to fits of gloom. And how often must the literary disputes and political *tracasseries* in which he was engaged, have embittered and irritated so susceptible a mind and temper ! If his wife were at his side to soothe him with her music, and her smiles, and her tenderness,—it was well,—the cloud passed away. If she were absent, every suffering seemed aggravated, and we find him—like one spoiled and pampered, with

* Barry Cornwall.

attention and love,—yielding to an irritable dependency, which even the presence of his children could not alleviate.

Che più ti resta a far per mio dispetto,
 Sorte crudel? mia donna è lungi, e io privo,
 De' suoi conforti in miserando aspetto
 Egro qui giaccio, al' sofferir sol vivo!*

But the most remarkable of all Monti's conjugal effusions, is a canzone written a short time before his death, and when he was more than seventy years of age. Nothing can be more affecting than the subdued tone of melancholy tenderness, with which the grey-haired poet apostrophises her who had been the love, the pride, the joy of his life for forty years. In power and in poetry, this canzone will bear a comparison with many of the more rapturous effusions of his youth. The occasion on which it was composed is thus related in a note prefixed to it by the editor.† When Monti was

* *Opere Varie*, v. iii. This sonnet to his wife was written when Monti was ill at the house of his son-in-law, Count Perticari.

† Edit. 1826, vol. vi.

recovering from a long and dangerous illness, through which he had been tenderly nursed by his wife and daughter, he accompanied them “in villeggiatura,” to a villa near Brianza, the residence of a friend, where they were accustomed to celebrate the birth-day of Madame Monti; and it was here that her husband, now declining in years, weak from recent illness and accumulated infirmities, addressed to her the poem which may be found in the recent edition of his works; it begins thus tenderly and sweetly—

Donna! dell' alma mia parte più cara!
 Perchè muta in pensosa atto mi guati?
 E di segrete stille,
 Rugiadose si fan le tue pupille? &c.

“Why, O thou dearer half of my soul, dost thou watch over me thus mute and pensive? Why are thine eyes heavy with suppressed tears?” &c.

And when he reminds her touchingly, that his long and troubled life is drawing to its natural close, and that she cannot hope to retain him much longer, even by all her love and care,—he

adds with a noble spirit,—“Remember, that Monti cannot wholly die! think, O think! I leave thee dowered with no obscure, no vulgar name! for the day shall come, when, among the matrons of Italy, it shall be thy boast to say,—“I was the love of Monti.”*

The tender transition to his daughter—

E tu del pari sventurata e cara mia figlia!

as alike unhappy and beloved, alludes to her recent widowhood. Costanza Monti, who inherited no small portion of her father's genius, and all her mother's grace and beauty, married the Count Giulio Peticari of Pesaro, a man of uncommon taste and talents, and an admired poet. He died in the same year with Canova, to whom he had been a favourite friend and companion: while his lovely wife furnished the sculptor with a model for his ideal heads of vestals and poetesses. Those who saw the Countess Peticari at Rome, such as she appeared seven or eight years ago, will not easily

* In the original, Monti designates himself by an allusion to his chef-d'œuvre—“Del Cantor di Basville.”

forget her brilliant eyes, and yet more brilliant talents. She, too, is a poetess. In her father's works may be found a little canzone written by her about a year after the death of her husband, and with equal tenderness and simplicity, alluding to her lonely state, deprived of him who once encouraged and cultivated her talents, and deserved her love.*

Vincenzo Monti died in October 1828:—his widow and his daughter reside, I believe, at Milan.

* Monti, Opere, vol. iii. p. 75.

CHAPTER XIII.

POETS AND BEAUTIES,

FROM CHARLES II. TO QUEEN ANNE.

THUS, then, it appears, that love, even the most ethereal and poetical, does not always take flight “at sight of human ties;” and Pope wronged the real delicacy of Heloïse when he put this borrowed sentiment into her epistle, making that conduct the result of perverted principle, which, in *her*, was a sacrifice to extreme love and pride in its object. It is not the mere idea of bondage which frightens away the light-winged god ;

The gentle bird feels no captivity

Within his cage, but sings and feeds his fill.*

* Spenser.

It is when those bonds, which were first decreed
in heaven

To keep two hearts together, which began
Their spring-time with one love,

are abused to vilest purposes:—to link together indissolubly, unworthiness with desert, truth with falsehood, brutality with gentleness; then indeed love is scared; his cage becomes a dungeon;—and either he breaks away, with plumage all impaired,—or folds up his many-coloured wings, and droops and dies.

But then it will be said, perhaps, that the splendour and the charm which poetry has thrown over some of these pictures of conjugal affection and wedded truth, are exterior and adventitious, or, at best, short-lived:—the bands were at first graceful and flowery;—but sorrow dewed them with tears, or selfish passions sullied them, or death tore them asunder, or trampled them down. It may be so; but still I will aver that what has been, *is*:—that there is a power in the human heart which survives sorrow, passion, age, death itself.

Love I esteem more strong than age,
And truth more permanent than time.

For happiness, *c'est différent!* and for that bright and pure and intoxicating happiness which we weave into our youthful visions, which is of such stuff as dreams are made of,—to complain that this does not last and wait upon us through life, is to complain that earth is *earth*, not heaven. It is to repine that the violet does not outlive the spring; that the rose dies upon the breast of June; that the grey evening shuts up the eye of day, and that old age quenches the glow of youth: for is not such the condition under which we exist? All I wished to prove was, that the sacred tie which binds the sexes together, which gives to man his natural refuge in the tenderness of woman, and to woman her natural protecting stay in the right reason and stronger powers of man, so far from being a chill to the imagination, as wicked wits would tell us, has its poetical side. Let us look back for a moment on the array of bright names and beautiful verse, quoted or alluded to in the

preceding chapters: what is there among the mercurial poets of Charles's days, those notorious scoffers at decency and constancy, to compare with them?—Dorset and Denham, and Sedley and Suckling, and Rochester,—“the mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease,”—with their smooth emptiness, and sparkling common-places of artificial courtship, and total want of moral sentiment, have degraded, not elevated the loves they sang. Could these gallant fops rise up from their graves, and see themselves exiled with contempt from every woman's toilet, every woman's library, every woman's memory, they would choak themselves with their own periwigs, eat their laced cravats, hang themselves in their own sword-knots! —“to be discarded thence!”

Turn thy complexion there,
Thou simpering, smooth-lipp'd cherub, Coxcombry,
Ay, there, look grim as hell!

And such be the fate of all who dare profane the
altar of beauty with adulterate incense!

For wit is like the frail luxuriant vine,
Unless to virtue's prop it join ;
Though it with beauteous leaves and pleasant fruit
 be crown'd,
It lies deform'd and rotting on the ground !

These lines are from Cowley,—a great name among the poets of those days ; but he has sunk into a *name*. We may repeat with Pope, “ Who now reads Cowley ? ” and this, not because he was licentious, but because, with all his elaborate wit, and brilliant and uncommon thoughts, he is as frigid as ice itself. “ A little ingenuity and artifice,” as Mrs. Malaprop would say, is well enough ; but Cowley, in his amatory poetry, is all artifice. He coolly sat down to write a volume of love verses, that he might, to use his own expression, “ be free of his craft, as a poet ; ” and in his preface, he protests “ that his testimony should not be taken against himself.” Here was a poet, and a lover ! who sets out by begging his readers, in the first place, not to believe him. This was like the weaver, in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, who was so anxious to assure his

audience “that Pyramus was not killed indeed, and that he, Pyramus, was not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver.” But Cowley’s amatory verse disproves itself, without the help of a prologue. It is, in his own phrase, “all sophisticate.” Even his sparkling chronicle of beauties,

Margaretta first possest,
If I remember well, my breast, &c.

is mere fancy, and in truth it is a pity. Cowley was once in love, after his querulous melancholy fashion; but he never had the courage to avow it. The lady alluded to in the last verse of the Chronicle, as

Eleonora, first of the name,
Whom God grant long to reign,

was the object of this luckless attachment. She afterwards married a brother of Dr. Spratt, Bishop of Rochester,* who had not probably half the poet’s wit or fame, but who could love as well, and speak better; and the gentle, amiable Cowley died an old batchelor.

* Spence’s Anecdotes, Sing. edit.

These writers may have merit of a different kind; they may be read by wits for the sake of their wit; but they have failed in the great object of lyric poetry: they neither create sympathy for themselves; nor interest, nor respect for their mistresses: they were not in earnest;—and what woman of sense and feeling was ever touched by a compliment which no woman ever inspired? or pleased, by being addressed with the swaggering licence of a libertine? Who cares to inquire after the originals of their Belindas and Clorindas—their Chloes, Delias, and Phillises, with their pastoral names, and loves—that were any thing but pastoral? There is not one among the flaunting coquettes, or profligate women of fashion, sung by these gay coxcomb poets—

Those goddesses, so blithe, so smooth, so gay,
Yet empty of all good wherein consists
Woman's domestic honour and chief praise,

who has obtained an interest in our memory, or a permanent place in the history of our literature; not one, who would not be eclipsed by Bonnie

Jean, or Highland Mary! It is true, that the age produced several remarkable women; a Lady Russell, that heroine of heroines! a Lady Fanshawe;* a Mrs. Hutchinson; who needed no poet to trumpet forth their praise: and others,—some celebrated for the possession of beauty and talents, and too many notorious for the abuse of both. But there were no poetical heroines, properly so called,—no Laura, no Geraldine, no Saccharissa. Among the temporary idols of the day, (by which name we shall distinguish those women whose beauty, rank, and patronage, procured them a sort of poetical celebrity, very different from the halo of splendour which love and genius cast round a chosen divinity,) there are one or two who deserve to be particularised.

The first of these was Maria Beatrice d'Este, the daughter of the Duke of Modena, second wife of James Duke of York, and afterwards his queen. She was married, at the age of fifteen, to a profligate prince, as ugly as his brother Charles, (without any of his captivating graces of figure and

* See her beautiful Memoirs, recently published.

manner,) and old enough to be her grandfather. She made the best of wives to one of the most unamiable of men. All writers of all parties are agreed, that slander itself, was disarmed by the unoffending gentleness of her character; all are agreed too, on the subject of her uncommon loveliness: she was quite an Italian beauty, with a tall, dignified, graceful figure, regular features, and dark eyes, a complexion rather pale and fair, and hair and eyebrows black as the raven's wing: so that in personal graces, as in virtues, she fairly justified the rapturous eulogies of all the poets of her time. Thus Dryden:—

What awful charms on her fair forehead sit,
Dispensing what she never will admit;
Pleasing yet cold—like Cynthia's silver beam,
The people's wonder, and the poet's theme!

She captivated hearts almost as fast as James the Second lost them;

And Envy did but look on her and died !*

* Dryden's Works, by Scott, vol. xi, p. 32.

Her fall from the throne she so adorned ; her escape with her infant son, under the care of the Duc de Lauzun ;* her conduct during her retirement at St. Germain's, with a dull court, and a stupid bigoted husband ; are all matters of history, and might have inspired, one would think, better verses than were ever written upon her. Lord Lansdown exclaims, with an enthusiasm which was at least disinterested—

O happy James ! content thy mighty mind !
 Grudge not the world, for still thy Queen is kind,—
 To lie but at whose feet, more glory brings,
 Than 'tis to tread on sceptres and on kings !†

Anne Killigrew, who has been immortalised by Dryden, in the ode,‡

Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies !

does not seem to have possessed any talents or

* The Duc de Lauzun of Mademoiselle de Montpensier.

† Grauville's Works,—“Progress of Beauty”

‡ “To the pious memory of the accomplished young lady, Mrs. Anne Killigrew, excellent in the two sister arts of poesy and painting.”

acquirements which would render her *very* remarkable in these days; though in her own time she was styled “a grace for beauty and a muse for wit.” Her youth, her accomplishments, her captivating person, her station at court, (as maid of honour to Maria d’Este, then Duchess of York,) and her premature death at the age of twenty-four, all conspired to render her interesting to her contemporaries; and Dryden has given her a fame which cannot die. The stanza in this ode, in which the poet, for himself and others, pleads guilty of having “made prostitute and profligate the muse,”

Whose harmony was first ordain’d above
For tongues of angels and for hymns of love !

—the sudden turn in praise of the young poetess, whose verse flowed pure as her own mind and heart; and the burst of enthusiasm—

Let this thy vestal, heaven ! atone for all !

are exceedingly beautiful. His description of her skill in painting both landscape and portraits, would answer for a Claude, or a Titian. We are

a little disappointed to find, after all this pomp and prodigality of praise, that Anne Killebrew's paintings were mediocre; and that her poetry has sunk, not undeservedly, into oblivion. She died of the small-pox in 1685.

The famous Tom Killebrew, jester (by courtesy) to Charles the Second, was her uncle.

There was also the young Duchess of Ormond, (Lady Mary Somerset, daughter of the Duke of Beaufort.) She married into a family which had been, for three generations, the patrons and benefactors of Dryden; and never was patronage so richly repaid. To this Duchess of Ormond, Dryden has dedicated the Tale of Palemon and Arcite, in an opening address full of poetry and compliment;—happily, both justified and merited by the object.

Lady Hyde, afterwards Countess of Clarendon and Rochester, was in her time a favourite theme of gay and gallant verse; but she maintained with her extreme beauty and gentleness of deportment, a dignity of conduct which disarmed scandal, and kept presumptuous wits as well as

presumptuous fops at a distance. Lord Lansdown has crowned her with praise, very pointed and elegant, and seems to have contrasted her at the moment, with his coquettish Mira, Lady Newburgh.

Others, by guilty artifice and arts,
 And promised kindness, practise on our hearts ;
 With expectation blow the passion up ;
She fans the fire without one gale of hope.*

Lady Hyde was the daughter of Sir William Leveson Gower, (ancestor to the Marquis of Stafford,) and mother of that Lord Cornbury, who has been celebrated by Pope and Thomson.

The second daughter of this lovely and amiable woman, lady Catherine Hyde, was Prior's famous Kitty,

Beautiful and young,
 And wild as colt untam'd,

the "female Phaeton," who obtained mamma's chariot for a day, to set the world on fire.

* See the lines on Lady Hyde's picture in Granville's poems.

Shall I thumb holy books, confin'd
With Abigails forsaken ?
Kitty 's for other things design'd,
Or I am much mistaken.

Must Lady Jenny frisk about,
And visit with her cousins ?
At balls must she make all this rout,
And bring home hearts by dozens ?

What has she better, pray, than I ?
What hidden charms to boast,
That all mankind for her must die,
Whilst I am scarce a toast ?

Dearest Mamma ! for once, let me
Unchain'd my fortune try :
I'll have my Earl as well as she,
Or know the reason why.

Fondness prevail'd, Mamma gave way :
Kitty, at heart's desire,
Obtain'd the chariot for a day,
And set the world on fire !

Kitty not only set the world on fire, but more than accomplished her magnanimous resolution to

have an Earl as well as her sister, Lady Jenny.* She married the Duke of Queensbury; and as *that* Duchess of Queensbury, who was the friend and patroness of Gay, is still farther connected with the history of our poetical literature. Pope paid a compliment to her beauty, in a well-known couplet, which is more refined in the application than in the expression:—

If Queensbury to strip there 's no compelling,
'Tis from a handmaid we must take a Helen.

She was an amiable, exemplary woman, and possessed that best and only preservative of youth and beauty,—a kind, cheerful disposition and buoyant spirits. When she walked at the coronation of George the Third, she was still so strikingly attractive, that Horace Walpole handed to her the following impromptu, written on a leaf of his pocket-book,

To many a Kitty, Love, his car,
Would for a day engage;
But Prior's Kitty, ever fair,
Obtained it for an age!

* Lady Jane Hyde married the Earl of Essex

She is also alluded to in Thomson's Seasons.

And stooping thence to Ham's embowering walks,
 Beneath whose shades, in spotless peace retir'd,
 With her the pleasing partner of his heart,
 The worthy Queensb'ry yet laments his Gay.—*Summer.*

The Duchess of Queensbury died in 1777.*

Two other women, who lived about the same time, possess a degree of celebrity which, though but a sound—a name—rather than a feeling or an interest, must not pass unnoticed; more particularly as they will farther illustrate the theory we have hitherto kept in view. I allude to “Granville's Mira,” and “Prior's Chloe.”

* On the death of Gay, Swift had addressed to the Duchess a letter of condolence in his usual cynical style. The Duchess replied with feeling—“I differ from you, that it is possible to comfort one's self for the loss of friends, as one does for the loss of money. I think I could live on very little, nor think myself poor, nor be thought so; but a *little* friendship could never satisfy one. In almost every thing but friends, another of the same name may do as well; but *friend* is more than a name, *if* it be any thing.”—This is true; but, as Touchstone says—“much virtue in *if*!”

For the fame of the first, a single line of Pope has done more than all the verses of Lord Lansdown: it is in the Epistle to Jervas the painter—

With Zeuxis' Helen, thy Bridgewater vie,
And these be sung, till Granville's Mira die !

Now, "Granville's Mira" would have been *dead* long ago, had she not been preserved in some material more precious and lasting than the poetry of her noble admirer: she shines, however, "embalmed in the lucid amber" of Pope's lines; and we not only wonder how she got there, but are tempted to inquire who she was, or, if ever she was at all.

Granville's Mira was Lady Frances Brudenel, third daughter of the Earl of Cardigan. She was married very young to Livingstone, Earl of Newburgh; and Granville's first introduction to her must have taken place soon after her marriage, in 1690: he was then about twenty, already distinguished for that elegance of mind and manner, which has handed him down to us as "Granville the polite." He joined the crowd of Lady New-

burgh's adorers; and as some praise, and some lucky lines had persuaded him that he was a poet, he chose to consecrate his verse to this fashionable beauty.

In all the mass of poetry, or rather rhyme, addressed to Lady Newburgh, there is not a passage,—not a single line which can throw an interest round her character; all we can make out is, that she was extremely beautiful; that she sang well; and that she was a most finished, heartless coquette. Thus her lover has pictured her:

Lost in a labyrinth of doubts and joys,
Whom now her smiles revived, her scorn destroys;
She will, and she will not, she grants, denies,
Consents, retracts; advances, and then flies.
Approving and rejecting in a breath,
Now proffering mercy, now presenting death!

She led Granville on from year to year, till the death of her first husband, Lord Newburgh. He then presented himself among the suitors for her hand, confiding, it seems, in former encouragement or promises; but Lady Newburgh had played the same despicable

game with others: she had no objection to the poetical admiration of an accomplished young man of fashion, who had rendered her an object of universal attention, by his determined pursuit and tuneful homage, and who was then the admired of all women. She thought, like the coquette, in one of Congreve's comedies,

If there 's delight in love, 'tis when I see
The heart that others bleed for—bleed for me!

But when free to choose, she rejected him and married Lord Bellevue. Her coquetry with Granville had been so notorious, that this marriage caused a great sensation at the time and no little scandal.

Rumour is loud, and every voice proclaims
Her violated faith and conscious flames.

The only catastrophe, however, which her falsehood occasioned, was the production of a long elegy, in imitation of Theocritus, which concludes Lord Lansdown's amatory effusions. He afterwards married Lady Anne Villiers, with whom he

lived happily : after a union of more than twenty years, they died within a few days of each other, and they were buried together.

Lady Newburgh left a daughter by her first husband,* and a son and daughter by Lord Bellew : she lived to survive her beauty, to lose her admirers, and to be the object in her old age of the most gross and unmeasured satire ; the flattery of a lover elevated her to a divinity, and the malice of a wit, whom she had ill-treated, degraded her into a fury and a hag—with about as much reason.

Prior's Chloe, the “nut-brown maid,” was taken from the opposite extremity of society, but could scarce have been more worthless. She was a common woman of the lowest description, whose real name was, I believe, Nancy Derham,—but it is not a matter of much importance.

Prior's attachment to this woman, however unmerited, was very sincere. For her sake he quitted

* Charlotte, Countess of Newburgh in her own right, from whom the present Earl of Newburgh is descended.

the high society into which his talents and his political connexions had introduced him; and for her, he neglected, as he tells us—

Whate'er the world thinks wise and grave,
Ambition, business, friendship, news,
My useful books and serious muse,

to bury himself with her in some low tavern for weeks together. Once when they quarrelled, she ran away and carried off his plate; but even this could not shake his constancy: at his death he left her all he possessed, and she—his Chloe—at whose command and in whose honour he wrote his “Henry and Emma,”—married a cobbler!* Such was Prior’s Chloe.

Is it surprising that the works of a poet once so popular, should now be banished from a Lady’s library?—a banishment from which all his sprightly wit cannot redeem him.—But because Prior’s love for this woman was real, and that he was really a man of feeling and genius, though debased by low and irregular habits, there are some sweet

* Spence’s Anecdotes.

touches scattered through his poetry, which show how strong was the illusion in his fancy:—as in “Chloe Jealous.”

Reading thy verse, “who cares,” said I,
 “If here or there his glances flew !
 O free for ever be his eye,
 Whose heart to me is always true !”

And in his “Answer to Chloe Jealous.”

O when I am wearied with wandering all day,
 To thee, my delight, in the evening I come.
 No matter what beauties I saw in my way,
 They were but my visits, but thou art my home !

The address to Chloe, with which the “Nut-brown Maid” commences,

Thou, to whose eyes I bend, &c.

will ever be admired, and the poem will always find readers among the young and gentle-hearted, who have not yet learned to be critics or to tremble at the fiat of Dr. Johnson. It is perhaps one of the most popular poems in the language.

CHAPTER XIV.

STELLA AND VANESSA.

IT is difficult to consider Swift as a poet. So many unamiable, disagreeable, unpoetical ideas are connected with his name, that, great as he was in fame and intellectual vigour, he seems as misplaced in the temple of the muses as one of his own yahoos. But who has not heard of “Swift’s Stella?” and of Cadenus and Vanessa? Though all will confess that the two devoted women, who fell victims to his barbarous selfishness, and whose names are eternally linked with the history of our literature, are far more interesting, from their ill-bestowed, ill-requited and passionate attachment to *him*, than by any thing he ever sung

or said of *them*.* Nay, his longest, his most elaborate, and his most admired poem—the avowed history of one of his attachments—with its insipid tawdry fable, its conclusion, in which nothing is concluded, and the inferences we are left to draw from it, would have given but an ignominious celebrity to poor Vanessa, if truth and time, and her own sweet nature, had not redeemed her.

I pass over Swift's early attachment to Jane Waryng, whom he deserted after a seven years' engagement: she is not in any way connected with his literary history,—and what became of her afterwards is not known. He excused himself by

* As Swift said truly and wittily of himself :

As when a lofty pile is raised,
 We never hear the workmen praised,
 Who bring the lime or place the stones,
 But all admire Inigo Jones ;
 So if this pile of scattered rhymes
 Should be approved in after-times,
 If it both pleases and endures,
 The merit and the praise are yours !

Verses to Stella.

some pitiful subterfuges about fortune; but it appears, from a comparison of dates, that the occasion of his breaking off with her, was his rising partiality for another.

When Swift was an inmate of Sir William Temple's family at Moor Park, he met with Esther Johnson, who appears to have been a kind of humble companion to Sir William's niece, Miss Gifford. She is said by some to have been the daughter of Sir William's steward; by others we are told that her father was a London merchant, who had failed in business. This was the interesting and ill-fated woman, since renowned as "Swift's Stella."

She was then a blooming girl of fifteen, with silky black hair, brilliant eyes, and delicate features. Her disposition was gentle and affectionate; and she had a mind of no common order. Swift sometimes employed his leisure in instructing Sir William's niece, and Stella was the companion of her studies. Her beauty, talents, and docility, interested her preceptor, who, though considerably older than herself, was in the vigour

of his life and intellectual powers; and she repaid this interest with all the idolatry of a young unpractised heart, mingled with a gratitude and reverence almost filial. When he took possession of his living in Ireland, he might have married her; for she loved him, and he knew it. She was perfectly independent of any family ties, and had a small property of her own: but what were really his views or his intentions, it is impossible to guess; nor at the reasons of that most extraordinary arrangement, by which he contrived to bind this devoted creature to him for life, and to enslave her heart and soul to him for ever, without assuming the character either of a husband or a lover. He persuaded her to leave England; and, under the sanction and protection of a respectable elderly woman named Dingley, often alluded to in his humorous poems, to take up her residence near him at Laracor. Subsequently, when he became Dean of St. Patrick's, she had a lodging in Dublin. He was accustomed to spend part of every day in her society, but never without the presence of a third person; and when he

was absent, the two ladies took possession of his residence, and occupied it till his return.

Two years after her removal to Ireland, and when she was in her twentieth year, Stella was addressed by a young clergyman, whose name was Tisdal; and sensible of the humiliating and equivocal situation in which she was placed, and unable to bring Swift to any explanation of his views or sentiments, she appears to have been inclined to favour the addresses of her new admirer. He proposed in form; but Swift, without in any way committing himself, contrived to prevent the marriage. Stella found herself precisely in the same situation as before, and every year increased his influence over her young and gentle spirit, as habit confirmed and strengthened the bonds of a first affection. She lived on in the hope that he would at length marry her; bearing his sullen outbreakings of temper, soothing his morbid misanthropy, cheering and adorning his life; and giving herself every day fresh claims to his love, compassion, and gratitude, by her sufferings, her virtues, her patient gentleness, and her exclusive

devotion ;—and all availed not ! During this extraordinary connection, Swift was accustomed to address her in verse. Some of these poems, though worthless as poetry, derive interest from the beauty of her character, and from that concentrated vigour of expression which was the characteristic of all he wrote ; as in this descriptive passage :—

Her hearers are amazed from whence
 Proceeds that fund of wit and sense,
 Which, though her modesty would shroud,
 Breaks like the sun behind a cloud ;
 While gracefulness its art conceals,
 And yet through every motion steals.
 Say, Stella, was Prometheus blind,
 And forming you, mistook your kind ?
 No ; 'twas for you alone he stole
 The fire that forms a manly soul ;
 Then, to complete it every way,
 He moulded it with female clay :
 To *that* you owe the nobler flame,
 To *this* the beauty of your frame.

He compliments her sincerity and firmness of principle in four nervous lines :

Ten thousand oaths upon record
Are not so sacred as her word !
The world shall in its atoms end,
Ere Stella can deceive a friend !

Her tender attention to him in sickness and suffering, is thus described, with a tolerable insight into his own character.

To her I owe
That I these pains can undergo ;
She tends me like an humble slave,
And, when indecently I rave,
When out my brutish passions break,
With gall in every word I speak,
She, with soft speech, my anguish cheers,
Or melts my passions down with tears :
Although 'tis easy to descry
She wants assistance more than I,
She seems to feel my pains alone,
And is a Stoic to her own.
Where, among scholars, can you find
So soft, and yet so firm a mind ?

These lines, dated March, 1724, are the more remarkable, because they refer to a period when

Stella had much to forgive;—when she had just been injured, in the tenderest point, by the man who owed to her tenderness and forbearance all the happiness that his savage temper allowed him to taste on earth.

As Stella passed much of her time in solitude, she read a great deal. She received Swift's friends, many of whom were clever and distinguished men, particularly Sheridan and Delany; and on his public days she dined as a guest at his table, where, says his biographer,* “the modesty of her manners, the sweetness of her disposition, and the brilliance of her wit, rendered her the general object of admiration to all who were so happy as to have a place in that enviable society.”

Johnson says that, “if Swift's ideas of women were such as he generally exhibits, a very little sense in a lady would enrapture, and a very little virtue astonish him;” and thinks, therefore, that Stella's supremacy might be “only local and com-

* Sheridan's Life of Swift.

parative ;” but it is not the less true, that she was beheld with tenderness and admiration by all who approached her ; and whether she could spell or not,* she could certainly write very pretty verses, considering whom she had chosen for her model : —for instance, the following little effusion, in reply to a compliment addressed to her :

If it be true, celestial powers,
That you have formed me fair,
And yet, in all my vainest hours,
My mind has been my care ;
Then, in return, I beg this grace,
As you were ever kind,
What envious time takes from my face,
Bestow upon my mind !

She had continued to live on in this strange undefinable state of dependance for fourteen years, “in pale contented sort of discontent,” though her spirit was so borne down by the ha-

* Dr. Johnson, who allows Stella to have been “virtuous, beautiful, and elegant,” says she could not spell her own language : in those days few women *could* spell accurately.

bitual awe in which he held her, that she never complained—when the suspicion that a younger and fairer rival had usurped the heart she possessed, if not the rights she coveted, added the tortures of jealousy to those of lingering suspense and mortified affection.

A new attachment had, in fact, almost entirely estranged Swift from her, and from his home. While in London, from 1710 to 1712, he was accustomed to visit at the house of Mrs. Vanhomrigh, and became so intimate, that during his attendance on the ministry at that time, he was accustomed to change his wig and gown, and drink his coffee there almost daily. Mrs. Vanhomrigh had two daughters: the eldest, Esther, was destined to be the second victim of Swift's detestable selfishness, and become celebrated under the name of Vanessa.

She was of a character altogether different from that of Stella. Not quite so beautiful in person, but with all the freshness and vivacity of youth—(she was not twenty,) and adding to the advantages of polished manners and lively talents,

a frank confiding temper, and a capacity for strong affections. She was rich, admired, happy, and diffusing happiness. Swift, as I have said, visited at the house of her mother. His age, his celebrity, his character as a clergyman, gave him privileges of which he availed himself. He was pleased with Miss Vanhomrigh's talents, and undertook to direct her studies. She was ignorant of the ties which bound him to the unhappy Stella; and charmed by his powers of conversation, dazzled by his fame, won and flattered by his attentions, surrendered her heart and soul to him before she was aware; and her love partaking of the vivacity of her character, not only absorbed every other feeling, but, as she expressed it herself, "became blended with every atom of her frame."*

Swift, among his other lessons, took pains to impress her with his own favourite maxims (it had been well for both had he acted up to them himself)—"to speak the truth on all occasions, and at

* See her Letters.

every hazard: and to do what seemed right in itself, without regard to the opinions or customs of the world." He appears also to have insinuated the idea, that the disparity of their age and fortune rendered him distrustful of his own powers of pleasing.* She was thus led on, by his open admiration, and her own frank temper, to betray the state of her affections, and proffered to him her hand and fortune. He had not sufficient humanity, honour, or courage, to disclose the truth of his situation, but replied to the avowal of this innocent and warm-hearted girl, first in a tone of raillery, and then by an equivocal offer of everlasting friendship.

The scene is thus given in Cadenus and Vanessa.

Vanessa, though by Pallas taught,
 By Love invulnerable thought,
 Searching in books for wisdom's aid,
 Was in the very search betrayed.

* * * *

* See some very poor verses found in Miss Vanhomrigh's desk, and inserted in his poems, vol. x, p. 14.

Cadenus many things had writ ;
 Vanessa much esteemed his wit,
 And call'd for his poetic works.
 Mean time the boy in secret lurks ;
 And, while the book was in her hand
 The urchin from his private stand
 Took aim, and shot with all his strength
 A dart of such prodigious length,
 It pierced the feeble volume through,
 And deep transfix'd her bosom too.
 Some lines, more moving than the rest,
 Stuck to the point that pierced her breast,
 And borne directly to the heart,
 With pains unknown, increas'd her smart.
 Vanessa, not in years a score,
 Dreams of a gown of forty-four ;
 Imaginary charms can find,
 In eyes with reading almost blind.
 Cadenus now no more appears
 Declin'd in health, advanc'd in years ;
 She fancies music in his tongue,
 Nor farther looks, but thinks him young.

Vanessa is then made to disclose her tenderness.
 The expressions and the sentiments are probably as
 true to the facts as was consistent with the rhyme :

but how cold, how flat, how prosaic ! no emotion falters in the lines—not a feeling blushes through them !—as if an ardent but delicate and gentle girl would ever have made a first avowal of passion in this *chop-logic* style—

“ Now,” said the Nymph, “ to let you see
 My actions with your rules agree ;
 That I can vulgar forms despise,
 And have no secrets to disguise ;
 I knew, by what you said and writ,
 How dangerous things were men of wit ;
 You caution’d me against their charms,
 But never gave me equal arms ;
 Your lessons found the weakest part,
 Aimed at the head, but reach’d the heart !”
 Cadenus felt within him rise
 Shame, disappointment, guilt, surprise, &c.

* * * * *

It is possible he might have felt thus ; and yet the excess of his *surprise* and *disappointment* on the occasion, may be doubted. He makes, however, a very candid confession of his own vanity.

Cadenus, to his grief and shame,
 Could scarce oppose Vanessa's flame ;
 And, though her arguments were strong,
 At least could hardly wish them wrong :
 Howe'er it came, he could not tell,
 But sure she never talked so well.
 His pride began to interpose ;
 Preferred before a crowd of beaux !
 So bright a nymph to come unsought !
 Such wonder by his merit wrought !
 'Tis merit must with her prevail !
 He never knew her judgment fail.
 She noted all she ever read,
 And had a most discerning head !

The scene continues—he rallies her, and affects to think it all

Just what coxcombs call a bite.

(such is his elegant phrase.) He then offers her friendship instead of love: the lady replies with very pertinent arguments; and finally, the tale is concluded in this ambiguous passage, in which we must allow that great room is left for scandal, for doubt, and for curiosity.

But what success Vanessa met
 Is to the world a secret yet ;—
 Whether the nymph, to please her swain,
 Talks in a high romantic strain,
 Or whether he at last descends
 To act with less seraphic ends ;
 Or to compound the business, whether
 They temper love and books together ;
 Must never to mankind be told,
 Nor shall the conscious Muse unfold.

Such is the story of this celebrated poem. The passion, the circumstances, the feelings are real, and it contains lines of great power ; and yet, assuredly, the perusal of it never conveyed one emotion to the reader's heart, except of indignation against the writer ; not a spark of poetry, fancy, or pathos, breathes throughout. We have a dull mythological fable in which Venus and the Graces descend to clothe Vanessa in all the attractions of her sex :—

The Graces next would act their part,
 And showed but little of their art ;
 Their work was half already done,
 The child with native beauty shone ;

The outward form no help required ;—
 Each, breathing on her thrice, inspired
 That gentle, soft, engaging air,
 Which in old times advanced the fair.

And Pallas is tricked by the wiles of Venus
 into doing *her* part.—The Queen of Learning

Mistakes Vanessa for a boy ;
 Then sows within her tender mind
 Seeds long unknown to womankind,
 For manly bosoms chiefly fit,—
 The seeds of knowledge, judgment, wit.
 Her soul was suddenly endued
 With justice, truth, and fortitude,—
 With honour, which no breath can stain,
 Which malice must attack in vain ;
 With open heart and bounteous hand, &c.

The nymph thus accomplished is feared by the men and hated by the women ; and Swift has shown his utter want of heart and good taste, by making his homage to the woman he loved, a vehicle for the bitterest satire on the rest of her sex. What right had he to accuse us of a universal preference for mere coxcombs,—he who,

through the sole power of his wit and intellect, had inspired with the most passionate attachment two lovely women not half his own age? Be it remembered, that while Swift was playing the Abelard with such effect, he was in his forty-fifth year, and though

He moved and bowed, and talked with so much grace,
Nor showed the parson in his gait or face,*

he was one of the ugliest men in existence,—of a bilious, saturnine complexion, and a most forbidding countenance.

The poem of Cadenus and Vanessa was written immediately on his return to Ireland and to Stella, (where he describes himself devoured by melancholy and regret,) and sent to Vanessa. Her passion and her inexperience seem to have blinded her to what was humiliating to herself in this poem, and left her sensible only to the admiration it expressed, and the hopes it conveyed. She wrote him the most impassioned letters; and he replied in a style which, without committing himself, kept alive all her tenderness, and rivetted his influence over her.

* “The Author on himself,” (Swift’s poems.)

Meanwhile, what became of Stella? Too quick-sighted not to perceive the difference in Swift's manner, pining under his neglect, and struck to the heart by jealousy, grief, and resentment, her health gave way. His pitiful resolve never to see her alone, precluded all complaint or explanation. The Mrs. Dingley who had been chosen for her companion, was merely calculated to save appearances;—respectable, indeed, in point of reputation, but selfish, narrow-minded and weak. Thus abandoned to sullen, silent sorrow, the unhappy Stella fell into an alarming state; and her destroyer was at length roused to some remorse, by the daily spectacle of the miserable wreck he had caused. He commissioned his friend Dr. Ashe, “to learn the secret cause of that dejection of spirits which had so visibly preyed on her health; and to know whether it was by any means in his power to remove it?” She replied, “that the peculiarity of her circumstances, and her singular connexion with Swift for so many years, had given great occasion for scandal; that she had learned to bear this patiently, hoping that all such reports

would be effaced by marriage; but she now saw, with deep grief, that his behaviour was totally changed, and that a cold indifference had succeeded to the warmest professions of eternal affection. That the necessary consequences would be, an indelible stain fixed on her character, and the loss of her good name, which was dearer to her than life.”*

Swift answered, that in order to satisfy Mrs. Johnson’s scruples, and relieve her mind, he was ready to go through the mere ceremony of marriage with her, on two conditions;—first, that they should live separately exactly as they did before;—secondly, that it should be kept a profound secret from all the world.† To these conditions,

* Sheridan’s Life of Swift, p. 316.

† How pertinaciously Swift adhered to these conditions, is proved by the fact, that after the ceremony, he never saw her alone; and that several years after, when she was in a dangerous state of health, and he was writing to a friend about providing for her comforts, he desires “that she might not be brought to the Deanery-house on any account, as it was a very improper place for her to breathe her last in.”—*Sheridan’s Life*, p. 356.

however hard and humiliating, she was obliged to submit: and the ceremony was performed privately by Dr. Ashe, in 1716. This nominal marriage spared her at least some of the torments of jealousy, by rendering a union with her rival impossible.

Yet, within a year afterwards, we find this ill-fated rival, the yet more unhappy Vanessa, —more unhappy because endued by nature with quicker passions, and far less fortitude and patience,—following Swift to Ireland. She had a plausible pretext for this journey, being heiress to a considerable property at Celbridge, about twelve miles from Dublin, on which she came to reside with her sister;* but her real inducement was

* “Marley Abbey, near Celbridge, where Miss Vanhomrigh resided, is built much in the form of a real cloister, especially in its external appearance. An aged man (upwards of ninety, by his own account,) showed the grounds to my correspondent. He was the son of Mrs. Vanhomrigh’s gardener, and used to work with his father in the garden when a boy. He remembered the unfortunate Vanessa well; and his account of her corresponded with the usual description of her person, especially

her unconquerable love for him. Nothing could be more *mal apropos* to Swift than her arrival in Dublin: placed between two women, thus devoted

as to her *embonpoint*. He said she went seldom abroad, and saw little company; her constant amusement was reading, or walking in the garden. Yet, according to this authority, her society was courted by several families in the neighbourhood, who visited her, notwithstanding her seldom returning that attention; and he added, that her manners interested every one who knew her,—but she avoided company, and was always melancholy save when Dean Swift was there, and then she seemed happy. The garden was to an uncommon degree crowded with laurels. The old man said, that when Miss Vanhomrigh expected the Dean, she always planted with her own hand a laurel or two against his arrival. He showed her favourite seat, still called Vanessa's Bower. Three or four trees, and some laurels, indicate the spot. They had formerly, according to the old man's information, been trained into a close arbour. There were two seats and a rude table within the bower, the opening of which commanded a view of the Liffey, which had a romantic effect; and there was a small cascade that murmured at some distance. In this sequestered spot, according to the old gardener's account, the Dean and Vanessa used often to sit, with books and writing materials on the table before them."—*Scott's Life of Swift*.

to him, his perplexity was not greater than his heartless duplicity deserved : nothing could extricate him but the simple, but desperate expedient of disclosing the truth, and this he could not or would not do : regardless of the sacred ties which now bound him to Stella, he continued to correspond with Vanessa and to visit her ; but “ the whole course of this correspondence precludes the idea of a guilty intimacy.”* *She*, whose passion was as pure as it was violent and exclusive, asked but to be his wife. She would have flung down her fortune and herself at his feet, and bathed them with tears of gratitude, if he would have deigned to lift her to his arms. In the midst of all the mortification, anguish, and heart-wearing suspense to which his stern temper and inexplicable conduct exposed her, still she clung to the hopes he had awakened, and which, either in cowardice, or compassion, or selfish egotism, he still kept alive. He concludes one of his letters with the following sentence in French,

* Scott's Life of Swift.

“ mais soyez assurée, que jamais personne au monde n'a été aimée, honorée, estimée, adorée, par votre amie, que vous :” * and there are other passages to the same effect, little agreeing with his professions to poor Stella :—one or the other, or both, must have been grossly deceived.

After declarations so explicit, Vanessa naturally wondered that he proceeded no farther ; it appears that he sometimes endeavoured to repress her overflowing tenderness, by treating her with a harshness which drove her almost to frenzy. There is really nothing in the effusions of Heloïse or Mdlle. de l'Espinasse, that can exceed, in pathos and burning eloquence, some of her letters to him during this period of their connection. † When he

* Correspondence, (as quoted in Sheridan's Life of Swift.)

† I give one specimen, not as the most eloquent that could be extracted, but as most illustrative of the story.

“ You bid me be easy, and you would see me as often as you could ; you had better have said as often as you could get the better of your inclination so much ; or, as often as you remembered there was such a person in the world. If you con-

had reduced her to the most shocking and pitiable state, so that her life or her reason were threatened, he would endeavour to soothe her in language which again revived her hopes—

tinue to treat me as you do, you will not be made uneasy by me long. 'Tis impossible to describe what I have suffered since I saw you last; I am sure I could have borne the rack much better than those killing, killing words of yours. Sometimes I have resolved to die without seeing you more; but those resolves, to your misfortune, did not last long, for there is something in human nature that prompts us to seek relief in this world. I must give way to it, and beg you would see me, and speak kindly to me; for I am sure you would not condemn any one to suffer what I have done, could you but know it. The reason I write to you is this, because I cannot tell it you, should I see you; for when I begin to complain, then you are angry, and there is something in your look so awful, that it strikes me dumb. Oh! that you may but have so much regard for me left, that this complaint may touch your soul with pity! I say as little as ever I can. Did you but know what I thought, I am sure it would move you. Forgive me, and believe, I cannot help telling you this, and live."—LETTERS, Vol. xix. page 421.

Give the reed

From storms a shelter,—give the drooping vine
 Something round which its tendrils may entwine,—
 Give the parch'd flower the rain-drop,—and the meed
 Of Love's kind words to woman!*

It will be said, where was her sex's delicacy,
 where her woman's pride? Alas!—

*La Vergogna ritien debile amore,
 Ma debil freno è di potente amore.*

In this agonizing suspense she lived through eight long years ; till, unable to endure it longer, and being aware of the existence of Stella, she took the decisive step of writing to her rival, and desired to know whether she was, or was not, married to Swift? Stella answered her immediately in the affirmative ; and then, justly indignant that he should have given any other woman such a right in him as was implied by the question, she enclosed Vanessa's letter to Swift ; and instantly, with a spirit she had never before exerted, quitted her lodgings, withdrew to the house of Mr. Ford,

* Mrs. Hemans.

of Wood Park, and threw herself on the friendship and protection of his family.

This lamentable tragedy was now brought to a crisis. Swift, on receiving the letter, was seized with one of those insane paroxysms of rage to which he was subject. He mounted his horse, rode down to Celbridge, and suddenly entered the room in which Vanessa was sitting. His countenance, fitted by nature to express the dark and fierce passions, so terrified her, that she could scarce ask him whether he would sit down? He replied savagely, “No!” and throwing down before her, her own letter to Stella, with a look of inexpressible scorn and anger, flung out of the room, and returned to Dublin.

This cruel scene was her death warrant.* Hitherto she had venerated Swift; and in the midst of her sufferings, confided in him, idolized him as the first of human beings. What must he now have appeared in her eyes?—They say, “Hell has no fury like a woman scorned;”—it is not so:

* Johnson's Life of Swift.

the recoil of the heart, when forced to abhor and contemn, where it has once loved, is far,—far worse; and Vanessa, who had endured her lover's scorn, could not scorn *him*, and live. She was seized with a delirious fever, and died “in resentment and in despair.”* She desired, in her last will, that the poem of Cadenus and Vanessa, which she considered as a monument of Swift's love for her, should be published, with some of his letters, which would have explained what was left obscure, and have cleared her fame. The poem was published; but the letters, by the interference of Swift's friends, were, at the time, suppressed.

On her death, and Stella's flight, Swift absented himself from home for two months, nor did any one know whither he was gone. During that time, what must have been his feelings—*if* he felt at all? what agonies of remorse, grief, shame, and horror, must have wrung his bosom! he had, in effect, murdered the woman who loved him, as absolutely as if he had plunged a poniard

* Johnson, Sheridan. Scott.

into her heart: and yet it is not clear that Swift was a prey to any such feelings; at least his subsequent conduct gave no assurance of it. On his return to Dublin, mutual friends interfered to reconcile him with Stella. About this time, she happened to meet, at a dinner-party, a gentleman who was a stranger to the real circumstances of her situation, and who began to speak of the poem of Cadenus and Vanessa, then just published. He observed, that Vanessa must have been an admirable creature to have inspired the Dean to write so finely. "That does not follow," replied Mrs. Johnson, with bitterness; "it is well known that the Dean could write finely on a *broomstick*." Ah! how must jealousy and irritation, and long habits of intimacy with Swift, have poisoned the mind and temper of this unhappy woman, before she could have uttered this cruel sarcasm!—And yet she was true to the softness of her sex; for after the lapse of several months, during which it required all the attention of Mr. Ford and his family to sustain and console her, she consented to return to Dublin,

and live with the Dean on the same terms as before. Well does old Chaucer say,

There can no man in humblesse him acquite
 As woman can, ne can be half so true
 As woman be !

“ Swift welcomed her to town,” says Sheridan, “ with that beautiful poem entitled ‘ Stella at Wood Park ;’ ” that is to say, he welcomed back to the home from which he had driven her, the woman whose heart he had well nigh broken, the wife he had every way injured and abused,—with a tissue of coarse sarcasms, on the taste for magnificence she must have acquired in her visit to Wood Park, and the difficulty of descending

From every day a lordly banquet
 To half a joint—and God be thanket !

From partridges and venison with the right *fumette*,—to

Small beer, a herring, and the Dean.

And this was all the sentiment, all the poetry with which the occasion inspired him !

Stella naturally hoped, that when her rival was no more, and Swift no longer exposed to her torturing reproaches, that he would do her tardy justice, and at length acknowledge her as his wife. But no ;—it would have cost him some little mortification and inconvenience ; and on such a paltry pretext he suffered this amiable and admirable woman, of whom he had said, that “ her merits towards him were greater than ever was in any human being towards another ;” and “ that she excelled in every good quality that could possibly accomplish a human creature,”—this woman did he suffer to languish into the grave, broken in heart and blighted in name. When Stella was on her death-bed, some conversation passed between them upon this sad subject. Only Swift’s reply was audible : he said, “ Well, my dear, it shall be acknowledged, if you wish it.” To which she answered with a sigh, “ It is *now* too late !” * It *was* too late !—

* Scott’s Life of Swift.—Sheridan has recorded another interview between Stella and her destroyer, in which she

What now to her was womanhood or fame ?

She died of a lingering decline, in January, 1728, four years after the death of Miss Vanhomrigh.

Thus perished these two innocent, warm-hearted and accomplished women ;—so rich in all the graces of their sex—so formed to love and to be loved, to bless, and to be blessed,—sacrifices to the demoniac pride of the man they had loved and trusted. But it will be said, “si elles n’avaient point aimé, elles seraient moins connues:” they have become immortal by their connection with genius ; they are celebrated, merely through their attachment to a celebrated man. But, good God ! what an immortality ! won by what martyrdom of the heart !—And what a celebrity ! not that with which the poet’s love, and his diviner verse, crown besought him to acknowledge her before her death, that she might have the satisfaction of dying his wife ; and he refused.

Dated Feb. 7, 1728, I find a letter from Swift to Martha Blount, written in a style of gay badinage, and her answer ; and in neither is there the slightest allusion to his recent loss.—*Roscoe’s Pope*, vol. viii. p. 460.

the deified object of his homage, but a celebrity, purchased with their life-blood and their tears ! I quit the subject with a sense of relief :—yet one word more.

It was after the death of these two amiable women, who had deserved so much from him, and whose enduring tenderness had flung round his odious life and character their only redeeming charm of sentiment and interest, that the native grossness and rancour of this incarnate spirit of libel burst forth with tenfold virulence.* He showed how true had been his love and his respect for *them*, by insulting and reviling, in terms a scavenger would disavow, the sex they belonged to. Swift's master-passion was pride,—an unconquerable, all-engrossing, self-revolving pride : he was proud of his vigorous intellect, proud of being the “dread and hate of half mankind,”—proud of his contempt for women,—proud of his tremendous

* It was after the death of Stella, that all Swift's coarsest satires were written. He was in the act of writing the last and most terrible of these, when he was seized with insanity ; and it remains unfinished.

powers of invective. It was his boast, that he never forgave an injury; it was his boast, that the ferocious and unsparing personal satire with which he avenged himself on those who offended him, had never been softened by the repentance, or averted by the concessions of the offender. Look at him in his last years, when the cold earth was heaped over those who would have cheered and soothed his dark and stormy spirit; without a friend—deprived of the mighty powers he had abused—alternately a drivelling idiot and a furious maniac, and sinking from both into a helpless, hopeless, prostrate lethargy of body and mind!—Draw,—draw the curtain, in reverence to the human ruin, lest our woman's hearts be tempted to unwomanly exultation!

CHAPTER XV.

POPE AND MARTHA BLOUNT.

IF the soul of sensibility, which I believe Pope really possessed, had been enclosed in a healthful frame and an agreeable person, we might have reckoned him among our *preux chevaliers*, and have had sonnets instead of satires. But he seems to have been ever divided between two contending feelings. He was peculiarly sensible to the charms of women, and his habits as a valetudinarian, rendered their society and attention not only soothing and delightful, but absolutely necessary to him: while, unhappily, there mingled with this real love for them, and de-

pendance on them as a sex, the most irascible self-love; and a torturing consciousness of that feebleness and deformity of person, which embittered all his intercourse with them. He felt that, in his character of poet, he could, by his homage, flatter their vanity, and excite their admiration and their fear; but, at the same time, he was shivering under the apprehension that, as a man, they regarded him with contempt; and that he could never hope to awaken in a female bosom any feelings corresponding with his own. So far he was unjust to us and to himself: his friend Lord Lyttelton, and his enemy Lord Hervey,* might have taught him better.

On reviewing Pope's life, his works, and his correspondence, it seems to me that these two op-

* Lord Hervey, with an exterior the most forbidding, and almost ghastly, contrived to supersede Pope in the good graces of Lady M. W. Montagu; carried off Mary Lepell, the beautiful maid of honour, from a host of rivals, and made her Lady Hervey: and won the whole heart of the poor Princess Caroline, who is said to have died of grief for his loss.—*See Walpole's Memoirs of George II.*

posite feelings contending in his bosom from youth to age, will account for the general character of his poems with a reference to our sex:—will explain why women bear so prominent a part in all his works, whether as objects of poetical gallantry, honest admiration, or poignant satire: why there is not among all his productions more than one poem decidedly amatory, (and that one partly suppressed in the ordinary editions of his works,) while women only have furnished him with the materials of all his *chef-d'œuvres*: his Elegy, his ‘Rape of the Lock,’ the ‘Epistle of Heloïse,’ and the second of his Moral Essays. He may call us, and prove us, in his antithetical style, “a contradiction:” * but we may retort; for, as far as women are concerned, Pope was himself one miserable antithesis.

* * * * *

The “Elegy to the memory of an unfortunate Lady,” refers to a tragedy which occurred in Pope’s early life, and over which he has studiously

* “Woman’s at best a contradiction still.”

drawn an impenetrable veil. When his friend Mr. Caryl wrote to him on the subject, many years after the Elegy was published, Pope, in his reply, left this part of the letter unnoticed; and a second application was equally unsuccessful. His biographers are not better informed. Johnson remarks upon the Elegy, that it commemorates the “amorous fury of a raving girl, who liked self-murder better than suspense;” and having given this deadly stroke with his critical fang, the grim old lion of literature stalks on, and “stays no farther question.” But is this merciful, or is it just? by what right does he sit in judgment on the unhappy dead, of whom he knew nothing? or how could he tell by what course of suffering, disease, or tyranny, a gentle spirit may have been goaded to frenzy? It was said, on the authority of some French author, that she was secretly attached to one of the French princes: that, in consequence, her uncle and guardian (“the mean deserter of a brother’s blood,”) forced her into a convent, where, in despair and madness, she put an end to her existence; and that the lines

Why bade ye else; ye powers! her soul aspire
 Above the vulgar flight of low desire?
 Ambition first sprung from your blest abodes;
 The glorious fault of angels and of gods,—

refer to this ambitious passion. But then, again, this has been contradicted. Warton's story is improbable and inconsistent with the poem; * and the assertion of another author, † that she was in love with Pope, and as deformed as himself, is most unlikely. "O ever beauteous, ever friendly!" is rather a strange style of apostrophising one deformed in person; and exposed to misery, and driven to suicide, by a passion for himself. In short, it is all mystery, wonder, and conjecture.

Other women who have been loved, celebrated, or satirized by Pope, are at least more notorious, if not so interesting. His most lasting and real attachment, was that which he entertained for Theresa and Martha Blount, who alternately, or with divided empire, reigned in his heart or fancy for five-

* See Roscoe's Life of Pope, p. 87. Warton says her name was Wainsbury, and that she hung herself.

† Warburton.

and-thirty years. They were of an old Roman Catholic family of Oxfordshire; and his acquaintance with them appears to have begun as early as 1707, when he was only nineteen. Theresa, the handsomest and most intelligent of the two sisters, was a brunette, with black sparkling eyes. Martha was short in stature, fair, with blue eyes, and a softer expression. They appear to have been tolerably amiable, and much attached to each other: *au reste*, in no way distinguished, but by the flattering admiration of a celebrated man, who has immortalised both.

The verses addressed to them, convey in general, either counsel or compliment, or at the most playful gallantry. His letters express something beyond these. He began by admiring Theresa; then he wavered: there were misunderstandings, and petulance, and mutual bickerings. His susceptibility exposed him to be continually wounded; he felt deeply and acutely; he was conscious that he could inspire no sentiment corresponding with that which throbbed at his own heart: and some passages in the correspondence cannot be read without a pain-

ful pity. At length, upon some mutual offence, his partiality for Theresa was transferred to Martha. In one of his last letters to Theresa, he says, beautifully and feelingly, "We are too apt to resent things too highly, till we come to know, by some great misfortune or other, how much we are born to endure; and as for me, you need not suspect of resentment a soul which can feel nothing but grief."

His attachment to Martha increased after his quarrel with Lady Mary W. Montagu, and ended only with his life.

"He was never," says Mr. Bowles, "indifferent to female society; and though his good sense prevented him, conscious of so many personal infirmities, from marrying, yet he felt the want of that sort of reciprocal tenderness and confidence in a female, to whom he might freely communicate his thoughts, and on whom, in sickness and infirmity, he could rely. All this Martha Blount became to him; by degrees, she became identified with his existence. She partook of his disappointments, his vexations, and his comforts.

Wherever he went, his correspondence with her was never remitted; and when the warmth of gallantry was over, the cherished idea of kindness and regard remained.”*

To Martha Blount is addressed the compliment on her birth-day—

O be thou blest with all that heaven can send,—
Long health, long youth, long pleasure, and a friend !

And an epistle sent to her, with the works of Voiture, in which he advises her against marriage, in this elegant and well-known passage,—

Too much your sex are by their forms confin'd,
Severe to all, but most to womankind ;
Custom, grown blind with age, must be your guide ;
Your pleasure is a vice, but not your pride.
By nature yielding, stubborn but for fame,
Made slaves by honour, and made fools by shame.
Marriage may all those petty tyrants chase,
But sets up one, a greater, in their place :
Well might you wish for change, by those accurst,
But the last tyrant ever proves the worst.
Still in constraint your suffering sex remains,
Or bound in formal or in real chains :

* Bowles's edition of Pope, vol. i. page 69.

Whole years neglected, for some months adored,
 The fawning servant turns a haughty lord.
 Ah, quit not the free innocence of life
 For the dull glory of a virtuous wife !
 Nor let false shows, nor empty titles please,—
 Aim not at joy, but rest content with ease.

Very excellent advice, and very disinterested, considering whence it came, and to whom it was addressed !!

The poem generally placed after this in his works, and entitled “Epistle to the *same* Lady, on leaving town after the Coronation,” was certainly not addressed to Martha, but to Theresa. It appears from the correspondence, that Martha was not at the Coronation in 1715, and that Theresa was. The whole tenour of this poem is agreeable to the sprightly person and character of Theresa, while “Parthenia’s softer blush,” evidently alludes to Martha. From an examination of the letters which were written at this time, I should imagine, that though Pope had previously assured the latter that she had gained the conquest over her fair sister, yet the public appearance of Theresa at the Coronation, and her

superior charms, revived all his tenderness and admiration, and suggested this gay and pleasing effusion.

In some fair evening, on your elbow laid,
You dream of triumphs in the rural shade ;
In pensive thought recall the fancy'd scene,
See coronations rise on every green.
Before you pass th' imaginary sights
Of lords, and earls, and dukes, and garter'd knights,
While the spread fan o'er shades your closing eyes,—
Then give one flirt, and all the vision flies.
Thus vanish sceptres, coronets, and balls,
And leave you in lone woods or empty walls !

To Martha Blount is dedicated the “ Epistle on the Characters of Women ;” which concludes with this elegant and flattering address to her.

O ! blest with temper, whose unclouded ray
Can make to-morrow cheerful as to-day ;
She who can love a sister's charms, or hear
Sighs for a daughter with unwounded ear ;
She who ne'er answers till a husband cools,
Or if she rules him, never shows she rules ;
Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,
Yet has her humour most when she obeys ;

Let fops or fortune fly which way they will,
Disdains all loss of tickets or codille ;
Spleen, vapours, or small-pox, above them all,
And mistress of herself though China fall.

The allusion to her affection for her sister, is just and beautiful; but the compliment to her temper is understood not to have been quite merited—perhaps, was rather administered as a corrective; for Martha was weak and captious; and Pope, who had suffered what torments a female wit could inflict, possibly found that peevishness and folly have also their *désagrémens*. He complains frequently, in his letters to Martha, of the difficulty of pleasing her, or understanding her wishes. Methinks, had I been a poet, or Pope, I would rather have been led about in triumph by the spirited, accomplished Lady Mary, than “chained to the footstool of two paltry girls.”

They used to employ him constantly in the most trifling and troublesome commissions, in which he had seldom even the satisfaction of contenting them. He was accustomed to send

them little presents almost daily, as concert-tickets, ribbons, fruit, &c. He once sent them a basket of peaches, which, with an affectation of careless gallantry, were separately wrapped in part of the manuscript translation of the Iliad: and he humbly requests them to return the wrappers, as he had no other copy. On another occasion he sent them fans, on which were inscribed his famous lines,

“Come, gentle air,” th’ Eolian shepherd said, &c.

Martha Blount was not so kind or so attentive to Pope in his last illness as she ought to have been. His love for *her* seemed blended with his frail existence; and when he was scarcely sensible to any thing else in the world, he was still conscious of the charm of her presence. “When she came into the room,” says Spence, “it was enough to give a new turn to his spirits, and a temporary strength to him.”

She survived him eighteen years, and died unmarried at her house in Berkeley Square, in 1762. She is described, about that time, as a little, fair,

prim old woman, very lively, and inclined to gossip. Her undefined connexion with Pope, though it afforded matter for mirth and wonder, never affected her reputation while living; and has rendered her name as immortal as our language and our literature. One cannot help wishing that she had been more interesting, and more worthy of her fame.

CHAPTER XVI.

POPE AND LADY M. W. MONTAGU.

IN the same year with Martha Blount, and about the same age, died Lady Mary W. Montagu. Every body knows that she was one of Pope's early loves. She had, for several years, suspended his attachment to his first favourites, the Blounts; and she really deserved the preference. But the issue of this romantic attachment was the most bitter, the most irreconcilable enmity. The cause did not proceed so much from any one particular offence on either side, but rather from a multitude of trifling causes, arising naturally out of the characters of both.

When they first met, Pope was about six-and-twenty; and from the recent publication of the ‘Rape of the Lock,’ and ‘The Temple of Fame,’ &c. had reached the pinnacle of fashion and reputation. Lady Mary was in her twenty-third year, lately married to a man she loved, and had just burst upon the world in all the blaze of her wit and beauty. Her masculine acquirements and powers of mind—her strong good sense—her extensive views—her frankness, decision, and generosity—her vivacity, and her bright eyes, must altogether have rendered her one of the most fascinating, as she really was one of the most extraordinary, women that ever lived.

There stands, in a conspicuous part of this great city, a certain monument, erected, it is said, at the cost of the ladies of Britain; but in a spirit and taste which, I trust, are not those of my countrywomen at large. Is this our patriotism? We may applaud the brave, who go forth to battle to defend us, and preserve inviolate the sanctity of our hearths and homes; but does it become us to lend our voice to exult in victory, always

bought at the expense of suffering, and aggravate the din and the clamour of war—we, who ought to be the peace-makers of the world, and plead for man against his own fierce passions? A huge brazen image stands up, an impudent (false) witness of our martial enthusiasm; but who amongst us has thought of raising a public statue to Lady Wortley Montagu! to her who has almost banished from the world that pest which once extinguished families and desolated provinces? To her true patriotic spirit,—to her magnanimity, her generous perseverance, in surmounting all obstacles raised by the outcry of ignorance, and the obstinacy of prejudice, we owe the introduction of inoculation;—she ought to stand in marble beside Howard the good.*

* In Litchfield Cathedral stands the only memorial ever raised, by public or private gratitude, to Lady Mary; it is a cenotaph, with Beauty weeping the loss of her preserver, and an inscription, of which the following words form the conclusion:—“To perpetuate the memory of such benevolence, and to express her gratitude for the benefit she herself received

I should imagine that a strong impression must have been made on Lady Mary's mind, by an incident which occurred just at the time she left England for Constantinople. Lord Petre,—he who is consecrated to fame in the Rape of the Lock, as the ravisher of Arabella Fermour's hair,—died of the small-pox at the age of three-and-twenty, just after his marriage with a young and beautiful heiress; his death caused a general sympathy, and added to the dread and horror which was inspired by this terrible disease: eighteen persons of his family had died of it within twenty-seven years. In those days it was not even allowable to mention, or allude to it in company.

Mr. Wortley was appointed to the Turkish embassy in 1716, and his wife accompanied him.

from this alleviating art, this monument is erected by Henrietta Inge, relict of Theodore William Inge, and daughter of Sir John Wrottesley, Bart. in 1789." One would like to have known the woman who raised this monument.

The letters which passed between her and Pope, during her absence, are well known. In point of style and liveliness, the superiority is on the lady's side; but the tone of feeling in Pope is better, more earnest; his language is not always within the bounds of that sprightly gallantry with which a man naturally addresses a young, beautiful, and virtuous woman, who had condescended to allow his homage. *

In one of his letters, written immediately after her departure, he asks her how he had looked? how he had behaved at the last moment? whether he had betrayed any deeper feeling than propriety might warrant? "For if," he says, "my parting looked like that of a common acquaintance, I am the greatest of all hypocrites that ever decency made." And in a subsequent

* "You shall see (said Lady Mary referring to these letters) what a goddess he made of me in some of them, though he makes such a devil of me in his writings afterwards, without any reason that I know of."—*Spence*.

letter he says, very feelingly and significantly, “ May that person (her husband) for whom you have left the world, be so just as to prefer you to all the world. I believe his good sense leads him to do so now, as gratitude will hereafter. May you continue to think him worthy of whatever you have done! may you ever look upon him with the eyes of a first lover, nay, if possible, with all the unreasonable happy fondness of an unexperienced one, surrounded with all the enchantments and ideas of romance and poetry! I wish this from my heart; and while I examine what passes there in regard to you, I cannot but glory in my own heart, that it is capable of so much generosity.”

This was sufficiently clear. I need scarcely remark *en passant*, that Pope’s generosity and wishes were all *en pure perte*; his spitefulness must have been gratified by the sequel of Lady Mary’s domestic bliss; her marriage ended in disgust and aversion; which, on her separation from Mr.

Wortley, subsided into a good-humoured indifference. *

After a union of twenty-seven years, she parted from him and went to reside abroad. There were errors on both sides; but I am obliged to admit that Lady Mary, with all her fine qualities, had two faults,—intolerable and unpardonable faults in the eyes of a husband or a lover. She wanted softness of mind, and refinement of feeling, in the first place: and she wanted—how shall I express it?—she wanted neatness and personal delicacy; and was, in short, that *odious* thing, a female sloven, as well as that *dangerous* thing, a female wit.

In those days the style of dress was the most hideous imaginable. The women wore a large quantity of artificial hair, in emulation of the tremendous periwigs of the men; and Pope, in

* I remember seeing, I think, in one of D'Israeli's works a fragment of some lines which Lady Mary wrote on her husband, and which expressed the utmost bitterness of female scorn.

one of his letters to Lady Mary, mentions her "full bottomed wig," which, he says, I did but assert to be a *bob*," and was answered, "Love is blind!" On her return from Turkey, she sometimes allowed her own fine dark hair to flow loose, and was fond of dressing in her Turkish costume. In this she was imitated by several beautiful women of the day, and particularly by her lovely contemporary, Lady Fanny Shirley, (Chesterfield's "Fanny, blooming fair:" he seems to have admired her as much as he could possibly admire any thing, next to himself and the Graces.) In her picture at Clarendon Park, she too appears in the habit of Fatima. *Apropos*, to the loves of the poets, Lady Fanny deserves to be mentioned as the theme of all the rhymesters, and "the joy, the wish, the wonder, the despair," of all the beaux of her day. *

* See, in Pope's Miscellanies, the sprightly stanzas, beginning "Yes, I beheld th' Athenian Queen." They are addressed to Lady Fanny, who had presented the poet with a standish, and two pens, one of steel and one of gold. She was the fourth

But it is time to return to Pope. The epistle of Heloïse to Abelard was published during Lady Mary's absence, and sent to her: and it is clear from a passage in one of his letters, that he wished her to consider the last lines,—from

And sure, if fate some future bard shall join,
down to

He best can paint them, who can feel them most,
as applicable to himself and to his feelings towards her.

And yet, whatever might have been his devotion to Lady Mary before she went abroad, it was increased tenfold after her memorable travels. At present, when ladies of fashion make excursions of pleasure to the pyramids of Egypt and the ruins of Babylon, a journey to Constantinople is little more than a trip to Rome or Vienna; but in the last age it was a prodigious and marvellous

daughter of Earl Ferrers. After numbering more adorers in her train than any beauty of her time, she died unmarried, in 1778.—*Collins' Peerage, by Brydges.*

undertaking; and Lady Mary, on her return, was gazed upon as an object of wonder and curiosity, and sought as the most entertaining person in the world: her sprightliness and her beauty, her oriental stories and her Turkish costume, were the rage of the day. With Pope, she was on the most friendly terms:—by his interference and negotiation, a house was procured for her and Mr. Wortley, at Twickenham, so that their intercourse was almost constant. When he finished his translation of the Iliad, in 1720, Gay wrote him a complimentary poem, in which he enumerates the host of friends who welcomed the poet home from Greece; and among them, Lady Mary stands conspicuous.

What lady's that to whom he gently bends ?

Who knows not her ! Ah, those are Wortley's eyes ;

How art thou honoured, numbered with her friends,—

For she distinguishes the good and wise !

To this period we may also refer the composition of the Stanzas to Lady Mary, which begin, “ In

beauty and wit.”* The measure is trivial and disagreeable, but the compliments are very sprightly and pointed.

She sat to Kneller for him in her Turkish dress ; and we have the following note from him on the subject, which shows how much he felt the condescension.

“ The picture dwells really at my heart, and I have made a perfect passion of preferring your present face to your past. I know and thoroughly esteem yourself of this year. I know no more of Lady Mary Pierrepont than to admire at what I have heard of her, or be pleased with some fragments of hers, as I am with Sappho’s. But now—I cannot say what I would say of you now. Only still give me cause to say you

* In beauty and wit,
 No mortal as yet,
 To question your empire has dared ;
 But men of discerning
 Have thought that, in learning,
 To yield to a lady was hard.

are good to me, and allow me as much of your person as Sir Godfrey can help me to. Upon conferring with him yesterday, I find he thinks it absolutely necessary to draw your face first, which, he says, can never be set right on your figure, if the drapery and posture be finished before. To give you as little trouble as possible, he purposes to draw your face with crayons, and finish it up at your own house of a morning; from whence he will transfer it to canvass, so that you need not go to sit at his house. This, I must observe, is a manner they seldom draw any but crowned heads, and I observe it with a secret pride and pleasure. Be so kind as to tell me if you care, he should do this to-morrow at twelve. Though, if I am but assured from you of the thing, let the manner and time be what you best like; let every decorum you please be observed. I should be very unworthy of any favour from your hands, if I desired any at the expense of your quiet or conveniency in any degree."

He was charmed with the picture, and composed an extemporary compliment, beginning

The playful smiles around the dimpled mouth,
That happy air of majesty and truth ; &c.

which, considering that they are Pope's, are strangely defective in rhyme, in sense, and in grammar. In a far different strain are the beautiful lines addressed to Gay, during Lady Mary's absence from Twickenham, and which he afterwards endeavoured to suppress. They are curious on this account, as well as for being the solitary example of amatory verse contained in his works.

Ah friend ! 'tis true,—this truth you lovers know,
In vain my structures rise, my gardens grow ;
In vain fair Thames reflects the double scenes,
Of hanging mountains, and of sloping greens ;
Joy lives not here, to happier seats it flies,
And only dwells where Wortley casts her eyes.

What are the gay parterre, the chequer'd shade,
The morning bower, the evening colonnade,

But soft recesses of uneasy minds,
 To sigh unheard in to the passing winds?
 So the struck deer, in some sequester'd part,
 Lies down to die, the arrow at his heart;
 There, stretch'd unseen in coverts hid from day,
 Bleeds drop by drop, and pants his life away.

These sweet and musical lines, which fall on the ear with such a lulling harmony, are dashed with discord when we remember that the same woman who inspired them, was afterwards malignantly and coarsely designated as the Sappho of his satires. The generous heart never coolly degraded and insulted what it has once loved; but Pope *could* not be magnanimous,—it was not in his spiteful nature to forgive. He says of himself,

Whoe'er offends, at some unlucky time
 Slides into verse, and hitches in a rhyme.*

* "I have often wondered," says the gentle-spirited Cowper, "that the same poet who wrote the *Dunciad* should have written these lines,—

One of Pope's biographers* seems to insinuate, that he had been led on, by the lady's coquetry, to presume too far, and in consequence received a repulse, which he never forgave. This is not probable: Pope was not likely to be so desperate or dangerous an admirer; nor was Lady Mary, who had written with her diamond ring on a window,

Let this great maxim be my virtue's guide :

In part, she is to blame that has been tried,—

He comes too near, that comes to be denied !—

at all likely to expose herself to such ridiculous audacity. The truth is, I rather imagine, that there was a great deal of vanity on both sides; that the lady was amused and flattered, and the poet bewitched and in earnest: that *she* gave the first offence by some pointed sarcasm or personal

That mercy I to others show,

That mercy show to me !

Alas ! for Pope, if the mercy he showed to others, was the measure of the mercy he received !"—*Cowper's Letters*, vol. iii. p. 195.

* Mr. Bowles.

ridicule, in which she was an adept, and that Pope, gradually awakened from his dream of adoration, was stung to the quick by her laughing scorn, and mortified and irritated by the consciousness of his wasted attachment. He makes this confession with extreme bitterness,—

Yet soft by nature, more a dupe than wit,
Sappho can tell you how this man was bit.

Prologue to the Satires.

The lines as they stand in a first edition are even more pointed and significant, and have much more asperity.

Once, and but once, his heedless youth was bit,
And liked that dangerous thing, a female wit.
Safe as he thought, though all the prudent chid,
He wrote no libels, but *my lady* did ;
Great odds in amorous or poetic game,
Where woman's is the *sin*, and man's the *shame* !

The result was a deadly and interminable feud. Lady Mary might possibly have inflicted the first private offence, but Pope gave the first public affront. A man who, under such circumstances,

could grossly satirize a female, would, in a less civilized state of society, have revenged himself with a blow. The brutality and cowardice were the same.

The war of words did not, however, proceed at once to such extremity; the first indication of Pope's revolt from his sworn allegiance, and a conscious hint of the secret cause, may be found in some lines addressed to a lady poetess,* to whom he pays a compliment at Lady Mary's expense.

Though sprightly Sappho force our love and praise,
 A softer wonder my pleased soul surveys,—
 The mild Erinna blushing in her bays ;
 So while the sun's broad beam yet strikes the sight,
 All mild appears the moon's more sober light.
 Serene in virgin majesty she shines,
 And unobserved, the glaring orb declines.

Soon after appeared that ribald and ruffian-like attack on her in the satires. She sent Lord Peterborough to remonstrate with Pope, to whom he denied the intended application; and his

* Erinna : her real name is not known. But she was a friend of Lady Suffolk, who wrote bad verses, and submitted them to Pope for correction.

disavowal is a proved falsehood. Lady Mary, exasperated, forgot her good sense and her feminine dignity, and made common cause with Lord Hervey (the Lord Fanny and the Sporus of the Satires.) They concocted an attack in verse, addressed to the imitator of Horace; but nothing could be more unequal than such a warfare. Pope, in return, grasped the blasting and vollied lightnings of his wit, and would have annihilated both his adversaries, if more than half a grain of truth had been on his side. But posterity has been just: in his anger, he overcharged his weapon, it recoiled, and the engineer has been "hoisted by his own petard."

Lady Mary's personal negligence afforded grounds for Pope's coarse and severe allusions to the "colour of her linen, &c." His asperity, however, did not reform her in this respect: it was a fault which increased with age and foreign habits. Horace Walpole, who met her at Florence twenty years afterwards, draws a hateful and disgusting picture of her, as "old, dirty, tawdry, painted," and flirting and gambling with all the young men

in the place. But Walpole is terribly satirical; he had a personal dislike to Lady Mary Wortley, whom he coarsely designates as *Moll Worthless*,—and his description is certainly overcharged. How differently the same characters will strike different people! Spence, who also met Lady Mary abroad, about that time, thus writes to his mother: “I always desired to be acquainted with Lady Mary, and could never bring it about, though we were so often together in London. Soon after we came to this place, her ladyship came here, and in five days I was well acquainted with her. She is one of the most shining characters in the world,—but shines like a comet: she is all irregularity, and always wandering: the most wise, most imprudent, loveliest, most disagreeable, best-natured, cruellest woman in the world!” Walpole could see nothing but her dirt and her paint. Those who recollect his coarse description, and do *not* remember her letters to her daughter, written from Italy about the same time, would do well to refer to them as a corrective: it is

always so easy to be satirical and ill-natured, and sometimes so difficult to be just and merciful !

The cold scornful levity with which she treated certain topics, is mingled with touches of tenderness and profound thought, which show her to have been a disappointed, not a heartless woman. The extreme care with which she cultivated pleasurable feelings and ideas, and shrunk from all disagreeable impressions ; her determination never to view her own face in a glass, after the approach of age, or to pronounce the name of her mad, profligate son, may be referred to a cause very different from either selfishness or vanity : but I think the principle was mistaken. While she was amusing herself with her silk-worms and her orangerie at Como, her husband Wortley, with whom she kept up a constant correspondence, was hoarding money and drinking tokay to keep himself alive. He died, however, in 1761 ; and that he was connected with the motives, whatever those were, which induced Lady Mary to reside abroad, is proved by the fact, that the moment she heard of his death she prepared to return to England, and

she reached London in January 1762. "Lady Mary is arrived," says Walpole, writing to George Montagu. "I have seen her. I think her avarice, her dirt, and her vivacity, are all increased. Her dress, like her language, is a galimatias of several countries. She needs no cap, no handkerchief, no gown, no petticoat, no shoes; an old black-laced hood represents the first; the fur of a horseman's coat, which replaces the third, serves for the second; a dimity petticoat is deputy, and officiates for the fourth; and slippers act the part of the last." About six months after her arrival she died in the arms of her daughter, the Countess of Bute, of a cruel and shocking disease, the agonies of which she had borne with heroism rather than resignation. The present Marquess of Bute, and the present Lord Wharnclyffe, are the great-grandsons of this distinguished woman: the latter is the representative of the Wortley family.

CHAPTER XVII.

POETICAL OLD BACHELORS.

THERE is a certain class of poets, not a very numerous one, whom I would call poetical old bachelors. They are such as enjoy a certain degree of fame and popularity themselves, without sharing their celebrity with any fair piece of excellence ; but walk each on his solitary path to glory, wearing their lonely honours with more dignity than grace : for instance, Corneille, Racine, Boileau, the classical names of French poetry, were all poetical old bachelors. Racine—*le tendre Racine*—as he is called *par excellence*, is said never to have been in love in his life ; nor has he left us

a single verse in which any of his personal feelings can be traced. He was, however, the kind and faithful husband of a cold, bigoted woman, who was persuaded, and at length persuaded *him*, that he would be *grillé* in the other world, for writing heathen tragedies in this; and made it her boast that she had never read a single line of her husband's works! Peace be with her!

And O, let her by whom the muse was scorn'd,
Alive nor dead, be of the muse adorn'd!

Our own Gray was in every sense, real and poetical, a cold fastidious old bachelor, who buried himself in the recesses of his college; at once shy and proud, sensitive and selfish. I cannot, on looking through his memoirs, letters, and poems, discover the slightest trace of passion, or one proof or even indication that he was ever under the influence of woman. He loved his mother, and was dutiful to two tiresome old aunts, who thought poetry one of the seven deadly sins—*et voilà tout*. He spent his life in amassing an inconceivable quantity of knowledge,

which lay as buried and useless as a miser's treasure; but with this difference, that when the miser dies, his wealth flows forth into its natural channels, and enriches others; Gray's learning was entombed with him: his genius survives in his elegy and his odes;—what became of his heart I know not. He is generally supposed to have possessed one, though none can guess what he did with it:—he might well moralise on his bachelorship, and call himself “a solitary fly,”—

Thy joys no glittering female meets,
No hive hast thou of hoarded sweets,
No painted plumage to display!

Collins was never a lover, and never married. His odes, with all their exquisite fancy and splendid imagery, have not much interest in their subjects, and no pathos derived from feeling or passion. He is reported to have been once in love; and as the lady was a day older than himself, he used to say jestingly, that “he came into the world *a day after the fair.*” He was not

deeply smitten; and though he led in his early years a dissipated life, his heart never seems to have been really touched. He wrote an Ode on the Passions, in which, after dwelling on Hope, Fear, Anger, Despair, Pity, and describing them with many picturesque circumstances, he dismisses Love with a couple of lines, as dancing to the sound of the sprightly viol, and forming with joy the light fantastic round. Such was Collins's idea of love!

To these we may add Goldsmith. Of his loves we know nothing; they were probably the reverse of poetical, and may have had some influence on his purse and respectability, but none on his literary character and productions. He also died unmarried.

Shenstone, if he was not a poetical old bachelor, was little better than a poetical dangler. He was not formed to captivate: his person was clumsy, his manners disagreeable, and his temper feeble and vacillating. The Delia who is introduced into his elegies, and the Phillis of his pastoral

ballad, was Charlotte Graves, sister to the Graves who wrote the *Spiritual Quixotte*. There was nothing warm or earnest in his admiration, and all his gallantry is as vapid as his character. He never gave the lady who was supposed, and supposed herself, to be the object of his serious pursuit, an opportunity of accepting or rejecting him; and his conduct has been blamed as ambiguous and unmanly. His querulous declamations against women in general, had neither cause nor excuse; and his complaints of infidelity and coldness are equally without foundation. He died unmarried.

When we look at a picture of Thomson, we wonder how a man with that heavy, pampered countenance, and awkward mien, could ever have written the "Seasons," or have been in love. I think it is Barry Cornwall, who says strikingly, that Thomson's figure "was a personification of the Castle of Indolence, without its romance." Yet Thomson, though he has not given any popularity or interest to the name of a woman, is

said to have been twice in love, after his own *lack-a-daisical* fashion. He was first attached to Miss Stanley, who died young, and upon whom he wrote the little elegy,—

Tell me, thou soul of her I love ! &c.

He alludes to her also in *Summer*, in the passage beginning,—

And art thou, Stanley, of the sacred band, &c.

His second love was long, quiet, and constant ; but whether the lady's coldness, or want of fortune, prevented a union, is not clear : probably the latter. The object of this attachment was a Miss Young, who resided at Richmond ; and his attentions to her were continued through a long series of years, and even till within a short time before his death, in his forty-eighth year. She was his Amanda ; and if she at all answered the description of her in his *Spring*, she must have been a lovely and amiable woman.

And thou, Amanda, come, pride of my song !
Form'd by the Graces, loveliness itself !

Come with those downcast eyes, sedate and sweet,
 Those looks demure, that deeply pierce the soul,
 Where, with the light of thoughtful reason mix'd,
 Shines lively fancy and the feeling heart :
 Oh, come ! and while the rosy-footed May
 Steals blushing on, together let us tread
 The morning dews, and gather in their prime
 Fresh-blooming flowers, to grace thy braided hair.

And if his attachment to her suggested that beautiful description of domestic happiness with which his Spring concludes,—

But happy they, the happiest of their kind,
 Whom gentler stars unite, &c.

who would not grieve at the destiny which denied to Thomson pleasures he could so eloquently describe, and so feelingly appreciate ?

Truth, however, obliges me to add one little trait. A lady who did not know Thomson personally, but was enchanted with his “ Seasons,” said she could gather from his works three parts of his character,—that he was an amiable lover, an

excellent swimmer, and extremely abstemious. Savage, who knew the poet, could not help laughing at this picture of a man who scarcely knew what love was; who shrunk from cold water like a cat; and whose habits were those of a good-natured bon vivant, who indulged himself in every possible luxury, which could be attained without trouble! He also died unmarried.

Hammond, the favourite of our sentimental great-grandmothers, whose "Love Elegies" lay on the toilettes of the Harriet Byrons and Sophia Westerns of the last century, was an amiable youth, "very melancholy and gentlemanlike," who being appointed equerry to Prince Frederic, cast his eyes on Miss Dashwood, bed-chamber woman to the Princess, and she became his Delia. The lady was deaf to his pastoral strains; and though it has been said that she rejected him on account of the smallness of his fortune, I do not see the necessity of believing this assertion, or of sympathising in the dull invectives and monotonous lamentations of the slighted lover. Miss Dash-

wood never married, and was, I believe, one of the maids of honour to the late Queen.

Thus the six poets, who, in the history of our literature, fill up the period which intervened between the death of Pope and the first publications of Burns and Cowper—all died old bachelors !

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRENCH POETS.

VOLTAIRE AND MADAME DU CHATELET.

IF we take a rapid view of French literature, from the reign of Louis the Fourteenth, down to the Revolution, we are dazzled by the record of brilliant and celebrated women, who protected or cultivated letters, and obtained the homage of men of talent. There was Ninon; and there was Madame de Rambouillet; the one *galante*, the other *precieuse*. One had her St. Evremond; the other her Voiture. Madame de Sablière protected La Fontaine; Madame de Montespan protected Molière; Madame de Maintenon protected Racine. It was all patronage

and protection on one side, and dependance and servility on the other. Then we have the *intrigante* Madame de Tencin ;* the good-natured, but rather *bornée* Madame de Geoffrin ; the Duchesse de Maine, who held a little court of *bel esprits* and small poets at Sceaux, and is best known as the patroness of Mademoiselle de Launay. Madame d'Épinay, the *amie* of Grimm, and the patroness of Rousseau ; the clever, selfish, witty, ever *ennuyée*, never *ennuyeuse* Madame du Deffand ; the ardent, talented Mademoiselle de l'Éspinasse, who would certainly have been a poetess, if she had not been a 'philosopheress and a French-woman : Madame Neckar, the patroness of Marmontel and Thomas :—*e tutte quante*. If we look over the light French literature of those times, we find an inconceivable heap of *vers galans*, and *jolis couplets*, licentious songs, pretty, well-

* Madame de Tencin used to call the men of letters she assembled at her house “ mes bêtes,” and her society went by the name of Madame de Tencin's ménagerie. Her advice to Marmontel, when a young man, was excellent. See his Memoirs, vol. i.

turned compliments, and most graceful badinage ; but we can discover the names of only two distinguished women, who have the slightest pretensions to a poetical celebrity, derived from the genius, the attachment, and the fame of their lovers. These were Madame du Châtelet, Voltaire's "Immortelle Emilie:" and Madame d'Houdetot, the Doris of Saint-Lambert.

Gabrielle-Emilie le Tonnelier de Bréteuil, was the daughter of the Baron de Bréteuil, and born in 1706. At an early age she was taken from her convent, and married to the Marquis du Châtelet ; and her life seems thenceforward to have been divided between two passions, or rather two pursuits rarely combined,—love, and geometry. Her tutor in both is said to have been the famous mathematician Clairaut ; and between them they rendered geometry so much the fashion at one time, that all the women, who were distinguished either for rank or beauty, thought it indispensable to have a geometrician in their train. The "Poëtes de Société" hid for a while their di-

minished heads, or were obliged to study geometry *pour se mettre à la mode*.* Her friendship with Voltaire began to take a serious aspect, when she was about eight-and-twenty, and he was about forty; he is said to have succeeded that *roué par excellence*, the Duc de Richelieu, in her favour.

This woman might have dealt in mathematics,—might have inked her fingers with writing treatises on the Newtonian philosophy; she might have sat up till five in the morning, solving problems and calculating eclipses;—and yet have possessed amiable, elevated, generous, and attractive qualities, which would have thrown a poetical interest round her character; moreover, considering the horribly corrupt state of French society at that time, she might have been pardoned “une vertu de moins,” if her power over a great genius had been exercised to some good purpose;—to restrain his licentiousness, to soften his pungent and merciless satire, and prevent the frequent prostitu-

* Correspondence de Grimm, vol. ii. 421.

tion of his admirable and versatile talents. But a female sceptic, profligate from temperament and principle; a termagant, “qui voulait furieusement tout ce qu'elle voulait;” a woman with all the *suffisance* of a pedant, and all the *exigeance*, caprices, and frivolity of a fine lady,—*grands dieux!* what a heroine for poetry!

To a taste for Newton and the stars, and geometry and algebra, Madame du Châtelet added some other tastes, not quite so sublime;—a great taste for bijoux—and pretty gimeracks—and old china—and watches—and rings—and diamonds—and snuff-boxes—and—puppet-shows!* and, now and then, *une petite affaire du cœur*, by way of variety.

Tout lui plait, tout convient à son vaste genie :

Les livres, les bijoux, les compas, les pompons,

Les vers, les diamants, le biribi,† l'optique,

* Je ris plus que personne aux marionnettes; et j'avoue qu'une boîte, une porcelaine, un meuble nouveau, sont pour moi une vraie jouissance.—*Œuvres de Madame du Châtelet—Traité de Bonheur.*

† The then fashionable game at cards.

L'algèbre, les soupers, le latin, les jupons,
L'opera, les procès, le bal, et la physique !

This "Minerve de la France, la respectable Emilie," did not resemble Minerva in *all* her attributes ; nor was she satisfied with a *succession* of lovers. The whole history of her *liaison* with Voltaire, is enough to put *en dérouté* all poetry, and all sentiment. With her imperious temper and bitter tongue, and his extreme irritability, no wonder they should have *des scènes terribles*.* Marmontel says they were often *à couteaux tirés* ; and this, not metaphorically but literally. On one occasion, Voltaire happened to criticise some couplets she had written for Madame de Luxembourg. "L'Amante de Newton"† could calculate eclipses, but she could not make verses ; and, probably, for that reason, she was most particularly

* Voltaire once said of her, "C'est une femme terrible, qui n'a point de flexibilité dans le cœur, quoiqu'elle l'ait bon." This hardness of temper, this *volonté tyrannique*, this cold determination never to yield a point, were worse than all her violence.

† The title which Voltaire gave her.

jealous of all censure, while she criticised Voltaire without manners or mercy; and he endured it, sometimes with marvellous patience.

A dispute was now the consequence; both became furious; and at length Voltaire snatched up a knife, and brandishing it exclaimed, “ne me regarde donc pas avec tes yeux hagards et louches!” After such a scene as this one would imagine that Love must have spread his light wings and fled for ever. Could Émilie ever have forgiven those words, or Voltaire have forgotten the look that provoked them?

But the *mobilité* of his mind was one of the most extraordinary parts of his character, and he was not more irascible than he was easily appeased. Madame du Châtelet maintained her power over him for twenty years; during five of which they resided in her chateau at Cirey, under the countenance of her husband; he was a good sort of man; but seems to have been considered by these two geniuses and their guests as a complete nonentity. He was “*Le bon-homme, le vilain petit Trichateau,*” whom it was a task to speak to, and a

penance to amuse. Every day, after coffee, Monsieur rose from the table with all the docility imaginable, leaving Voltaire and Madame to recite verses, translate Newton, philosophise, dispute, and do the honours of Cirey to the brilliant society who had assembled under his roof.

While the boudoir, the laboratory, and the sleeping-room of the lady, and the study and gallery appropriated to Voltaire, were furnished with Oriental luxury and splendour, and shone with gilding, drapery, pictures, and baubles, the lord of the mansion and the guests were destined to starve in half-furnished apartments, from which the wind and the rain were scarcely excluded.*

In 1748, Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet paid a visit to the Court of Stanislas, the ex-king of Poland, at Luneville, and took M. du Châtelet in their train. There Madame du Châtelet was

* "Vie privée de Voltaire et de Madame du Châtelet," in a series of letters, written by Madame de Graffigny during her stay at Cirey. The details in these letters are exceedingly amusing, but the style so diffuse, that it is scarcely possible to make extracts.

seized with a passion for Saint-Lambert, the author of the “Saisons,” who was at least ten or twelve years younger than herself, and then a *jeune militaire*, only admired for his fine figure and pretty *vers de société*. Voltaire, it is said, was extremely jealous; but his jealousy did not prevent him from addressing some very elegant verses to his handsome rival, in which he compliments him gaily on the good graces of the lady.

Saint-Lambert, ce n'est que pour toi
Que ces belles fleurs sont écloses,
C'est ta main qui cueille les roses,
Et les épines sont pour moi!*

Some months afterwards, Madame du Châtelet died in child-birth, in her forty-fourth year.

Voltaire was so overwhelmed by this loss, that he set off for Paris immediately *pour se dissiper*. Marmontel has given us a most ludicrous account of a visit of condolence he paid him on this occasion. He found Voltaire absolutely drowned in tears, and at every fresh burst of sorrow, he called

* Epitre à Saint-Lambert.

on Marmontel to sympathise with him. “ Helas! j’ai perdu mon illustre amie! Ah! ah! je suis au desespoir!” — Then exclaiming against Saint-Lambert, whom he accused as the cause of the catastrophe—“ Ah! mon ami! il me l’a tuée, le brutal!” while Marmontel, who had often heard him abuse his “*sublime* Emilie” in no measured terms, as “*une furie, attachée à ses pas,*” hid his face with his handkerchief in pretended sympathy, but in reality to conceal his irrepressible smiles. In the midst of this scene of despair, some ridiculous idea or story striking Voltaire’s vivid fancy, threw him into fits of laughter, and some time elapsed before he recollected that he was inconsolable.

The death of Madame du Châtelet, the circumstances which attended it, and the celebrity of herself and her lover, combined to cause a great *sensation*. No elegies indeed appeared on the occasion,—“ no tears eternal that embalm the dead;” but a shower of epigrams and *bon mots*—some exquisitely witty and malicious. The story of her ring, in which Voltaire and her husband

each expected to find his own portrait, and which on being opened, was found, to the utter discomfiture of both, to contain that of Saint-Lambert, is well known.

If we may judge from her picture, Madame du Châtelet must have been extremely pretty. Her eyes were fine and piercing; her features delicate, with a good deal of *finesse* and intelligence in their expression. But her countenance, like her character, was devoid of interest. She had great power of mental abstraction; and on one occasion she went through a most complicated calculation of figures in her head, while she played and won a game at piquet. She *could* be graceful and fascinating, but her manners were, in general, extremely disagreeable; and her parade of learning, her affectation, her egotism, her utter disregard of the comforts, feelings, and opinions of others, are well portrayed in two or three brilliant strokes of sarcasm from the pen of Madame de Staal.* She

* Madlle. de Launay: it has become necessary to distinguish between two celebrated women bearing the same name, at least in sound.

even turns her philosophy into ridicule. “ Elle fait actuellement la revue de ses Principes ;* c’est un exercice qu’elle réitère chaque année, sans quoi ils pourroient s’échapper ; et peut-être s’en aller si loin qu’elle n’en retrouverait pas un seul. Je crois bien que sa tête est pour eux une maison de force, et non pas le lieu de leur naissance.”†

* “ Les principes de la philosophie de Newton.”

† V. Correspondence de Madame de Deffand. In another letter from Sceaux, Madame de Staal adds the following clever, satirical,—but most characteristic picture:—

“ En tout cas on vous garde un bon appartement : c’est celui dont Madame du Châtelet, après une revue exacte de toute la maison, s’était emparée. Il y aura un peu moins de meubles qu’elle n’y en avait mis ; car elle avait dévasté tous ceux par où elle avait passé pour garnir celui-là. On y a trouvé six ou sept tables ; il lui en faut de toutes les grandeurs ; d’immenses pour étaler ses papiers, de solides pour soutenir son nécessaire, de plus légères pour ses pompons, pour ses bijoux ; et cette belle ordonnance ne l’a pas garantie d’une accident pareil à celui qui arrive à Philippe II. quand, après avoir passé la nuit à écrire, on répandit une bouteille d’encre sur ses dépêches. La dame ne s’est pas piquée d’imiter la moderation de ce prince ; aussi n’avait-il écrit que sur des affaires d’état ; et ce qu’on lui a barbouillé, c’était de l’algèbre, bien plus difficile à remettre au net.”

That Madame du Châtelet was a woman of extraordinary talent, and that her progress in abstract sciences was uncommon, and even *unique* at that time, at least among her own sex, is beyond a doubt; but her learned treatises on Newton, and the nature of fire, are now utterly forgotten. We have since had a Mrs. Marcet; and we have read of Gaetana Agnesi, who was professor of mathematics in the University of Padua; two women who, uniting to the rarest philosophical acquirements, gentleness and virtue, have needed no poet to immortalize them.

Of the numerous poems which Voltaire addressed to Madame du Châtelet, the *Epistle* beginning

Tu m'appelles à toi, vaste et puissant génie,
Minerve de la France, immortelle Emilie,

is a *chef d'œuvre*, and contains some of the finest lines he ever wrote. The *Epistle* to her on calumny, written to console her for the abuse and ridicule which her abstractions and indiscretions had provoked, begins with these beautiful lines—

Ecoutez-moi, respectable Emilie :

Vous êtes belle ; ainsi donc la moitié

Du genre humain sera votre ennemie :
 Vous possédez un sublime génie ;
 On vous craindra ; votre tendre amitié
 Est confiante ; et vous serez trahie :
 Votre vertu dans sa démarche unie,
 Simple et sans fard, n'a point sacrifié
 A nos dévots ; craignez la calomnie.

With that famous ring, from which he had afterwards the mortification to discover that his own portrait had been banished to make room for that of Saint-Lambert, he sent her this elegant *quatrain*.

Barrier grava ces traits destinés pour vos yeux ;
 Avec quelque plaisir daignez les reconnoître :
 Les vôtres dans mon cœur furent gravés bien mieux,
 Mais ce fut par un plus grand maitre.

* * * * *

The heroine of the famous Epistle, known as “Les TU et les VOUS,” (Madame de Gouverné,) was one of Voltaire’s earliest loves ; and he was passionately attached to her. They were separated in the world:—she went through the usual *routine* of a French woman’s existence,—I mean, of a French woman *sous l’ancien régime*.

Quelques plaisirs dans la jeunesse,
Des soins dans la maternité,
Tous les malheurs dans la vieillesse.
Puis la peur de l'éternité.

She was first dissipated ; then an *esprit fort* ; then *très dévote*. In obedience to her confessor, she discarded, one after the other, her rouge, her ribbons, and the presents and billets-doux of her lovers ; but no remonstrances could induce her to give up Voltaire's picture. When he returned from exile in 1778, he went to pay a visit to his old love ; they had not met for fifty years, and they now gazed on each other in silent dismay. *He* looked, I suppose, like the dried mummy of an ape : *she*, like a withered *sorcière*. The same evening she sent him back his portrait, which she had hitherto refused to part with. Nothing remained to shed illusion over the past ; she had beheld, even before the last terrible proof—

What dust we doat on, when 'tis man we love.

And Voltaire, on his side, was not less dismayed by his visit. On returning from her, he exclaimed, with a shrug of mingled disgust and horror, " Ah,

mes amis! je viens de passer à l'autre bord du Cocyte!" It was not thus that Cowper felt for his Mary, when "her auburn locks were changed to grey:" but it is almost an insult to the memory of true tenderness to mention them both in the same page.

To enumerate other women who have been celebrated by Voltaire, would be to give a list of all the beautiful and distinguished women of France for half a century; from the Duchess de Richelieu and Madame de Luxembourg, down to Camargo the dancer, and Clairon and le Couvreur the actresses: but I can find no name of any *poetical* fame or interest among them: nor can I conceive any thing more revolting than the history of French society and manners during the Regency and the whole of the reign of Louis the Fifteenth.

CHAPTER XIX.

FRENCH POETRY CONTINUED.

MADAME D'HOUDETOT.

SAINT-LAMBERT, who seemed destined to rival greater men than himself, after carrying off Madame du Châtelet from Voltaire, became the favoured lover of the Comtesse d'Houdetot, Rousseau's Sophie; she for whom the philosopher first felt love, "*dans toute son energie, toutes ses fureurs,*"—but in vain.

Saint-Lambert is allowed to be an elegant poet: his *Saisons* were once as popular in France, as Thomson's *Seasons* are here; but they have not retained their popularity. The French poem, though in many parts imitated from the English,

is as unlike it as possible : correct, polished, elegant, full of beautiful lines,—of what the French call *de beaux vers*,—and yet excessively dull. It is equally impossible to find fault with it in parts, or endure it as a whole. *Une petite pointe de verve* would have rendered it delightful ; but the total want of enthusiasm in the writer freezes the reader. As Madame du Deffand said, in humorous mockery of his monotonous harmony, “ Sans les oiseaux, les ruisseaux, les hameaux, les ormeaux, et leur rameaux, il aurait bien peu de choses a dire ! ”

Madame d’Houdetot was the *Doris* to whom the Seasons are dedicated ; and the opening passage addressed to her, is extremely admired by French critics.

Et toi, qui m’as choisi pour embellir ma vie,
 Doux répos de mon cœur, aimable et tendre amie !
 Toi, qui sais de nos champs admirer les beautés :
 Dérobe toi, Doris ! au luxe des cités,
 Aux arts dont tu jouis, au monde où tu sçais plaire ;
 Le printemps te rappelle au vallon solitaire ;
 Heureux si près de toi je chante à son retour,
 Ses dons et ses plaisirs, la campagne et l’amour !

Sophie de la Briche, afterwards Madame

d'Houdetot, was the daughter of a rich *fermier general*; and destined, of course, to a marriage de convenance, she was united very young to the Comte d'Houtetot, an officer of rank in the army; a man who was allowed by his friends to be *très peu amiable*, and whom Madame d'Epinay, who hated him, called *vilain*, and *insupportable*. He was too good-natured to make his wife absolutely miserable, but *un bonheur à faire mourir d'ennui*, was not exactly adapted to the disposition of Sophie; and there was no principle within, no restraint without, no support, no counsel, no example, to guide her conduct or guard her against temptation.

The power by which Madame d'Houdetot captivated the gay, handsome, dissipated Saint-Lambert, and kindled into a blaze the passions or the imagination of Rousseau, was not that of beauty. Her face was plain and slightly marked with the small-pox; her eyes were not good; she was extremely short-sighted, which gave to her countenance and address an appearance of uncertainty and timidity; her figure was *mignonne*,

and in all her movements there was an indescribable mixture of grace and awkwardness. The charm by which this woman seized and kept the hearts, not of lovers only, but of friends, was a character the very reverse of that of Madame du Châtelet, who would have deemed it an insult to be compared to her either in mind or beauty :—the absence of all *pretension*, all coquetry ; the total surrender of her own feelings, thoughts, interests, where another was concerned ; the frankness which verged on giddiness and imprudence ; the temper which nothing could ruffle ; the warm kindness which nothing could chill ; the bounding spirit of gaiety, which nothing could subdue,—these qualities rendered Madame d’Houdetot an attaching and interesting creature, to the latest moment of her long life. “ Mon Dieu ! que j’ai d’impatience de voir dix ans de plus sur la tête de cette femme ! ” exclaimed her sister-in-law, Madame d’Epinay, when she saw her at the age of twenty. But at the age of eighty, Madame d’Houdetot was just as much a child as ever,—“ aussi vive, aussi enfant, aussi gaie, aussi distraite, aussi bonne

et très bonne;”* in spite of wrinkles, sorrows, and frailties, she retained, in extreme old age, the gaiety, the tenderness, the confiding simplicity, though not the innocence of early youth.

Her *liaison* with Saint-Lambert continued fifty years, nor was she ever suspected of any other indiscretion. During this time he contrived to make her as wretched as a woman of her disposition could be made; and the elasticity of her spirits did not prevent her from being acutely sensible to pain, and alive to unkindness. Saint-Lambert, from being her lover, became her tyrant. He behaved with a peevish jealousy, a petulance, a bitterness, which sometimes drove her beyond the bounds of a woman's patience; and when ever this happened, the accommodating husband, M. d'HouDETOT would interfere to reconcile the lovers, and plead for the recall of the offender.

When Saint-Lambert's health became utterly broken, she watched over him with a patient tenderness, unwearied by all his *exigeance*, and unprovoked by his detestable temper; he had a

* Mémoires et Lettres de Madame d'Épmy, tom. 1. p. 95.

house near her's in the valley of Montmorenci, and lived on perfectly good terms with her husband. I must add one trait, which, however absurd, and scarcely credible, it may sound in our sober, English ears, is yet true. M. and Madame d'Houdetot gave a fête at Eaubonne, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their marriage. Sophie was then nearly *seventy*, but played her part, as the heroine of the day, with all the grace and vivacity of seventeen. On this occasion, the lover and the husband chose, for the first time in their lives, to be jealous of each other, and exhibited, to the amusement and astonishment of the guests, a *scene*, which was for some time the talk of all Paris.

Saint-Lambert died in 1805. After his death, Madame d'Houdetot was seized with a sentimental *tendresse* for M. Somariva,* and continued to send him bouquets and billets-doux to the end of her life. She died about 1815.

To her singular power of charming, Madame d'Houdetot added talents of no common order,

* M. Somariva is well known to all who have visited Paris, for his fine collection of pictures, and particularly as the possessor of Canova's famous Magdalen.

which, though never cultivated with any perseverance, now and then displayed, or rather *disclosed* themselves unexpectedly, adding surprise to pleasure. She was a musician, a poetess, a wit;—but every thing, “par la grâce de Dieu,”—and as if unconsciously and involuntarily. All Saint-Lambert’s poetry together is not worth the little song she composed for him on his departure for the army:—

L'Amant que j'adore,
 Prêt à me quitter,
 D'un instant encore
 Voudrait profiter :
 Félicité vaine !
 Qu'on ne peut saisir,
 Trop près de la peine
 Pour être un plaisir !*

It is to Madame d'Houdetot that Lord Byron alludes in a striking passage of the third canto of *Childe Harold*, beginning

Here the self-torturing sophist, wild Rousseau,† &c.

* See Lady Morgan's *France*, and the *Biographie Universelle*.

† Stanza 77, and more particularly stanza 79.

And *apropos* to Rousseau, I shall merely observe, that there is, and can be but one opinion with regard to his conduct in the affair of Madame d'Houdetot : it was abominable. She thought, as every one who ever was connected with that man, found sooner or later, that he was all made up of genius and imagination, and as destitute of heart as of moral principle. I can never think of his character, but as of something at once admirable, portentous and shocking ; the most great, most gifted, most wretched ;—worst, meanest, maddest of mankind !

* * * * *

Madame du Châtelet and Madame d'Houdetot must for the present be deemed sufficient specimens of French poetical heroines;—it were easy to pursue the subject further, but it would lead to a field of discussion and illustration, which I would rather decline.*

* In one of Madame de Genlis' prettiest Tales—"Les pre-ventions d'une femme," there is the following observation, as full of truth as of feminine propriety. I trust that the princi-

Is it not singular that in a country which was the cradle, if not the birth-place of modern poetry and romance, the language, the literature, and the women, should be so essentially and incurably *prosaic*? The muse of French poetry never swept a lyre; she grinds a barrel-organ in her serious moods, and she scrapes a fiddle in her lively ones; and as for the distinguished French women, whose memory and whose characters are blended with the literature, and connected with the great names of their country,—they are often admirable, and sometimes interesting; but with all their fascinations, their charms, their *esprit*, their *graces*, their *amabilité*, and their *sensibilité*, it was not in the power of the gods or their lovers to make them *poetical*.

ple it inculcates has been kept in view through the whole of this little work.

“ Il y a plus de pudeur et de dignité dans la douce indulgence qui semble ignorer les anecdotes scandaleuses ou du moins, les revoquer en doute, que dans le dédain qui en retrace le souvenir, et qui s'érige publiquement en juge inflexible.”

CONCLUSION.

HEROINES OF MODERN POETRY.

Heureuse la Beauté que le poëte adore !

Heureux le nom qu'il a chanté !

DE LAMARTINE.

IT will be allowed, I think, that women have reason to be satisfied with the rank they hold in modern poetry ; and that the homage which has been addressed to them, either directly and individually, or paid indirectly and generally, in the beautiful characters and portraits drawn of them, ought to satisfy equally female sentiment and female vanity. From the half ethereal forms which float amid moonbeams and gems, and odours and flowers, along the dazzling pages of *Lalla Rookh*,

down to Phœbe Dawson, in the Parish Register :* from that loveliest gem of polished life, the young Aurora of Lord Byron, down to Wordsworth's poor Margaret weeping in her deserted cottage ;† —all the various aspects between these wide extremes of character and situation, under which we have been exhibited, have been, with few exceptions, just and favourable to our sex.

In the literature of the classical ages, we were debased into mere servants of pleasure, alternately the objects of loose incense or coarse invective. In the poetry of the Gothic ages, we all rank as queens. In the succeeding period, when the platonian philosophy was oddly mixed up with the institutions of chivalry, we were exalted into divinities ;—“ angels called, and angel-like adored.” Then followed the age of French gallantry, tinged with classical elegance, and tainted with classical licence, when we were caressed, complimented, wooed and satirised by coxcomb poets,

Who ever mix'd their song with light licentious toys.

* Crabbe's Poems.

† See the Excursion.

There was much expenditure of wit and of talent, but in an ill cause;—for the feeling was, *au fond*, bad and false;—“et il n'est guere plaisant d'être empoisonné, même par l'esprit de rose.”

In the present time a better spirit prevails. We are not indeed sublimated into goddesses; but neither is it the fashion to degrade us into the playthings of fopling poets. We seem to have found, at length, our proper level in poetry, as in society; and take the place assigned to us as women—

As creatures not too bright or good,
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles!*

We are represented as ruling by our feminine attractions, moral or exterior, the passions and imaginations of men; as claiming, by our weakness, our delicacy, our devotion,—their protection, their tenderness, and their gratitude: and, since

* Wordsworth.

the minds of women have been more generally and highly cultivated: since a Madame de Stael, a Joanna Baillie, a Maria Edgeworth, and a hundred other names, now shining aloft like stars, have shed a reflected glory on the whole sex they belong to, we possess through them, a claim to admiration and respect for our mental capabilities. We assume the right of passing judgment on the poetical homage addressed to us, and our smiles alone can consecrate what our smiles first inspired.*

If we look over the mass of poetry produced during the last twenty-five years, whether Italian, French, German, or English, we shall find that the predominant feeling is honourable to women, and if not gallantry, is something better.† It is

* Even so the smile of woman stamps our fates,
And consecrates the love it first creates!

Barry Cornwall.

† See in particular Schiller's ode, "Honour to Women," one of the most elegant tributes ever paid to us by a poet's enthusiasm. It may be found translated in Lord F. Gower's beautiful little volume of *Miscellanies*.

too true, that the incense has not been always perfectly pure. “ Many light lays,—ah, woe is me there-fore !” * have sounded from one gifted lyre, which has since been strung to songs of patriotism and tenderness. Moore, whom I am proud, for a thousand reasons, to claim as my countryman, began his literary and amatory career, fresh from the study of the classics, and the poets of Charles the Second’s time ; and too often through the thin undress of superficial refinement, we trace the grossness of his models. It is said, I know not how truly, that he has since made the *amende honorable*. He has possibly discovered, that women of sense and sentiment, who have a true feeling of what is due to them as women, are not fitly addressed in the style of Anacreon and Catullus ; have no sympathies with his equivocal

* Many light lays (ah ! woe is me the more)
 In praise of that mad fit which fools call *love*,
 I have i’ the heat of youth made heretofore,
 That in light wits did loose affections move ;
 But all these follies do I now reprove, &c

Spenser.

Rosas, Fanny, and Julias, and are not flattered by being associated with tavern orgies and bumpers of wine, and such "tipsey revelry." Into themes like these he has, it is true, infused a buoyant spirit of gaiety, a tone of sentiment, and touches of tender and moral feeling, which would reconcile us to them, if any thing could; as in the beautiful songs, "When time, who steals our years away,"—"O think not my spirits are always as light,"—"Farewell! but whenever you think on the hour,"—"The Legacy," and a hundred others. But how many *more* are there, in which the purity and earnestness of the feeling vie with the grace and delicacy of the expression! and in the difficult art (only to be appreciated by a singer) of marrying verse to sound, Moore was never excelled—never equalled—but by Burns. He seems to be gifted, as poet and musician, with a double instinct of harmony, peculiar to himself.

Barry Cornwall is another living poet who has drunk deep from the classics and from our elder writers; but with a finer taste and a better feeling, he has borrowed only what was decorative,

graceful and accessory: the pure stream of his sentiment flows unmingled and untainted,—

Yet musical as when the waters run,
Lapsing through sylvan haunts deliciously.*

It is not without reason that Barry Cornwall has been styled the “Poet of woman,” *par excellence*. It enhances the value, it adds to the charm of every tender and beautiful passage addressed to us, that we know them to be sincere and heartfelt,

Not fable bred,

But such as truest poets love to write.

It is for the sake of *one*, beloved “beyond ambition and the light of song,”—and worthy to be so loved, that he approaches *all* women with the most graceful, delicate, and reverential homage ever expressed in sweet poetry. His fancy is indeed so luxuriant, that he makes whatever he touches appear fanciful: but the beauty adorned by his verse, and adorning his home, is not imaginary; and though he has almost hidden his divinity behind a cloud of incense, she is not therefore less *real*.

* Marcian Colonna.

The life Lord Byron led was not calculated to give him a good opinion of women, or to place before him the best virtues of our sex. Of all modern poets, he has been the most generally popular among female readers; and he owes this enthusiasm not certainly to our obligations to *him*; for, as far as women are concerned, we may designate his works by a line borrowed from himself,—

With much to excite, there's little to exalt.

But who, like him, could administer to that “*besoin de sentir*,” which I am afraid is an ingredient in the feminine character all over the world?

Lord Byron is really the Grand Turk of amatory poetry,—ardent in his love,—mean and merciless in his resentment: he could trace passion in characters of fire, but his caustic satire burns and blisters where it falls. Lovely as are some of his female portraits, and inimitably beautiful as are some of his lyrical effusions, it must be confessed there is something very Oriental in all his feelings and ideas about women; he seems to require nothing of us but beauty and submission. Please him—and he will crown you with the richest

flowers of poetry, and heap the treasures of the universe at your feet, as trophies of his love; but once offend, and you are lost,—

There yawns the sack—and yonder rolls the sea!

Campbell, ever elegant and tender, has hymned us all into divinities; and through his sweet and varied page

Where love pursues an ever devious race,
True to the winding lineaments of grace,
we figure under every beautiful aspect that truth and feeling could inspire, or poetry depict.

Sir Walter Scott ought to have lived in the age of chivalry, (if we could endure the thoughts of his living in any other age but our own!) so touched with the true antique spirit of generous devotion to our sex are all his poetical portraits of women. I do not find that he has, like most other writers of the present day, mixed up his personal feelings and history with his poetry; or that any fair and distinguished object will be so thrice fortunate as to share his laurelled immortality. We must therefore treat him like Shakspeare, whom alone he resembles—and claim him for us all.

Then there is Rogers, whose compliments to us are so polished, so pointed, and so elegantly turned, and have such a drawing-room air, that they seem as if intended to be presented to Duchesses, by beaux in white kid gloves. And there is Coleridge who approaches women with a sort of feeling half earthly, half heavenly, like that with which an Italian devotee bends before his Madonna—

And comes unto his courtship as his prayer.

And there is Southey, in whose imagination we are all heroines and queens; and Wordsworth, lost in the depths of his own tenderness!

* * * * *

The time is not yet arrived, when the loves of the living poets, or of those lately dead, can be discussed individually, or exhibited at full length. The subject is much too hazardous for a contemporary, and more particularly for a female to dwell upon. Such details belong properly to the next age, and there is no fear that these gossiping times will leave any thing a mystery for posterity.

The next generation will be infinitely wiser on these interesting subjects than their grandmothers. Yet a few years, and what is scandal and personality *now*, will *then* be matter for biography and history. Then many a love, destined to rival that of Petrarch in purity and celebrity, and that of Tasso in interest, shall be divulged; the thread of many a poetical romance now coiled up in mystic verse, shall then be evolved. Then we shall know the true history of Lord Byron's "Fare thee well." We shall then know more than the mere name of his Mary,* who first kindled his boyish fancy, and left an ineffaceable impression on his young heart, and whose history is said to be shadowed forth in "The Dream." We may then know who was the heroine of "Remember him whom passion's power:" whose moonlight charms at once so radiant and so shadowy, inspired "She walks in beauty;" we shall be told, perhaps, who was the Thyrsa, so

* Miss Chaworth, now Mrs. Musters.

loving and beloved in life, and whose early death, which appears to have taken place during his travels, is so deeply, so feelingly lamented: and who was his Ginevra,* and what spot of earth was made happy by her beautiful presence—if any thing so divinely beautiful ever was!

Then we shall not ask in vain who was Campbell's Caroline?† Whether she did, indeed, walk this earth in mortal beauty, or was not rather invoked by the poet's spell, from the soft evening star which shone upon her bower?

Then we shall know upon whose white bosom perished that rose,‡ which, dying, bequeathed with its odorous breath a tale of truest love to after-times, and glory to her, whose breast was its envied tomb—to *her*, whose heart has thrilled to the homage of her poet,—yet who would “*blush to find it fame!*”

* Lord Byron's Works, vol. iii. p. 183, (small edit.)

† Campbell's Poems, vol. ii. p. 202.

‡ Barry Cornwall's Poems, “Lines on a Rose.”

Then we shall know who was the "Lucy,"

Who dwelt among the untrodden ways,

Beside the springs of Dove!*

and who was the heroine of that most exquisite picture of feminine loveliness in all its aspects, "She was a Phantom of delight."†—No phantom, it is said, but a fair reality :

A being, breathing thoughtful breath,

A traveller betwixt life and death,

yet fated not to die, while verse can live !

Then we shall know whose tear has been preserved by Rogers with a power beyond "the Chymist's magic art ;" who was the lovely bride who is destined to blush and tremble in his Epithalamium, for a thousand years to come ; and to what fair obdurate is addressed his "Farewell."

We may then learn who was that sweet Mary who adorned the cottage-home of Wilson ; and who was the "Wild Louisa," of whom he has drawn such a captivating picture ; first as

* Wordsworth's Poems, vol. i. p. 181.

† Wordsworth, vol. ii. p. 132.

the sprightly girl floating down the dance,

With footsteps light as falling snow,

and afterwards as the matron and the mother,
hanging over the cradle of her infant, and blessing
him in his sleep.

Then we may *tell* who was the “Bonnie Jean,”
sung by Allan Cunningham, whose destructive
charms are so pleasantly, so naturally touched
upon.

Sair she slights the lads—

Three are like to die ;

Four in sorrow listed,—

And five flew to sea !

This rural beauty, who caused such terrible
devastation, and who, it is said, first made a poet
of her lover, became afterwards his wife ; and in
her matronly character, she inspired that beautiful
little effusion of conjugal tenderness, “The Poet’s
Bridal Song.” When first published, it was
almost universally copied, and committed to me-
mory ; and Allan Cunningham may not only boast
that he has woven a wreath “to grace his Jean,”

While rivers flow and woods are green,

but that he has given the sweet wife, seated among her children in sedate and matronly loveliness, an interest even beyond that which belongs to the young girl he has described with raven locks and cheeks of cream, driving rustic admirers to despair, or lingering with her lover at eve,

— Amid the falling dew,

When looks were fond, and words were few!

Such is the charm of affection, and truth, and moral feeling, carried straight into the heart by poetry!

What a new interest and charm will be given to many of Moore's beautiful songs, when we are allowed to trace the feeling that inspired them, whether derived from some immediate and present impression; or from remembered emotion, that sometimes swells in the breast, like the heaving of the waves, when the winds are still! Several of the most charming of his lyrics are said to be inspired by "the heart so warm, and eyes so bright," which first taught him the value of domestic happiness;—taught him that the true poet

need not rove abroad for themes of song, but may kindle his genius at the flame which glows on his own hearth, and make the Muses his household goddesses.*

Gifford, the late editor of the Quarterly Review, and the author of the *Baviad* and *Mæviad*, was in early youth doomed to struggle with poverty, obscurity, ill health, and every hardship which could check the rise of genius. He has himself described the effect produced on his mind, under these circumstances, by his attachment to an amiable and gentle girl. "I crept on," he says, "in silent discontent, unfriended and unpitied; indignant at the present, careless of the future,—an object at once of apprehension and dislike. From this state of abjectness, I was raised by a young woman of my own class.

* See in Moore's *Lyrics* the beautiful song. "I'd mourn the hopes that leave me." The concluding stanza is in point :

"Far better hopes shall win me,
 Along the path I've yet to roam,
 The mind that burns within me,
 And pure smiles from thee *at home*."

She was a neighbour ; and whenever I took my solitary walk with my Wolfius in my pocket, she usually came to the door, and by a smile, or a short question, put in the friendliest manner, endeavoured to solicit my attention. My heart had been long shut to kindness ; but the sentiment was not dead within me ; it revived at the first encouraging word ; and the gratitude I felt for it, was the first pleasing sensation I had ventured to entertain for many dreary months."

There are two little effusions inserted in the notes to the Baviad and Mæviad, which have since been multiplied by copies, and have found their way into almost all collections of lyric poetry and "Elegant Extracts ;" one of these was composed during the life of Anna ; the other, written after her death, and beginning,

I wish I were where Anna lies,
For I am sick of lingering here,

is extremely striking from its unadorned simplicity and profound pathos.—Such was not the prevailing style of amatory verse at the time it was written, nearly fifty years ago. Mr. Gifford never

married ; and the effect of this early disappointment could be traced in his mind and constitution to the last moments of his life.

The same sad bereavement which tended to make Gifford a caustic critic and satirist, made Mr. Bowles a sentimental poet. The subject of his Sonnets was real ; but he who has pointed out the difference between natural and fabricated feeling, should not have left a *blank* for the name of her he laments. He gives us indeed a formal permission to fill up the blank with any name we choose. But it is not the same thing ; the name of the woman who inspired a poet, is quite as important to posterity, as the name of the poet himself.

Who was the Hannah, whose fickleness occasioned that exquisite little poem which Montgomery has inscribed “ To the memory of her who is dead to me ? ” It tells a tale of youthful love, of trusting affection, suddenly and eternally blighted,—and with such a brevity, such a simplicity, such a fervent yet heart-broken earnestness, that I fear it must be true !

At some future time, we shall, perhaps, be told who was the beautiful English girl, whose retiring charms won the heart of Hyppolito Pindemonte, when he was here some years ago. His Canzone on her is, in Italy, considered as his masterpiece,* and even compared to some of Petrarch's. There are indeed few things in the compass of Italian poetry more sweet in expression, more true to feeling, than the lines in which Pindemonte, describing the blooming youth, the serene and quiet grace of this fair girl, disclaims the idea of even wishing to disturb the heavenly calm of her pure heart by a passion such as agitates his own.

Il men di che può Donna esser cortese
 Ver chi l' ha di sè stesso assai più cara,
 Da te, vergine pura, io non vorrei.

This was being very peculiarly disinterested.— We may also learn, at some future time, who was the sweet Elvire, to whom Alphonse de Lamartine

* See in the "Opere di Pindemonte," the Canzone, "O Giovanetta che la dubbia via."

has promised immortality, and not promised more than he has the power to bestow. He is one of the few French poets, who have created a real and a strong interest out of their own country. He has vanquished, by the mere force of genius and sentiment, all the difficulties and deficiencies of the language in which he wrote, and has given to its limited poetical vocabulary a charm unknown before. He thus addresses Elvire in one of the *Meditations Poétiques*.

Vois, d'un œil de pitié, la vulgaire jeunesse
 Brillante de beauté, s'enivrant de plaisir ;
 Quand elle aura tari sa coupe enchanteresse,
 Que restera-t-il d'elle ? à peine un souvenir :
 Le tombeau qui l'attend l'engloutit tout entière,
 Un silence éternel succède à ses amours ;
 Mais les siècles auront passé sur ta poussière,
 Elvire !—et tu vivras toujours !

* * * * *

Over some of the heroines of modern poetry, the tomb has recently closed; and the flowers scattered there, could not be disturbed without awakening a pang in the bosoms of those who sur-

vive. They sleep, but only for a while: they shall rise again—the grave shall yield them up, “even in the loveliest looks they wore,” for a poet’s love has redeemed them from death and from oblivion ! Methinks I see them even now with the prophetic eye of fancy, go floating over the ocean of time, in the light of their beauty and their fame, like Galatea and her nymphs triumphing upon the waters !

Others, perhaps, (the widow of Burns, and the widow of Monti, for instance,) are declining into wintry age : sorrow and thought have quenched the native beauty on their cheek, and furrowed the once polished brow ; yet crowned by poetry with eternal youth and unfading charms, they will go down to posterity among the Lauras, the Geraldines, the Sacharissas of other days ;— Nature herself shall feel decrepitude,

And, palsy-smitten, shake her starry brows,

ere these grow old and die !

And some, even now, move gracefully through the shades of domestic life, and the universe, of whose beauty they will ere long form a part, knows

them not. Undistinguished among the ephemeral divinities around them, not looking as though they felt the future glory round their brow, nor swelling with anticipated fame, they yet carry in their mild eyes, that light of love, which has inspired undying strains,

Aud Queens hereafter shall be proud to live
Upon the alms of their superfluous praise !

THE END.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY S. AND R. BENTLEY,
Dorset Street, Fleet Street.

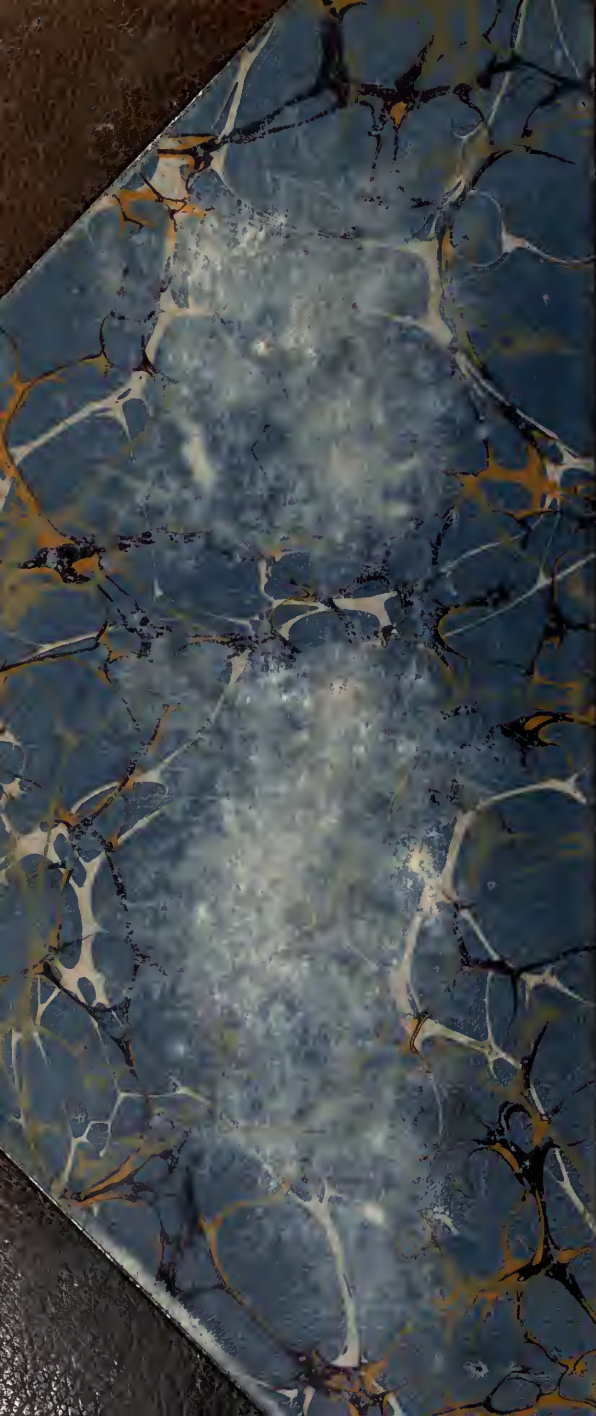
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