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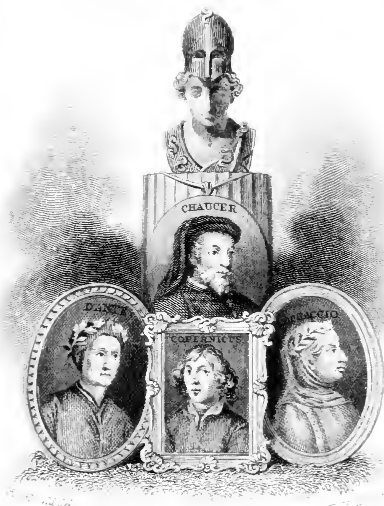
LIVES

of the most

EMINENT LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC MEN

OF ITALY, SPAIN, AND PORTUGAL.



London.

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LIVES

OF

EMINENT

LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC MEN.

DANTE ALIGHIERI.

ITALY. 1265—1321.

——— "'Tis the doom
Of spirits of my order to be rack'd
In life; to wear their hearts out, and consume
Their days in endless strife, and die alone:
—Then future thousands crowd around their tomb,
And pilgrims come from climes where they have known
The name of Him,—who now is but a name;
And wasting homage o'er the sullen stone,
Spread his, by him unheard, unheeded, fame."
LORD BYRON'S *Prophecy of Dante*, Canto I.

AMONG the illustrious fathers of song who, in their own land, cannot cease to exercise dominion over the minds, characters, and destinies of all posterity,—and who, beyond its frontiers, must continue to influence the taste, and help to form the genius, of those who shall exercise like authority in other countries,—Dante Alighieri is, undoubtedly, one of the most remarkable.

This poet was descended from a very ancient stock, which, according to Boccaccio, traced its lineage to the Roman house of Frangipani,—one of whose members, surnamed Eliseo, was said to have been an early settler, if not a principal founder, of the restored city of Flo-

rence, in the reign of Charlemagne, after it had lain desolate for several centuries, subsequently to its destruction by Attila the Hun. From this Eliseo sprang a family, of which Dante gives, in the fifteenth and sixteenth cantos of his "Paradiso," such information, as he thought proper; making Cacciaguida (one of its most distinguished chiefs, who fell fighting in the crusade under the emperor Conrad III.,) say, rather ambiguously, of those who went before him, that "who they were, and whence they came, it is more honest to keep silence than to tell,"—probably, however, intending no more than to disclaim vain boasting, but not by any means to disparage his progenitors, for whom, in the fifteenth canto of the "Inferno," he seems to claim the glory of having been of Roman descent, and fathers of Florence. Cacciaguida, having married a noble lady of Ferrara, gave to one of his sons by her the name of Aldighieri (afterwards softened to Alighieri), in honour of his consort. This Alighieri was the grandfather of Dante; and concerning him, Cacciaguida, in the last-mentioned canto, informs the poet, that, for some unnamed offence, his spirit has been more than a hundred years pacing round the first circle of the mountain of purgatory; adding,—

> "Ben si convien, che la lunga fatica
> Tu gli raccorci con l' opere tue."

> "And well it would be, were his long fatigue
> Shorten'd by thy good deeds."

Dante was born in the spring of the year 1265. Benvenuta da Immola calls his father a lawyer; but little more is recorded of him except that he was twice married, and left two sons and a daughter, at an early age, to the guardianship of relatives. Dante (abridged from Durante) was born of Bella, his father's second wife, of whom, during her pregnancy, Boccaccio relates a very significant dream,—on what authority he does not say, and with what truth the reader may judge for himself.

She imagined herself sitting under the shade of a lofty laurel, in the midst of a green meadow, by the side of a brilliant fountain. Here she was delivered of a boy, who, in as little time as might easily happen in a dream, grew up into a man before her eyes, by feeding upon the berries that fell from the tree, and drinking of the pure stream which watered its roots. Presently he had become a shepherd; but, climbing too eagerly up the stem to gather some leaves from the laurel, with the fruit of which he had been hitherto nourished, he fell headlong to the ground, and on rising appeared no longer a man, but a magnificent peacock. It would be aggravating the offence of wasting time by quoting such a fable, were we to give the obvious interpretation. This, however, the great Boccaccio has done with most magniloquent gravity,—a task for which, of all men, he was no doubt the most competent, as it is probable that no soul living (the lady herself not excepted) besides himself was in the secret either of the vision or the moral. One point of the latter, which could not easily be guessed, may be mentioned; namely, that the spots on the peacock's tail (the hundred eyes of Argus) foreshowed the hundred cantos of the "Divina Commedia." The ingenious author of the Decameron may have borrowed the idea of this dream from Dante's own allusion to the laurel and its leaves,—the meed of poets and of princes,—in his preposterous invocation of Apollo at the commencement of the "Paradiso."

Dante himself never alludes to this notable omen, though often referring, with conscious pride, to his genius, and the circumstances by which it had been awakened and exercised. This he attributed to the benign influence of the constellation Gemini, which ruled at his nativity. In the "Paradiso," Canto XXII., mentioning his flight from the planetary system to the eighth sphere, where the fixed stars have their dwelling, he exclaims,—

"O Reader! as I hope once more to reach
That realm of holy triumph *, for whose sake

* The heaven of heavens.

I oft lament my sins and smite my breast,
Thou could'st not, in so brief a space, through fire
Have pass'd and pluck'd thy finger, as I saw
And was within the sign that follows Taurus.
O glorious stars! light full of highest virtue!
From whence, whate'er it be, my genius sprang,
With you arose, and set the Sire of life *,
When first I breathed the Tuscan air. With you
My lot was cast, when grace was given to mount
The lofty wheel which guides your revolutions.
To you, devoutly, my whole soul aspires
To gather courage for the bold adventure
That draws me onward tow'rds itself." †

Brunetto Latini (his tutor afterwards) is reported to have foretold the boy's illustrious destiny, on due consultation with the heavenly bodies that presided at his birth. Yet, superstitious as Dante appears to have been in this respect, in the twentieth canto of the "Inferno" he punishes astrologers, and those who presume to predict events, by twisting their heads over their shoulders, and making those for ever look backward who, too daringly, had looked forward into inscrutable futurity.

"People I saw within that nether glen,
Silent, and weeping as they went, with slow
Pace, like the chaunters of our litanies. ‡
As I gazed down on them, the chin of each
Seem'd marvellously perverted from the chest,
And from the reins the visage turn'd behind:

* The sun in the sign of the Twins.

† "S' io torni mai, Lettore, a quel devoto
Trionfo, per lo quale io piango spesso
Le mie peccata, e 'l petto mi percuoto,
Tu non avresti in tanto tratto e messo
Nel fuoco il dito, in quanto io vidi 'l segno,
Che segue 'l tauro, e fui dentro da esso.
O gloriose stelle! O lume pregno
Di gran virtù, 'dal quale io riconosco
Tutto (qual che si sia) il mio ingegno;
Con voi nasceva, e s'ascendeva vosco
Quegli, ch' è padre d'ogni mortal vita,
Quand' io senti' da prima l'aer Tosco.
E poi quando mi fu grazia largita
D'entrar nell' alta ruota che vi gira,
La vostra regiόn mi fu sortita.
A voi divotamente ora sospira
L' ánima mia, per aquistar virtute
Al passo forte che a se la tira."

‡ In religious processions on saint-days.

Wherefore, since none could look before him, all
Must needs walk backward; — so it may have chanced
To some one palsy-stricken, to be wrench'd
Thus all awry; but I have never seen
Aught like it, nor believe the like hath happened.
Reader, — so help thee Heaven to gather fruit
From this strange lesson! — think within thyself
If I could keep my countenance unwet
When I beheld our image so transposed,
That the eyes wept their tears between the shoulders."*

Though early deprived of his father by death, Dante appears to have been well attended to by his relatives and guardians, who placed him for education under Brunetto Latini and other eminent tutors. He was by them instructed not only in polite letters, but in those liberal accomplishments which became his rank and prospects in life. In these he excelled; yet, while he delighted in

* This passage is remarkable for having been imitated by Spenser in his personification of Forgetfulness: he, however, makes the feet and face at variance, which Dante does not, reversing the aspect of the one and the motion of the other: —

"But very uncouth sight was to behold
How he did fashion his untoward pace;
For as he forward moved his footing old,
To backward still was turn'd his wrinkled face,
Unlike to men, who, ever as they trace
Both feet and face one way are wont to lead."
Faerie Queene, book i. canto viii. st. 31.

The latter clause of Dante's lines has been remembered by Milton: —

"Sight so deform, what heart of man could long
Dry-eyed behold? — Adam could not, but wept."
Paradise Lost, book xi. ver. 495.

"E vidi gente per lo vallon tondo
Venir, tacendo e lagrimando, al passo
Che fanno le letane in questo mondo.
Come 'l viso mi scese in lor più basso,
Mirabilmente apparve esser travolto
Ciascim dal mento al principio del casso:
Che dalle reni era tornato il volto,
Ed indietro venir li convenia,
Perchè 'l veder dinanzi era lor tolto.
Forse per forza gia di parlasia
Si travolse cosi alcùn del tutto:
Ma io nol vidi, ne credo che sia.
Se Dio ti lasci, lettor, prender frutto
Di tua lezione, or pensa per te stesso
Com' io potea tener lo viso asciutto,
Quando la nostra imagine da presso
Vidi si torta, che 'l pianto degli occhi
Le natiche bagnava per lo fesso."

horsemanship, falconry, and all the manly as well as military exercises practised by persons of distinction in those days, he was, at the same time, so diligent a scholar, that he readily made himself master of all the crude learning then in vogue. It is stated by Pelli that, while yet a boy, he entered upon his noviciate at a convent of the Minor Friars. But his mind was too active and enterprising to enslave itself to dulness in any form ; and he withdrew before the term of probation was ended.

According to Boccaccio, before he could be either student, sportsman, soldier, or monk, he became a lover; and a lover thenceforward to the end of his life he appears to have remained, with a passion so pure and unearthly, that it has been gravely questioned whether his mistress were a real or an imaginary being. The former, however, happening to be quite as probable as the latter, all true youths and maidens will naturally choose to believe that which is most pleasant, and give the credence of the heart to every eulogium which the poet, throughout his works, has lavished upon his Beatrice, whatever greybeards may think of the following story:—One fine May-day, when, according to the custom of the country, parties of both sexes used to meet in family circles, and, under the roofs of common friends, rejoice on the return of the genial season, Folco Portinari, a Florentine of no mean parentage, had invited a great number of neighbours to partake of his hospitality. As it was common on such occasions for children to accompany their relatives, Dante Alighieri, then in his ninth year, had the good fortune to be present ; where, mingling with many other young folks, in their afternoon sports, he singled out, with the second sight of the future poet, that one whom his verse was destined to eternise. The little lady, a year younger than himself, was *Bicè* (the familiar abbreviation of *Beatricè*), daughter of the gentleman at whose house the festivities were held. She need not be pictured here ; for premature as such a fit must have been, every one who remembers a first love, at any age, will know how she

looked, how she spoke, how she stepped, and how her hero felt,—growing at every instant greater and better, and braver in his own esteem, that he might become worthy of hers: — suffice it to say, from Boccaccio, that Dante, though but a boy, received her beautiful image into his heart with such fondness of affection, that, from that day, it never departed thence.

In his "Vita Nuova" (a romantic and sentimental retrospect of his youth), he has himself described his raptures and his agonies in the commencement and progress of this passion; which was not extinguished, but refined; not buried with her body, but translated with its object, (her soul,) when Beatrice died, in 1290, at the age of twenty-four years. Judging from the general tenour of his poetry, of which his mistress was at once the inspirer and the theme, it must be presumed that the lady returned his noble attachment with corresponding tenderness and delicacy; though why they were not united by marriage has never been told. He intimates, indeed, that it was long before he could learn, by any token from herself, that his faithful passion was not hopeless. As usual in cases of this kind, a most unpoetical accident has been ill-naturedly interposed, by truth or tradition, to spoil a charm almost too exquisite to be more than a charm which the breath of five words might break. On the evidence of a marriage certificate, which Time unluckily dropped in his flight, and some poring antiquary picked up a century or two afterwards, it seems as though Beatrice became the wife of a cavalier de Bardi. Dante himself, however (who pretends to no bosom-secrets too dark to be uttered), never alludes to such a blight of his prospects on this side of that threefold world which he was afterwards privileged to explore, at her spontaneous intercession, that he might be purged from every baser flame than entire affection to herself, while she gave him in the eighth heaven a heart divided only with her God. After her decease, he intimates that he was tempted to infidelity to her memory (in which she was

the bride of his soul), by the appearance at a window of a lady who so much resembled his "late deceased saint," that he almost forgot *her* in retracing her own loveliness in the features of this new apparition. His tears flowed freely at the sight; and he felt comforted by the sympathy of the beautiful stranger in his sufferings. But when, after a little while, he found love to the living symbol growing up like a serpent among the flowers, he fled in terror from it, before the gaze which had gained such power over his senses had irrevocably fascinated him to destruction; and he bewailed, in the most humiliating terms, the frailty of his heart and the wandering of his eyes. It is, moreover, the glory of his great work that the posthumous affection of Beatrice herself is represented as having so troubled her spirit, that, even amidst the blessedness of Paradise, she devised means whereby her lover might be reclaimed from the irregularities into which he had fallen after her restraining presence had been withdrawn from him on earth, and that he might be prepared, by visions of the eternal world, for future and everlasting companionship with her in heaven.

Dante, as he grew up to manhood, and for several years afterwards, continued successfully to pursue his studies in the universities of Padua, Bologna, and Paris. In the latter city he is said to have held various theological disputations, alike creditable to his learning, eloquence, and acuteness; though, from the failure of pecuniary means, he could not remain long enough there to obtain academical honours. On the authority of Giovanni da Serraville, bishop of Fermo, it has been believed that he also visited Oxford, where, as elsewhere, his different exercises gained him,—according to the respective tastes of his admirers,—from some the praise of being a great philosopher, from others a great divine, and, from the rest, a great poet. Serraville, at the request of cardinal Saluzzo and two English bishops, (Nicholas Bubwith, of Bath, and Robert Halam, of Salisbury,) whom he met at the council of Constance,

translated Dante's "Divina Commedia" into Latin prose; of which one manuscript copy only, with a commentary annexed, is known to be in existence, in the Vatican library. The extraordinary interest which the two English prelates took in Dante's poem may be regarded as indirect, though of course very indecisive, evidence of his having been personally known at our famous university, and having been honourably remembered there. It is, however, certain that, soon after his decease, the "Divina Commedia" was in high repute among the few in this country who, during the reigns of Edward III. and Richard II., in a chivalrous age, cultivated polite letters. This is apparent from the numerous imitations of passages in it by Chaucer, who was then attempting to do for England what his magnificent prototype had recently done for Italy.

Uncertain as the traditions concerning this portion of Dante's life (and indeed of every other) may be, there is no doubt that he became early and intimately acquainted with the reliques of all the Roman writers then known in Italy. Among these, Virgil, Ovid, and Statius were his favourites, and naturally so, as excelling (each according to his peculiar genius) in marvellous and beautiful narrative, to which their youthful admirer's own sublime and daring genius intuitively led him. At the same time, he not less courageously and patiently groped his way through the labyrinths of school divinity, and the dark caverns of what was then deemed philosophy, under the bewildering guidance of Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. Full proof of the improvement which he made, both under classical and polemical tutors and prototypes, may be traced in all his compositions, prose as well as verse, from the earliest to the last: yet, that which was his own, it must be acknowledged, is ever the best; and if, in addition to a large proportion of this, there had not been a savour of originality communicated to every thing which he borrowed or had been taught, his works must have perished with those of his contemporaries, who are now either

nameless, or survive only as names in the titles of unread and unreadable volumes.

During this season of seed time for the mind, we are told that, notwithstanding his indefatigable labours in the acquirement and cultivation of knowledge, he appeared so cheerful, frank, and generous in deportment and disposition, that nobody would have imagined him to be such a devotee to literature in the stillness of the closet, or the open field of college exercises. On the contrary, he passed in public for a gallant and high-bred man of the world; following its customs and fashions, so far as might be deemed consistent in a person of honour, and independence, — qualities on which he sufficiently prided himself; for which, also, in after life, he dearly paid the price, — and paid it, like Aristides, by banishment.

But Beatrice dying in 1290 *, her lover is reported to have fallen into such a state of despondency, that his friends, fearing the most frightful effects upon his reason not less than upon his health, persuaded him, as a last resource, to marry. Accordingly he took to wife Madonna Gemma, of the house of Donati; one of the most powerful families of Tuscany, and unhappily one of the most turbulent where few could be called pacific. By her he had five sons and a daughter. Her husband's biographers (with few exceptions) have conspired to darken this lady's memory with the stigma of being an insufferable shrew, who rendered his life a martyrdom by domestic discomforts. A line in the "Inferno," Canto XVI., in which one of the lost spirits, Jacopo Rusticci, says,

> "La fiera moglie, più ch' altro, mi nuoce,"
>
> "More than aught else, my furious wife annoys me,"—

has often been quoted as referring, with indirect bitterness, to his own miserable union with a firebrand of a

* According to his own intimation in the *Purgatorio*, canto xxxii. ver. 2., where he speaks of his "eyes" being eager to relieve themselves of their "*ten* years' thirst," on her spiritual appearance to him; — the date of the visions being A. D. 1300, and the descent into the lower regions represented as having been made on Good Friday, 1266 years after the death of Christ. — *Inferno*, canto xxi.

woman: yet, in no passage throughout the whole of his long poem, does Dante cast the slightest shade upon her character; though, with the frankness of honest censure or undisguised resentment, he spares nobody else, friend or foe, in the distribution of what he deemed impartial justice. One thing is exceedingly in favour of his own amiable and affectionate nature, in the nearest connections of life: whenever he mentions children in his similes (and he mentions them often), it is always with exquisite delicacy or endearing playfulness; while, in the tenderest tones, he descants on their beauty, their innocence, their sports, and their sufferings. Mothers, too, are among the loveliest objects which he presents in those sweet interludes of real life which he delights to bring in, and does so with consummate address, to relieve the horrors of the infernal pit, the wearying pains of purgatory, and the insufferable glories of Paradise. Concerning Dante's wife it may therefore be fairly presumed, that she was less of either termagant or tormentor than has been generally imagined by his over-zealous editors. The petulance of Boccaccio and the gravity of Aretino (two of his earliest biographers) on this subject are ludicrously contrasted. The former affects to be quite shocked at the idea of the sublime and contemplative poet being forced to lead the dull household life of other men, and submit to certain petty annoyances of daily occurrence.—On these he expatiates most pathetically, as things which *might have been*, though he fairly acknowledges that he does not know that any of them *were*, the causes of long unhappiness and final separation between the parties. Aretino, on the other hand, in sober sadness (without any reference to the ill qualities of either), justifies Dante for condescending to be married, on the ground that many illustrious philosophers, including Socrates, the greatest of all, were husbands and fathers, and held offices of state, in perfect compatibility with their intellectual pursuits!

It should not be overlooked, in mitigation of her occa-

sional asperities, that, Madonna Gemma being the near kinswoman of Corso Donati, Dante's most formidable and inveterate rival in the party feuds of Florence, some drops of the gall of political rancour may have been infused into the matrimonial cup. The poet's known and avowed passion for Beatrice, living and dead, was alone sufficient to afflict a high-minded woman with the rankling consciousness that she had not all her husband's heart. It is, moreover, no small proof of her submission to his will and pleasure, that their only daughter bore the name of his first — last — only love, if we are to believe all the protestations of his verse. Be these things as they may, it must be concluded that he was coupled with a most unpoetical yoke-mate; and she with a lord and master not easy to be ruled by her or any body else. It has been loosely stated that "the poet, not possessing the patience of Socrates, separated himself from his wife, with such vehement expressions of dislike that he never afterwards allowed her to sit down in his presence." When this happened — if it ever *so* happened — does not appear; nothing further seems certain, except that she did *not* follow her husband into exile: but Boccaccio himself acknowledges, that after that event, having secured (not without difficulty) a small portion of his effects from confiscation as her dower, she preserved herself and their little children from the wretchedness of absolute poverty, by such expedients of industry and economy as she had never before been accustomed to practise.

It has been already intimated, that, though in all the logomachies of the schools Dante was an eager and skilful disputant, yet he was left behind by none of his contemporaries in those personal accomplishments which became his station. In the mean while he cultivated with constitutional ardour and diligence those higher qualifications, which, in the sequel, enabled him to serve his country as a citizen, a soldier, and a magistrate, under circumstances that called forth all his talents, valour, firmness, wisdom, and discretion; though, judg-

ing from the issue, the latter failed him oftener than the former. Eloquent, brave, and resolute he always was; but not always wise and discreet. This, indeed, might be presumed; for in the pursuit of distinction,—instead of attaching himself to the selfish and mercenary professions which oftenest lead to wealth, power, and family aggrandisement,—he preferred those generous studies which most exalt, enrich, and adorn the mind, but yet, while they gratify the taste of their votary, rather advance him in moral and intellectual eminence than to temporal and substantial prosperity. These, therefore, were exercises calculated to awaken and display the energies and resources of a temper formed to conceive, attempt, and achieve great things, so far—and perhaps so far only—as depended on his individual exertions. In the solitary case wherein he had official authority to direct difficult public affairs he failed so irrecoverably, that, during the residue of his life, he was more a sufferer than an actor in the troubles of those hideous times.

Italy, it must be observed, was still distracted with strife, in every form that strife could assume, between the factions of the Guelfs and Ghibelines;—the former, adherents of the pope; the latter, of the emperor of Germany. These factions not only arrayed state against state, but frequently divided people of the same province, the same city, and the same family against one another, in the most violent and implacable hostility,—hostility, violent in proportion as it was irrational, and implacable in proportion as it was unnatural; being, in every instance, and on both sides, contrary to the interests of their respective communities. Lombardy, especially since the Cisalpine conquests of Charlemagne, had never ceased to be a snare to his successors. The popes, who at first had affected spiritual dominion only, after the grant of territorial possessions, by that deed of Constantine to Silvester, which, having disappeared from earth, may be found, according to the veritable testimony of Ariosto, in the moon, the receptacle of all lost

things *, gradually aspired to secular power. But all their ambition and influence failed, in the end, to spread their secular sovereignty beyond those provinces adjacent to Rome, which they yet retain by courtesy of the catholic potentates of Europe.

At the time of Dante's birth, the Guelf or papal party had recently recovered their ascendancy at Florence, after having been expatriated for several years, in consequence of their disastrous overthrow at the battle of Monte Aperto. The poet was therefore educated in Guelfic principles, and adhered to them till his banishment, when the perfidious interference of the pope with the independence of his native city, and the atrocious hostility of its citizens against himself and his friends, compelled him to take part with the imperialists.

The first public character in which we find the patriotic poet distinguishing himself was that of a soldier. In one of the petty wars that were perpetually occurring between the little irascible republics in the north of Italy, the Florentines gained a decisive victory over their neighbours of Arezzo (who had harboured the Ghibelline refugees), at the battle of Campaldino, A. D. 1289. On this occasion, Dante, who served among the cavalry, was not only exposed to imminent peril at the commencement of the action, when that body was partially routed by the impetuosity of the enemy's charge,

* "Di varii fiori ad un gran monte passa,
Ch' ebber già buono odore, or puzzan forte,
Questo era il dono (se però dir lece,)
Che Constantino al buon Silvestro fece."

Orlando Furioso, canto xxxiv.

Thus translated by Milton : —

"Then pass'd he to a flowery mountain green,
Which once smelt sweet, now stinks as odiously
This was that gift (if you the truth will have)
That Constantine to good Silvester gave."

Dante alludes, with bitterness, to the same unhappy gift, in three lines, which Milton has also translated with more faithfulness than felicity : —

"Ahi! Constantin, di quanto mal fu matre,
Non la tua conversion, ma quella dote,
Che da te prese il primo ricco patre."—*Dell' Inferno*, canto xix.

"Ah Constantine! of how much ill was cause
Not thy conversion, but those rich domains,
Which the first wealthy pope receiv'd of thee."

but when the squadron had rallied again on reaching the lines of infantry, and thence returned to the attack, he fought in the first rank, and displayed such extraordinary valour, as to claim a proud share in the glory of that day. To this conflict, and the particular service in which he had been engaged, he seems to allude in Canto XXII. of the Inferno. Having mentioned the signal given by Barbariccia (serjeant of a file of demons, appointed to escort Dante and Virgil over a certain dangerous pass on their journey,)—a signal too absurd to be repeated here, either in English or Italian, he says:—

"I have seen cavalry upon their march,
Rush to the combat, rally on the field,
And sometimes seek for safety in retreat:
I have seen jousts and tournaments array'd;
Seen clouds of skirmishers sweep through your fields,
Ye Aretines! and spoilers, lay them waste;
Drum, cymbal, trumpet, beacon from tower-top,
And other strange or native things their signals;
But never, at the blast of instrument
So barbarous have witness'd horse or foot,
Or ship, by star or landmark, put in motion:
—With those ten demons thus we took our way;
Fell company! but, as the proverb saith,
At church with saints, with gluttons in the tavern."*

In the following year Dante was again in the field, at the siege of Caprona. To this he alludes in Canto XXI. of the Inferno, where, under convoy of the aforementioned fiends, he compares his fears lest they

* "I' vidi già cavalier muover campo,
E comminciare stormo, e far lor mostra,
E tal volta partir per loro scampo:
Corridor vidi per la terra vostra,
O Aretini! e vidi gir gualdane,
Ferir torneamenti, e correr giostra,
Quando con trombe, e quando con campane,
Con tamburi, e con cenni di castella,
E con cose nostrali, e con istrane:
Ne già con si diversa cennamella,
Cavalier vidi muover, ne pedoni,
Ne nave a segno di terra, o di stella.
Noi andavam con li dieci demoni;
Ah! fiera compagnia!—ma nella chiesa
Co' Santi, e in taverna co' ghiottoni."

should break truce with him and his companion, to the apprehensions of the garrison of that fortress when they marched out on condition of being permitted to depart unmolested with their arms and property; but were so terrified, on seeing the multitude and the rage of their enemies, who cried, "Stop them! stop them! kill them! kill them!" as they passed along, that they submitted to be sent in irons, as prisoners, to Lucca, for safeguard.

> "Wherefore I moved right on towards my guide,
> The devils marshalling themselves before,
> For much I fear'd lest they should not keep faith:
> So saw I once Caprona's garrison
> Come trembling forth, upon capitulation,
> To find themselves among so many foes.
> I crouch'd with my whole frame beside my master,
> Nor could I turn mine eyes away from watching
> Their physiognomy, which was not good." *

During this active period of his citizenship, Dante is stated to have been frequently employed on important embassies; and, among others, to the kings of Naples, Hungary, and France; in all of which his eloquence and address enabled him to acquit himself with honour and advantage to his country: but as there is no allusion in any of his works, even to the most distinguished of these, it is very questionable whether the traditions are not, in many cases, wholly unwarranted; and probably founded upon misapprehension of the verbiage and bombast of Boccaccio, in his account of the political, philosophical, and literary labours of his hero.

In the year 1300, Dante was chosen, by the suffrages of the people, chief prior of his native city; and from that era of his arrival at the highest honour to which

* "Perch' i' mi mossi, e a lui venni ratto:
E i diavoli si fecer tutti avanti,
Si ch' io temetti non tenesser patto.
E cosi vid' io già temer li fanti,
Ch' uscivan pattegiati di Caprona,
Veggendo se tra nemici cotanti.
I' m'accostai con tutta la persona
Lungo 'l mio duca, e non torceva gli occhi
Dalla sembianza lor, ch'era non buona."

his ambition could aspire, he himself dated all the miseries which (like the file of evil spirits above mentioned) accompanied him thenceforward to the end of his life. In one of his epistles, quoted by Aretino, he says,—"All my calamities had their origin and occasion in my unhappy priorship, of which, though I might not for my wisdom have been worthy, yet on the ground of age and fidelity was I not unworthy; ten years having elapsed since the battle of Campaldino, in which the Ghibelline party was routed and nearly exterminated; wherein, also, I proved myself no novice in arms, but experienced great perils in the various fortunes of the fight, and the highest gratification in the issue of it." Since that triumph, the Guelfs had maintained undisputed predominance in Tuscany; but the citizens of Florence split into two minor factions as bitterly opposed to each other as the Guelfs and Ghibellines.

The following circumstance (considerably varied in particulars by different narrators) has been mentioned as the origin of this schism:—Two branches of the family of Cancellieri divided the patronage of Pistoia, which was then subject to Florence, between them. The heads of these were Gulielmo and Bertaccio. In playing at snow-balls, a son of the first happened to give the son of the second a black eye. Gulielmo, knowing the savage disposition of his kinsman, immediately sent his son to offer submission for the unlucky hit. Bertaccio, eager to avail himself of a pretext for quarrelling with the rival section of his house, seized the boy, and chopped off the hand which flung the snowball, drily observing, that blows could only be compensated by blows—not with words. Another version of the story is, that the young gentlemen, quarrelling over some game, drew their swords, when one wounded the other in the face; in retribution for which, Foccacio, brother to the latter, cut off his offending cousin's hand. The father of the mutilated lad immediately called upon his friends to avenge the inhuman outrage; Bertaccio's dependants not less promptly armed them-

selves to maintain his cause; and a civil war was ready to break out in the heart of the city. An ancestor of the Cancellieri family having married a lady named *Bianchi*, in honour of her one of the parties took the denomination of *Bianchi* (whites), when the other, in defiance, assumed the reverse, and styled themselves *Neri* (blacks).

This happened during the priorship of Dante, who, with the approbation of his colleagues, summoned the leaders of the antagonist factions to repair to Florence, to prevent that extremity of violence with which they threatened not Pistoia only, but the whole commonwealth. This, as Leonardo Bruni observes, was importing the plague to the capital, instead of taking means to repress it upon the spot where it had already appeared. For it so fell out, that Florence itself was principally under the influence of two great families,—the Cerchi and the Donati,—habitually jealous of one another, and each watching for opportunity to obtain the ascendancy. When, therefore, the hostages for preserving the peace of Pistoia arrived, the Bianchi were hospitably entertained by the Cerchi, and the Neri by the Donati; the natural consequence of which was, that the people of Florence were far more annoyed by the acquisition, than those of the neighbouring city were benefited by the riddance of so troublesome a crew. What these incendiary spirits had been doing in a small place, on a small scale, they forthwith began to do on a large scale, in a large place. Jealousies, fears, and antipathies were easily awakened among the families with which the partisans respectively associated. From these, through every rank of citizens down to the lowest, the contagion spread; first seizing the youth, who were sanguine and restless, but soon infecting persons of all ages; till every man who had a mind or an arm to influence or to act, enlisted himself with one side or the other. In the course of a few months, from whisperings the discontents rose to clamours, from words to blows, and from feuds in private dwellings to battles in the streets; so that not the me-

tropolis only, but the whole territory, became involved in unnatural contention.

While this was in process, the heads of the Neri held a meeting by night in the church of the Holy Trinity, at which a plan was suggested to induce pope Boniface VIII. to constitute Charles of Valois, (who was brother to Philip the Fair, king of France, and then commanded an army under his holiness against the emperor,) mediator of differences and reformer-general of abuses in the state. The Bianchi, having received information of this clandestine assembly, and the unpatriotic project which had been devised at it, took grievous umbrage, and went in a body, with arms in their hands, to the chief prior, with whom they remonstrated sharply upon what they deemed a privy conspiracy hatched for the purpose of expelling themselves and their friends from the city; at the same time demanding summary punishment on the offenders. The Neri, alarmed in their turn, flew likewise to arms, and assailed the prior with the same complaint and demand reversed, — namely, that their adversaries had plotted to drive them (the Neri) into exile under false pretences; and requiring that they (the Bianchi) should be sent into banishment, to preserve the public tranquillity.

The danger was imminent, and prompt decision to avert it indispensable. The prior and magistrates, therefore, by the advice of Dante their chief, who was the Cicero in this double conspiracy, though neither so politic nor so fortunate as his eloquent archetype, appealed to the people at large to support the executive government; and, having conciliated their favour, banished the principal instigators of tumult on both sides, including Corso Donati (Dante's wife's kinsman) of the Neri party, who, with his accomplices, was confined in the castle of Pieve in Perugia; while Guido Cavalcanti (Dante's own particular friend) and others of the Bianchi faction were sent to Serrazana.

This disturbance, and the severe remedy necessary to be adopted, painfully tried the best feelings of Dante,

who seems to have acted on truly independent principles in the affair, though suspected at the time of favouring the Bianchi. That, indeed, was probable; for though as chief magistrate he knew no man by his colours, yet, being a genuine Florentine, — and such he remained when Florence had banished and proscribed him, — he could not but be opposed to so preposterous a scheme as that of bringing in a stranger to lord it over his native city, under pretence of assuaging the animosities of malecontents, who cared for nothing but their own personal, family, or party aggrandisement, at the expense of the common weal.

This apparent impartiality was openly arraigned, when the Bianchi exiles were permitted to come back after a short absence, while the Neri remained under proscription. Dante vindicated himself by saying, that he had attached himself to neither party; that in condemning the heads of both he had acted solely for the public safety; and at home had used his utmost endeavours to reconcile the adverse families, who had implicated all their fellow-citizens in their feuds. With respect to the return of the Bianchi, he denied that it had been allowed on his authority, his priorate having expired before that event took place; and, moreover, that their release had been rendered necessary by the premature death of Guido Cavalcanti, who had been killed by the pestilent air of Serrazana. The pope, however, eagerly availed himself of the opportunity as a plea for sending Charles of Valois to Florence, to restore tranquillity by conciliation. That prince accordingly entered the city in triumph at the head of his troops, with a solemn assurance that liberty, property, and personal safety should in no instance be violated. In consequence of this he was well received by the people; but he had no sooner seated himself in influence than he obtained the recall of the Neri, who were his partisans. Then, having secured his authority by their presence, he threw off the mask, and began to play the part of dictator within the walls, as well as throughout

the adjacent territory, by causing 600 of the principal men of the Bianchi to be driven forth into exile.

At the time of this expatriation of his friends, Dante was absent, having undertaken an embassy to Rome to solicit the good offices of the pope towards pacifying his fellow-citizens without foreign interference. Boccaccio records a singular specimen at once of his self-confidence, and his disparagement of others, which, if true, betrays the most unamiable feature of his character, and throws additional light on a circumstance not otherwise well accounted for, — why, with all his admirable qualities, Dante was unhappy in domestic life, and in public life made so many and such inveterate enemies. — When his associates in the government proposed this embassy to him, he haughtily enquired, — " If I go, who will stay? If I stay, who will go ?" It was fortunate for the poet that his holiness and himself, on this occasion, were unconsciously playing at cross purposes, though he was beaten in the game, — the very intervention which he had gone to deprecate taking place whilst he was on the journey. Had he been at home, it is not improbable that death, rather than banishment with the Bianchi, would have been his lot, from the exasperation of the Neri against him individually, whom they regarded as the chief agent in their disgrace and exile, as well as the patron of their rivals. It is remarkable that the pretext on which the failing party were now expelled was, that *they* had secretly intrigued with Pietro Ferranti, the confidant of Charles of Valois, to give him the castle of Prato, on condition that he prevailed upon his master to allow them the ascendancy under him in Florence. Charles himself countenanced the accusation, and affected high displeasure at the insulting offer, as derogatory to his immaculate purity; though the purport of it was no other than to concede to him the express object of his ambition, if he *would* grant to the Bianchi faction what he *did* grant to the perfidious Neri. A document was long preserved as the genuine letter to Ferranti, with the seals and signatures of the principal Bianchi

attached, containing the traitorous proposal; but Leonardo Aretino, who had himself seen it in the public archives, declares his perfect conviction that it was a forgery.

Of participation in such baseness (had his partisans been really guilty of it), Dante must stand clearly acquitted by every one who takes his character from the matter-of-fact statements, perverted as they are, of his adversaries themselves, much more from the unimpeachable evidence of his own writings; — open, undaunted, high-spirited, and generous as a friend, he was not less violent, acrimonious, and undisguisedly vindictive as an enemy. So exasperated, however, were the Neri against him, that they demolished his dwelling, confiscated his property, and decreed a fine of 8000 lire against him, with banishment for two years; not for any crime of which he had been convicted, but under pretence of contumacy, because he did not appear to a citation which had been issued when they knew him to be absent, — absent, it might be said, on their own business (his mission to Rome), where he could not be aware of the nature of his imputed offence till he heard of the condign punishment with which it had been thus prematurely visited. In the course of a few weeks a further inculpation of Dante and his associates was promulged, under which they were condemned to perpetual exile, with the merciless provision that, if any of them thereafter fell into the hands of their persecutors, they should be burnt alive. And this execrable measure seems to have been determined upon before the exiled party had made any attempt, by force of arms, to reenter Florence.

When Dante was informed at Rome of the revolution in Florence, he hastened to Siena, where, learning the full extent of his misfortune, he was driven, it may be said, by necessity to join himself to his homeless countrymen in that neighbourhood, who were concerting (though with little of mutual confidence, and miserably inadequate means) how they might compel their fellow-

citizens to receive them back. Arezzo, the city of the Aretines (with whom Dante had combated at Campaldino), afforded them an asylum, and became the head-quarters of the Bianchi; who thenceforward, from being, like the Neri, Guelfs, transferred their affections, or rather their wrongs and their vengeance, to the Ghibellines; deeming the adherents of the emperor less the enemies of their country than their adversaries were. Their affairs were managed by a council of twelve, of whom Dante was one. Great numbers of malecontents from Bologna, Pistoia, and the adjacent provinces of Northern Italy, gradually flocking to their standard, — in the course of two years they were sufficiently strong to take the field with a force of cavalry and foot exceeding 10,000, under count Alessandro da Romena, and to commence active hostilities. By a bold and sudden march, they attempted to surprise Florence itself, and were so far successful that their advanced guard got possession of one of the gates; but the main body being attacked and defeated on the outside of the walls, the former gallant corps was overpowered by the garrison; and the enterprise itself, after the campaign of a few days, was abandoned altogether. Dante, according to general belief, accompanied this unfortunate expedition; and so did Pietro Petracco, the father of the celebrated Petrarca (Petrarch), who had been expelled with the Bianchi from Florence; and it is stated, that on the very night on which the army of the exiles marched against the city, Petracco's wife Eletta gave birth to the poet who was to succeed Dante as the glory of his country's literature.

After this miscarriage Dante quitted the confederacy, disgusted by the bickerings, jealousies, and bad faith of the heterogeneous and unmanageable multitude, which common calamities had driven together, but could not cement by common interests. The poet refers to this motley and discordant crew in the latter lines of the celebrated passage, in which he represents his ancestor, Cacciaguida, as prophesying his future banishment with

the miseries and mortifications which he should suffer from the ingratitude of his countrymen:—

"For thou must leave behind thee every thing
Thine heart holds dearest.— This will be the first
Shaft which the bow of exile shoots against thee:
And thou must prove how salt the bread that's eaten
At others' tables, and how hard the path
To climb and to go down a stranger's stairs:
But what shall weigh the heaviest on thy shoulders,
Will be the base and evil company
With which thy lot hath cast thee in that valley;
For every thankless, lawless, reckless wretch
Shall turn against thee:— yet confusion, soon,
Of face shall cover them, not thee, with blushes;
Their brutishness will be so manifest,
That to have stood alone will be thy glory."*

Del Paradiso, xvii

To the personal humiliations of which he chewed the cud in bitter secrecy, through years of heart-breaking dependence on the precarious bounty of others, there is a striking but forced allusion at the close of the eleventh canto of the "Purgatorio." Dante enquires concerning a proud spirit bent double under a huge burden of stones, which he is condemned to carry for as many years as he had lived, till he shall be sufficiently humbled to pass muster through the flames into Paradise. This is Provenzano Salvani, who for his acts of outrageous tyranny would have been doomed to a much harder penance, but for one good deed.—A friend of his being kept prisoner

* "Tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta
Più caramente; e questo è quello strale,
Che l'arco dell' esilio pria saetta.
Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
Lo pane altrui, e com'è duro calle
Lo scendere, e 'l salir per l'altrui scale.
E quel, che più ti graverà le spalle,
Sarà la campagnia malvagia e scempia,
Con la qual tu cadrai in questa valle:
Che tutta ingrata, tutta matta ed empia
Si farà contra te: ma poco appresso
Ella, non tu, n'avrà rossa la tempia.
Di sua bestialitate il suo processo
Farà la pruova, sì ch' a te fia bello
Averti fatta parte per te stesso."

by Charles of Anjou, and threatened with death unless a ransom of 10,000 golden florins were paid for his freedom, Salvani so far degraded himself as to stand (to kneel, say some,) in the public market-place of Siena, with a carpet spread on the ground before him, imploring, with the cries and importunity of a common beggar, the charitable contributions of every passenger towards raising the required sum. This he accomplished, and his friend was saved.

> " 'He in his height of glory,' said the other,
> 'Casting aside all shame, spontaneously,
> Stood in the market of Siena, begging;
> He, to redeem his friend from infamy
> And death, in Charles's dungeons, did what made him
> Tremble through every vein. — No more; my speech
> Is dark; thy countrymen, ere long, will do
> That which will help thee to interpret it." *

In despair of being able to force his way, sword in hand, back to Florence, Dante next endeavoured, by supplicating the good offices of individuals connected with the government, by expostulatory addresses to the people, and even by appeals to foreign princes, to obtain a reversal of his unrighteous sentence. Disappointment, however, followed upon disappointment, till, hope deferred having made the heart sick, he grew so impatient under the sense of wrong and ignominy, that he again had recourse to the summary but perilous redress of violence; — not indeed by force which *he* could command, though one in a million for energy, courage, and perseverance; but a powerful auxiliary having appeared in 1308, he gave up his whole soul to the main object of his desire at this time, — the chastisement of his inexorable fellow-citizens. Henry of Luxembourg, having

* " Quando vivea più glorioso, disse,
Liberamente nel campo di Siena,
Ogni vergogna deposta, s'affisse:
Egli, per trar l'amico suo di pena,
Che sostenea nella prigion di Carlo,
Si condusse a tremar per ogni vena.
Più non dirò, e scuro so che parlo;
Ma poco tempo andià, che i tuoi vicini
Faranno sì che tu potrai chiosarlo."

been raised to the throne of Germany, eagerly engaged, like his predecessors, in the delusive contest for the "iron crown" of Italy, though "Luke's iron crown"* (placed red hot on the brow of an unsuccessful aspirant to that of Hungary) was hardly more painful or more certainly fatal than this, except that it was far more expeditious in putting the wearer out of torture. Dante now rose from the dust of self-abasement, openly professed himself a Ghibelline, and changed his tones of supplication into those of menace against his refractory countrymen. Henry himself denounced terrible retribution upon the Guelfs, and at the head of an army invaded the Florentine territory; from which, however, he was compelled to make an early retreat; and the magnificent flourish of drums and trumpets, with which the imperial actor entered, was followed by a dead march, that closed the scene before he had turned round upon the stage—except to hurry away. He died in 1313, poisoned, it was reported, by a consecrated wafer. To this prince Dante dedicated his political treatise, in Latin, "De Monarchia," in which he eloquently asserts the rights of the emperor in Italy against the usurpations of the pope. He has been accused of exciting Henry to abandon the siege of Brescia, and undertake that of Florence; though, from regard to his native land, he himself forebore to accompany the expedition. He had affected no such scruple when the Bianchi, like trodden worms, turned upon the parent foot which spurned them from the soil where they were bred. There must, therefore, have been some other motive than patriotism, —nobody will suspect that it was cowardice,—which restrained him from witnessing the expected humiliation of his persecutors.

Several of his biographers state, that after this consummation of his ruin,—a third decree having been passed against him at Florence, — the poet retired into France, and strove to reconcile his unsubdued spirit to his fate, or to forget both it and himself in those fashion-

* See Goldsmith's Traveller, towards the end.

able theological controversies, for which he was, perhaps, better qualified than either for the council-chamber or the battle-field. This, however, is doubtful, and, in fact, very improbable, when we recollect that, next to the malice of the Neri, he was indebted for his misfortunes to Charles of Valois, their patron, who was brother to Philip the Fair, king of France. Be this as it may, the remainder of Dante's life was spent in wandering from one petty court to another, in exile and poverty, accepting the means of subsistence, almost as alms, from lukewarm friends, from hospitable strangers, and even from generous adversaries. Hence we trace him, at uncertain periods, through Lombardy, Tuscany, and Romagna, as an admitted, welcomed, admired, or merely a tolerated guest, according to the liberality or caprice of his patrons for the time being. Little more can be recorded of these "evil days" and "years," of which he was compelled to say, "I have no pleasure in them," than a few questionable anecdotes of his caustic humour, and the names of some of those who showed him kindness in his affliction.

Among the latter may be honourably mentioned Busone da Gubbio, who first afforded him shelter at Arezzo, whither he himself had been banished from Florence as an incorrigible Ghibelline; but being a brother poet, he was too noble to let political prejudice (Dante was at that time a Guelf) interfere either with his compassion towards an illustrious fugitive, or his veneration for those rare talents which ought every where to have raised the unhappy possessor above contempt, though, in some instances, they seem to have exposed him to it. Yet he knew well how to resent indignity. While residing at Verona with Can' Grande de la Scala (one of his most distinguished protectors), it happened one day, according to the rude usages of those times, that the prince's jester, or some casual buffoon about the palace, was introduced at table, to divert the high-born company there with his waggeries. In this the arch fellow succeeded so egregiously, that Dante, from scorn

or mortification, showed signs of chagrin, whereupon Can' Grande sarcastically asked,—"How comes it, Dante, that you, with all your learning and genius, cannot delight me and my friends half so much as this fool does with his ribaldry and grimaces?"—"Because *like loves like*," was the pithy retort of the poet, in the phrase of the proverb. Another story of the kind is told by Cinthio Geraldi.—On occasion of a jovial entertainment, Can' Grande, or his jester, had placed a little boy under the table, to gather all the bones that were thrown down upon the floor by the guests, and lay them about the feet of Dante. After dinner these were unexpectedly shown above board, as tokens of his feasting prowess. "You have done great things to day!" exclaimed the prince, affecting surprise at such an exhibition. "Far otherwise," returned the poet; "for if I had been a dog, (*Cane*, his patron's name,) I should have devoured bones and all, as it appears you have done." *

Other grandees, who gave the indignant wanderer an occasional asylum from the blasts of persecution, were the marchese Malespina, who, though belonging to the antagonist party, cordially entertained him in Lunigiana; the conte Guido Salvatico, of Cassentino; the signori della Faggiuolo, among the mountains of Urbino; and also the fathers of the monastery of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana, in the district of Gubbio. In this romantic retreat, according to the Latin inscription under a marble bust of him against a wall in one of the chambers, Dante is recorded to have written a considerable portion of the "Divina Commedia." In a tower belonging to the conti Falucci, in the same territory, there is a tradition that he was often employed in the like manner. At the castle of Tulmino, the residence of

* A silly practical joke, which has probably been often repeated in such parties, as it much resembles one told by Josephus respecting the young Hyrcanus. In fact, there is scarcely "a good thing" of this base class, which, on investigation, does not become apocryphal from too much evidence.

the patriarch of Aquileia, a rock has been pointed out as a favourite resort of the inspired poet, while engaged in that marvellous and melancholy composition.

> "There, nobly pensive, *Dante* sat and thought."

Marius, banished from his country, and resting upon the ruins of Carthage, may have appeared a more august and mournful object; but Dante, in exile, want, and degradation, on a lonely crag, meditating thoughts, combining images, and creating a language for both in which they should for ever speak, presents a far more sublime and touching spectacle of fallen grandeur renovating itself under decay. Marius, having "mewed his mighty youth," flew back to Rome like the eagle to his quarry, surfeited himself with vengeance, and died in a debauch of blood, leaving a name to be execrated through all generations: Dante did not return to Florence; living or dead he did not return; but his name, cast out and abhorred as it had been, stands the earliest and the greatest of a long line of Tuscan poets, rivalling the most illustrious of their country, not excepting those of even Rome and Ferrara.

Dante's last and most magnanimous patron was Guido Novello da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, who was himself a poet, and a munificent benefactor of men of letters. This nobleman was the father of Francesca di Rimini, whose fatal love has given her a place on the most splendid page of the "Divina Commedia;" no other episode being told with equal beauty and pathos: yet so brief and simple is the narrative, that, even if the circumstances were as unexceptionably pure as they are insidiously delicate, translation ought hardly to be attempted; for the labour would be fruitless. Dante himself could not have given his masterpiece in precisely corresponding terms in another language; though, had any other been his own, it need not be doubted that in it he would have found words to tell his tale as well. It is not what a poet finds a language to be, but what he makes it,

that constitutes the charm, not to be imitated, of his style. This is the despair of translators, though few seem to have suspected the existence of such a secret.

The mental sufferings of the poet during his nineteen years of banishment, ending in death, oftener find utterance, through his writings, in bitter invectives and prophetic denunciations against his enemies and traducers, than in strains of lamentation; yet would his wounds bleed afresh, and the anguish of his spirit be renewed with all the tenderness of wronged but passionate attachment, at every endeared recollection of the land of his nativity;—the city where he had been cradled and had grown up — where Beatrice was born, beloved, and buried—where he had himself attained the highest honours of the state, and, in his own esteem, deserved the lasting gratitude of his fellow-citizens, instead of experiencing their implacable hatred. Haughty yet humbled, vindictive yet forgiving, it is manifest, even in his darkest moods, that his heart yearned for reconciliation; that he pined in home-sickness wherever he went, and would gladly have renounced all his wrath, and submitted to any self-denial consistent with honour, to be received back into his country. For, much as he loved the latter, — nay, madly as he loved it in his paroxysms of exasperation, — he wrapt himself up tighter in the mantle of his integrity as the storm raged more vehemently; and, as the conflict went harder against him, grasped his honour, like his sword, never to be surrendered but with life: to preserve these, he submitted to lose all beside.

Boccaccio says, that, at a certain time, some friend obtained from the Florentine government leave for Dante to return, on condition that he should remain a while in prison, then do penance at the principal church during a festival solemnity, and afterwards be exempt from further punishment for his offences against the state. As might be expected, he spurned the ignominious terms. A letter, preserved in the Laurentian

library *, seems to refer to this circumstance, which, till the modern discovery of that document, required stronger testimony than the random verbiage of Boccaccio to confirm its credibility. It is addressed to a correspondent at Florence, whom the writer styles "father." The following are extracts; the original is in Latin. Having alluded to some overtures for pardon and return, nearly corresponding with those above mentioned, he proceeds: —

"Can such a recall to his country, after fifteen years' exile, be glorious to Dante Alighieri? Has innocence, which is manifest to every one, — have toil and fatigue in perpetuated studies, merited this? Away from the man trained up in philosophy, the dastard humiliation of an earth-born heart, that, like some petty pretender to knowledge, or other base wretch, *he* should endure to be delivered up in chains! Away from the man who demands justice, the thought that, after having suffered wrong, he should make terms by his money with those who have injured him, as though *they* had done righteously! — No, father! this is not the way of return to my country for me. Yet, if you, or any body else, can find another which shall not compromise the fame and the honour of Dante, I will not be slow to take it. But if by such an one he may not return to Florence, — to Florence he will never return. What then? May I not every where behold the sun and the stars? Can I not every where under heaven meditate on the most noble and delightful truths, without first rendering myself inglorious, aye infamous, before the people and city of Florence, — and this, for fear I should want bread!"

Far different return to Florence, and far other scene in his favourite church there, had he sometimes ventured to anticipate as possible. This we learn from the opening of the twenty-fifth canto of the "Paradiso," where, even in the presence of Beatrice and St. Peter, he thus unbosoms the long-cherished hope; conscious of high desert, as well as grievous injustice, which he would nevertheless most fervently forgive, could restoration to his country be obtained on terms "consistent with the fame and honour of Dante."

* See the Edinburgh Review, vol. xxx. p. 349.

"If e'er the sacred song, which heaven and earth
Have lent a hand to frame,—which, many a year,
Hath kept me lean with thought,—o'ercome the rage
That bars re-entrance to the lovely fold,
Where, like a lamb, I slept; the foe of wolves,
Waging inveterate war against its life;
With other voice, with other fleece, will I
Return, a poet, and receive the laurel
At that baptismal font, where I was brought
Into the faith which makes souls dear to God."*

In the same church here alluded to (San Giovanni), at Florence, there remained till lately a stone-remembrancer of Dante, in his prosperous days, scarcely less likely than "storied urn or animated bust," to awaken that sweet and voluntary sadness by which we love to associate dead things with the memory of those who once have lived. This was no other than an ancient bench of masonry which ran along the wall,

"South of the church, east of the belfry-tower,"

on which, according to long-believed tradition, the future poet of the other world was wont to

"Sit conversing in the sultry time,"

with those,

"Who little thought that in his hand he held
The balance, and assign'd, at his good pleasure,
To each his place in the invisible world."

ROGERS's *Italy.*

Here also, according to his own record, in rescuing a child which had fallen into the water, he accidentally broke one of the baptismal fonts,—a circumstance which seems to have been maliciously misrepresented as an

* "Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro,
Al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra,
Sì che m' ha fatto per più anni macro,
Vinca la crudeltà, che fuor mi serra
Del bello ovile, ov' io dormì' agnello
Nimico a' lupi, che gli danno guerra;
Con altra voce omai, con altro vello
Ritornerò poeta, ed in sul fonte
Del mio battesmo prenderò 'l capello;
Perocchè nella fede, che fa conte
L'anime a Dio."

act of wilful sacrilege. His stern anxiety to clear himself is characteristically indicated by the brief but dignified attestation of the real fact, in the last line of the following singular parallel between objects not otherwise likely to be brought into comparison with each other. Describing the wells in which, head-downward, simoniacal offenders (among the rest pope Nicholas III.) were tormented with flames, that glanced from heel to toe along the up-turned soles of their feet, he says,—

> " The sides and bottom of that livid rock
> Were scoop'd into round holes, of equal size,
> Which seem'd not less nor larger than the fonts
> For baptism, in my beautiful St. John's;
> And one of which, not many years ago,
> I broke to save a drowning child from death:
> — Be this my seal to undeceive the world." *
>
> *Dell' Inferno*, canto xix.

Dante resided several years at Ravenna, with the noble-minded Guido da Polenta, who, of his own accord, had invited him thither, and who, to the last moment of his life, made him feel no other burden in his service than gratitude for benefits bestowed with such a grace as though the giver, and not the receiver, were laid under obligation. By him being sent on an embassy to Venice, with the government of which Guido had an unhappy dispute, Dante not only failed to accomplish a reconciliation, but was even refused an audience, and compelled to return by land for fear of the enemy's fleet, which had already commenced hostilities along the coast. He arrived at Ravenna broken-hearted with the disappointment, and died soon afterwards, — according to his epitaph, on the 14th of September, 1321, though some authorities date his demise in July preceding.

* " I' vidi per le coste, e per lo fondo,
Piena la pietra livida di fori
D'un largo tutti, e ciascuno era tondo.
Non mi parèn meno ampj, ne maggiori,
Che quei, che son nel mio bel San Giovanni,
Fatti per luogo de' battezzatori;
L' un degli quali, ancor non è molt' anni,
Rupp' io per un, che dentro v'annegava;
E questo sia suggel, ch' ogni uomo sganni."

The remains of the illustrious poet were buried with a splendour honourable to his name and worthy of his patron, who himself pronounced the funeral eulogium of his departed guest. His own countrymen, who had hardened their hearts against justice and humanity, in resistance of his return amongst them while living, soon after his death became sensible of their folly, and too late repented it. Embassy on embassy, during the two succeeding centuries, failed to recover the bones of their outcast fellow-citizen from his hospitable entertainers; and Florence has less to boast of in having given him birth, than Ravenna for having given him burial. One of those fruitless negotiations was conducted under the auspices of Leo X., and more illustriously sanctioned by Michael Angelo, an enthusiastic admirer of Dante, who offered to adorn the shrine, had the desired relics been obtained. The mighty sculptor, — himself the Dante of marble, simple, severe, sublime in style, and preternatural almost from the fulness of reality condensed in his ideal forms,— in many of his works, both of the chisel and the pencil, introduced figures suggested by images of the poet, or directly embodying such. Most conspicuous among these were the statues of Leah and Rachel, from the twenty-seventh canto of the "Purgatorio," on the monument of pope Julius II. His own copy of the "Divina Commedia" was embellished down the margin with sketches from the subjects of the text; and, had it been preserved, would surely have been classed with the most precious of those books for which collectors are eager to give ten times or more their weight in gold. The fate of this volume was not less singular than its good fortune; after having been made inestimable by the hand of Michael Angelo, it was lost at sea, and thus added to the treasures of darkness one of the richest spoils that ever went down from the light.

It was the purpose of Guido da Polenta to erect a gorgeous sepulchre over the ashes of the poet; but he neither reigned nor lived to accomplish this, being soon afterwards driven from his dominions, and dying himself

a banished man at Bologna. More than a hundred and fifty years later, Bernardo Bembo, father of the famous cardinal, completed Polenta's design, though upon an inferior scale; and three centuries more had elapsed, when cardinal Gonzaga raised a second and far more sumptuous monument in the same place,—Ravenna; while in Florence, to this day, there is none worthy of itself or the poet, who had been in turn "its glory and its shame." The greatest honours conferred on his memory by his native city were, the restoration to his family of his confiscated property, after a lapse of forty years, the erection of a bust crowned with laurel, at the public expense, a present from the state of ten golden florins to his daughter by the hands of Boccaccio, and the appointment of a public lecturer to expound the mysteries of the "Divina Commedia." Boccaccio was the first professor who filled this chair of poetry, philosophy, and theology. He commenced his dissertations on a Sunday, in the church of St. Stephen, but died at the end of two years, having proceeded no further than the seventeenth Canto of the "Inferno." Similar institutions were adopted in Bologna, Pisa, Venice, and other Italian towns; so that the renown of the man who had lived by sufferance, died an outlaw, and been indebted to strangers for a grave, exceeded, within two centuries, that of all his countrymen who in polite literature had gone before him, and became the load-star of all who, in any age, should follow. At Rome only the memory of the Ghibelline bard was execrated, and his writings were proscribed. His book "De Monarchia" was publicly burnt there, by order of pope John XXII., who also sent a cardinal to the successor of Guido da Polenta, to demand his bones, that they might be dealt with as those of an heretic, and the ashes scattered on the wind. How impotent is the vengeance of the great after the death of the object of their displeasure! What a refuge, especially to fame, is the grave; a sanctuary which can never be violated; for all human passions die on its threshold!

Boccaccio, the earliest of his biographers, though not the most authentic, says, that in person Dante was of middle stature; that he stooped a little from the shoulders, and was remarkable for his firm and graceful gait. He always dressed in a manner peculiarly becoming his rank and years. His visage was long, with an aquiline nose, and eyes rather full than small; his cheek-bones large, and his upper lip projecting beyond the under; his complexion was dark; his hair and beard black, thick and curled; and his countenance exhibited a confirmed expression of melancholy and thoughtfulness. Hence one day, at Verona, as he passed a gateway, where several ladies were seated, one of them exclaimed, "There goes the man who can take a walk to hell, and back again, whenever he pleases, and bring us news of every thing that is doing there." On which another, with equal sagacity, added, "That must be true; for don't you see how his beard is frizzled, and his face browned, with the heat and the smoke below!" The words, whether spoken in sport or silliness, were overheard by the poet, who, as the fair slanderers meant no malice, was quite willing that they should please themselves with their own fancies. Towards the opening of the "Purgatorio" there is an allusion to the soil which his face had contracted on his journey with Virgil through the nether world: —

"High morn had triumph'd o'er the glimmering dawn
Which fled before her, so that I discern'd
The *tremble* of the ocean from afar:
We walk'd along the solitary plain,
Like men retracing their erratic steps,
Who think all lost till they regain the path.
Arriving where the dew-drops with the sun
Contended, and lay thick beneath the shade,
Both hands my master delicately spread
Upon the grass: — aware of his intent,
I turn'd to him my tearful countenance,
And thence he wiped away the dusky hue,
With which the infernal air had sullied it." *

* "L' alba vinceva l' ora mattutina,
Che fuggia 'nnanzi, sì che di lontano
Conobbi il tremolar della marina:

In his studies, Dante was so eager, earnest, and indefatigable, that his wife and family often complained of his unsocial habits. Boccaccio mentions, that once, when he was at Siena, having unexpectedly found at a shop window a book which he had not seen, but had long coveted, he placed himself on a bench before the door, at nine o'clock in the morning, and never lifted up his eyes from the volume till vespers, when he had run through the whole contents with such intense application, as to have totally disregarded the festivities of processions and music which had been passing through the streets the greater part of the day; and when questioned about what had happened even in his presence, he denied having had knowledge of any thing but what he was reading. As might be expected from his other habits, he rarely spoke, except when personally addressed, or strongly moved, and then his words were few, well chosen, weighty, and expressed in tones of voice accommodated to the subject. Yet when it was required, his eloquence brake forth with spontaneous felicity, splendour, and exuberance of diction, imagery, and thought.

Dante delighted in music. The most natural and touching incident in his "Purgatorio" is the interview between himself and his friend Casella; an eminent singer in his day, who must, notwithstanding, have been forgotten within his century, but for the extraordinary good fortune which has befallen him, to be celebrated by two of the greatest poets of their respective countries, (Dante and Milton) from whose pages his name cannot soon perish.

Noi andavam per lo solingo piano,
Com' uom, che torna alla smaritta strada,
Che 'nfino ad essa li pare ire invano.
Quando noi fummo, dove la rugiada
Pugna col sole, e per essere in parte
Ove adorezza, poco si dirada,
Ambo le mani in su l'erbetta sparte
Soavemente 'l mio maestro pose;
Ond' io che fui accorto di su' arte,
Porsi ver lui le guance lagrimose;
Quivi mi fece tutto discoverto
Quel color, che l'inferno mi nascosa."

Choosing to excel in all the elegancies of life, as well as in gentlemanly exercises and intellectual prowess, Dante attached himself to painting not less than to music, and practised it with the pencil (not, indeed, so triumphantly as with the pen, his picture-poetry being unrivalled,) with sufficient facility and grace to make it a favourite amusement in private; and none can believe that he could amuse himself with what was worthless. His four celebrated contemporaries, Cimabue, Odorigi, Franco Bolognese, and Giotto, are all honourably mentioned by him in the eleventh canto of the "Purgatorio."

There is an interesting allusion to the employment which he loved in the "Vita Nuova:—" On the day that completed the year after this lady (Beatrice) had been received among the denizens of eternal life, while I was sitting alone, and recalling her form to my remembrance, I drew an angel on a certain tablet," &c. It may be incidentally observed, that Dante's angels are often painted with unsurpassable beauty as well as inexhaustible variety of delineation throughout his poem, especially in canto ix. of the "Inferno," and cantos ii. viii. xii. xv. xvii. xxiv. of the "Purgatorio." Take six lines of one of these portraits; though the inimitable original must consume the unequal version.

> "A noi venia la creatura bella,
> Bianco vestita, e nella faccia, quale
> Par, tremolando, mattutina stella:
> Le braccia aperse, e indi aperse l'ale;
> Disse; 'Venite; quì son presso i gradi,
> E agevolmente omai si sale.'"
>
> *Dell' Purgatorio,* canto xii.

> "That being came, all beautiful, to meet us,
> Clad in white raiment, and the morning star
> Appear'd to tremble in his countenance ;
> His arms he spread, and then he spread his wings
> And cried, 'Come on, the steps are near at hand,
> And here the ascent is easy.'"

Leonardo Aretino, who had seen Dante's handwriting, mentions, with no small commendation, that the letters

were long, slender, and exceedingly distinct, — the characteristics of what is called in ornamental writing a fine Italian hand. The circumstance may seem small, but it is not insignificant as a finishing stroke in the portraiture of one who, though he was the first poet unquestionably, and not the last philosopher, was also one of the most accomplished gentlemen of his age.

Two of Dante's sons, Pietro and Jacopo, inherited a portion of their father's spirit, and were among the first commentators on his works, — an inestimable advantage to posterity, since the local and personal histories were familiar to them; for had these not been explained by contemporaries, many of the brief and more exquisite allusions must have been irrecoverably lost, and some of the most affecting passages remained as uninterpretable as though they had been carved on granite in hieroglyphics. For example, in the fifth canto of the "Purgatorio," the travellers meet three spirits together, — the first, Giacopo del Cassero of Fano, who had been assassinated by order of a prince of Ferrara, for having spoken ill of his highness; — the second, Buonconte, of Montefeltro, who had fallen fighting on the side of the Aretines, in the battle of Campaldino; and for whose soul a singular contention took place between a good angel and an evil one, in which the former happily prevailed; — the third shade was that of a female of rank, who, having quietly waited till the two gentlemen had told their tales, thus emphatically hinted hers: —

"Ah! when thou hast return'd to yonder world,
And art reposing from thy long, long journey,
Remember me, for I am Pia: —
* * * *
Siena gave me birth, Maremma death,
And this *he* knows, who, with his ring and jewel,
But newly had espoused me."*

---

* "Deh, quando tu sarai tornato al mondo,
E riposato della lunga via,
* * * *
Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia:
Siena mi fe'; disfecemi Maremma;
Salsi colui, che 'nnanellata pria,
Disposando m'avea con la sua gemma."

This unfortunate lady was the bride of Nello della Pietra, a grandee of Siena, who, becoming jealous of her, removed his predestined victim to the putrid marshes of Maremma, where she soon drooped and died, without suspicion on her part, or intimation on his, of the hideous purpose for which she had been hurried thither; her gloomy keeper, with a dreadful eye, watching her life go out like a lamp in a charnel-vault, and after her death abandoning himself to despair.—One of Dante's sons above mentioned (Pietro) was an eminent lawyer at Verona, and enjoyed the friendship of Petrarch, who dedicated some lines to him, at Trevizi, in 1361. Jacopo is said to have been a writer of Italian verse. Of three others, almost nothing is known, except that they died young. His daughter Beatrice, so named after his *first* love, took the veil in the convent of St. Stefano del' Uliva, at Ravenna.

Dante was the author of two Latin treatises,—the one already noticed, "De Monarchia;" and another, "De Vulgari Eloquio," on the structure of language in general, and that of Italy in particular. But for his celebrity he is indebted solely to his productions in the latter tongue, consisting of "La Vita Nuova," a reverie of fact and fable, in prose and rhyme, referring to his youthful love;—"Canzoni* and Sonnets" of which his lady was the eternal theme;—"Il Convito," a critical and mystical commentary on three of his lyrics;—and the "Divina Commedia, or Vision of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise," by the glory of which its forerunners have been at once eclipsed and kept in mid-day splendour, instead of glimmering through that doubtful twilight of obscure fame among the feeble productions of contemporaries, which must have been their lot but for such fortunate alliance.

The prose of the "Vita Nuova" and the "Convito" is

* Canzoni are the larger odes of the Italians, composed according to certain strict but exquisite rules; which, when rightly observed, give admirable harmony and proportion to what may be called the architecture of the thoughts: the stanzas resembling columns of the most perfect symmetry, which may be infinitely diversified, and of considerable length, each new form constituting what may be termed a different order.

deemed, at this day, not only nervous and racy, but in a high degree pure and elegant Italian; while much greater praise may be unhesitatingly bestowed upon his verse. Whether employed upon the arbitrary structure of Canzoni, the love-knot form of the sonnet, or the interminable chain of *terze rime*, (the triple intertwisted rhyme of the "Divina Commedia," which Dante is supposed to have invented,) his language is not more antiquated to his countrymen than the English of Shakspeare is to ours. The limits of the present essay preclude further notice of his lyrics than the general remark, that they have all the stately, brief, sententious character of his heroics, with occasional strokes of natural tenderness, and not unfrequently exhibit a delicacy of thought so pure, graceful, and unaffected, that Petrarch himself has seldom reached it in his more ornate and laboured compositions.

Dante did more than either his predecessors or contemporaries had done to improve, ennoble, and refine his native idiom; indeed he was wont to speak indignantly of those who would degrade it below the Provençal, the fashionable vehicle of verse in that age of transition, when the young languages of modern Europe, begotten between the stern tongues of the north and the classic ones of the south, were growing up together, on both sides of the Alps and the Pyrenees, like children in rivalry of each other, as the nations that spoke them respectively, so often intermingled in war or in peace. At the close of canto xxvi. of the "Purgatorio," Arnauld Daniel is introduced as the master-minstrel of the age gone by, singing some lines in a "Babylonish dialect," partly Provençal and partly Catalonian; pitting infamous French against the worst kind of Spanish (according to P. P. Venturi); and these certainly present a striking contrast of barbarous dissonance with the full-toned Tuscan of the context.

Like our Spenser, Dante took many freedoms with the extant Italian, which no later writer could have used. For the sake of euphony, emphasis, or rhyme, he occa-

sionally modified words and terminations to serve a present purpose only, and which he himself rejected elsewhere. In this he was justified: he ran through the whole compass of his native vocabulary, he tried every note of the diapason, and all that were most pure, harmonious, or energetic, he sanctioned, by employing them in his song, which gave them a voice through after ages, so that few, comparatively very few, have been entirely rejected by his most fastidious successors. It was well for the poetry of his country that he wrote his immortal work in its language; for neither Petrarch nor Boccaccio could have gone so far as they did in perfecting it, if they had not had so great a model, not to equal only but to excel. They, indeed, affected to think little of their vernacular writings, and pretended merely to amuse themselves with such compositions as every body could read. Dante himself began his poem in Latin; and if he had gone forward, the finishing stroke of the last line would have been a *coup-de-grace*, which it could never have survived.*

Of the origin of the "Divina Commedia" it would be in vain to speculate here; the author himself, probably, could not have traced the first idea. Such conceptions neither come by inspiration nor by chance: —

* Lord Byron, in his poem, "The Prophecy of Dante," (canto ii.) has the following noble apostrophe, which, as it refers to the subject of the foregoing paragraph, and affords a fine English specimen of the *terze rime*, in which the *Divina Commedia* is composed, cannot be more opportunely introduced than in this place: —

"Italia! ah! to me such things, foreshown
With dim sepulchral light, bid me forget
In thine irreparable wrongs my own:
We can have but one country. — and even yet
Thou 'rt mine — my bones shall be within thy breast,
My soul within thy language, which once set
With our old Roman sway in the wide West;
But I will make another tongue arise
As lofty and more sweet, in which exprest
The hero's ardour, or the lover's sighs,
Shall find alike such sounds for every theme,
That every word, as brilliant as thy skies,
Shall realise a poet's proudest dream,
And make thee Europe's nightingale of song;
So that all present speech to thine shall seem
The note of meaner birds, and every tongue
Confess its barbarism when compared with thine.
This shalt thou owe to him thou didst so wrong,
The Tuscan Bard, the banish'd Ghibelline."

who can recollect the moment when he began to think, yet all his thoughts have been consecutively allied to that? Many visions and allegories had appeared before Dante's; and in several of these were gross representations of the spiritual world, especially of purgatory, the reality of which, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was urged upon credulity with extraordinary zeal and perseverance by a corrupt hierarchy. By all these rather than by one his mind might have been prepared for the work.

Seven cantos of the "Inferno" are understood to have been written before the author's banishment; it is manifest, however, that if this were the case they must have been considerably altered afterwards; indeed the whole character of the poem, however the original outline may have been followed, must have undergone a very remarkable, and (afflictive as the occasion may have been for himself) a very auspicious change, from his misfortunes. To the latter, his poem owes many of its most splendid passages, and almost all its personal interest; an interest wherein consists, if not its *principal*, its *prevailing* and preserving charm. Had the whole been composed in prosperity, amidst honours, and affluence, and learned ease, in his native city, it would no doubt have been a mighty achievement of genius; but much that enhances and endears both its moral and its fable could never have been suggested, indeed would not have existed, under happier circumstances. That moral, indeed, is often as mistaken as that fable is monstrous; but the one and the other should be judged according to the times. The poet's romantic and unearthly love to Beatrice would have wanted that sombre and terrible relief which is now given to it by the gloom of his own character, the expression of his feelings under the sense of unmerited wrongs, invectives thundered out against his persecutors, and exposures of atrocities which were every-day deeds of every-day men, in those distracted countries, of which his poem has left such fearful records.

Much unsatisfactory discussion has arisen upon the title "Divina Commedia," which Dànte gave to his poem; it being presumed that he had never seen a regular drama either in letter or exhibition, as the Greek and Latin authors of that class were scarcely known in Italy till after his time. The religious spectacles, however, common in the darkest of the middle ages, consisting not of pantomime only, but of dialogue and song, may have suggested to him the designation as well as the subject of his strange adventure. Be this as it may, the character of the work is dramatic throughout, consisting of a series of scenes, which conduct to one catastrophe; for however miscellaneous or insulated they may seem in respect to *each other*, — in respect to *the author* (who is his own hero, and for whose warning, instruction, and final recovery from an evil course of life, the whole are collocated,) they all bear directly upon *him*, and accomplish by just gradations the purpose for which they were intended. Dante is a changed man when he emerges, from the infernal regions in the centre of the globe, upon the shore of the island of Purgatory at the Antipodes; and is further so refined by his ascent up that perilous mount, that when he reaches the terrestrial paradise at the top, he is prepared for translation from thence through the nine spheres of the celestial universe. Many of the interviews between the visiters of the invisible worlds which they explore, and the inhabitants of these, are scenes which involve all the peculiarities of stage-exhibitions, — dialogue, action, passion, — secrecy, surprise, interruption. Examples may be named. The meeting and conversations with Sordello, in the sixth and seventh cantos of the "Purgatorio," in which there are two instances of unexpected discoveries which bring out the whole beauty and grandeur of that mysterious personage's character; as a patriot, when at the mere sound of the word "Mantua" he embraces Virgil with transport, not yet knowing, nor even enquiring, any thing further about him, except that he is his countryman; and afterwards as a poet, when, Virgil disclosing his name, Sordello is

overpowered with delightful astonishment, like one who suddenly beholds something wonderful before him, and, scarcely believing his own eyes for joy, exclaims, in a breath, "It is! it is not!" (*Ell' è, non è.*) The parties are thus introduced to each other. Dante and Virgil are considering which road they shall take, when the latter observes: —

"Yonder I see a spirit, fix'd in thought,
Alone and gazing earnestly upon us,
He will point out the readier way to take.
Tow'rds him we went — Soul of a Longobardian!
How didst thou stand aloof with haughty bearing,
And lordly eyes, slow-moving as we moved!
— He utter'd not a word, but let us pass,
On-looking like a lion from his lair:
But Virgil, drawing near, entreated him
To show the easiest path for our ascent:
Still to that meek request he answer'd not,
But of our country and our way of life
Enquired; — my courteous guide began then, 'Mantua';
Straight at the word, that spirit, erewhile so wrapt
Within himself, sprang from his place, and cried,
'O Mantuan! I'm thy countryman, Sordello;'
And one the other instantly embraced." *

The reserve of Sordello is generally attributed to stubbornness or pride; but is it not manifest that, on the first sight of the strangers, he had a misgiving hope (if the phrase be allowable) which he feared might deceive him, that they were countrymen of his, where-

* "Ma vedi là un' anima, ch' a posta,
Sola soletta verso noi riguarda;
Quella ne 'nsegnera la via più tosta
Venimmo a lei: — O anima Lombarda!
Come ti stavi altera e disdegnosa,
E nel muover degli occhi onesta e tarda!
Ella non ci diceva alcuna cosa;
Ma lasciavane gir, solo guardando
A guisa di leon, quando si posa.
Pur Virgilio si trasse a lei, pregando,
Che ne mostrasse la miglior salita;
E quella non rispose al suo dimando,
Ma di nostro paese, e della vita
C' inchiese; e 'l dolce duca incomminciava,
'Mantova' — e l'ombra tutta in se romita,
Surse ver lui del luogo, ove pria stava,
Dicendo, 'O Mantovano! io son Sordello
Della tua terra;' e l'un l'altro abbracciava."

fore, absorbed in that sole idea, he disregards their question concerning the road, and directly comes to the point which he was anxious to ascertain; and this being resolved by the single word "Mantua," his soul flies forth at once to embrace the speaker?

In the tenth canto of the "Inferno," where heretics are described as being tormented in tombs of fire, the lids of which are suspended over them till the day of judgment, Dante finds Farinata d' Uberti, an illustrious commander of the Ghibellines, who, at the battle of Monte Aperto, in 1260, had so utterly defeated the Guelfs of Florence, that the city lay at the mercy of its enemies, by whom counsel was taken to raze it to the ground: but Farinata, because his bowels yearned towards his native city, stood up alone to oppose the barbarous design; and partly by menace — having drawn his sword in the midst of the assembly — and partly by persuasion, preserved the city from destruction. The interview is thus painted; but to prepare the reader for well understanding the nature of the by-play which intervenes, it is necessary to state that Cavalcante Cavalcanti, whose head appears out of an adjacent sepulchre, was the father of Guido Cavalcanti, a poet, the particular friend of Dante, and chief of the Bianchi party banished during his priorship.

> "'O Tuscan! Thou, who, through this realm of fire,
> Alive dost walk, thus courteously conversing
> Pause, if it please thee, here. Thy dialect
> Proclaims thy lineage from that noble land,
> Which I, perhaps, too much have wrong'd.'
> "Such sounds
> Suddenly issued forth from one of those
> Sepulchral caverns. — Tremblingly I crept
> A little nearer to my guide, but he
> Cried, 'Turn again! What would'st thou do? Behold,
> 'Tis Farinata that hath raised himself:
> There may'st thou see him, upward from the loins.'
> Already had I fix'd mine eyes on his,
> Who stood, with bust and visage so erect,
> As though he look'd on hell itself with scorn.
> My master then, with prompt and resolute hands,

Thrust me among the charnel-vaults towards him,
Saying, — 'Thy words be plain.' When I had reach'd
His tombstone-foot, he look'd at me a while
As in disdain, then loftily demanded—
'Who were thine ancestors?'

—— "Eager to tell,
Nought I conceal'd, but utter'd all the truth.
Arching his brow a little, he return'd;—
'Bitter antagonists of mine, of me,
And of my party, were thy sires; but twice
I scatter'd them.'

" 'If scatter'd twice,' said I,
'Once and again they came from all sides back,—
A lesson which *thy* friends have not well learn'd.'
"Just then a second figure, at his side,
Emerged to view; unveil'd above the chin,
And kneeling, as methought. — It look'd around
So wistfully, as though it hoped to find
Some other with me; but, that hope dispell'd,
Weeping it spake: — 'If through this dungeon-gloom,
Grandeur of genius guide thy venturous way,
My son! — where is he? — and why not with *thee?*'
Then I to him: — 'Not of myself I came;
He who awaits me yonder brought me hither,—
One whom perhaps thy Guido held in scorn.*
His speech and form of penance had already
Taught me his name; my words were therefore pointed.
Upstarting he exclaim'd: — "How? — said'st thou *held?*
Lives he not then? and doth not heaven's sweet light
Fall on his eyes?' — When I was slow to answer,
Backward he sunk, and re-appear'd no more.
"Meanwhile that other most majestic form,
Near which I stood, neither changed countenance,
Nor turn'd his neck, nor lean'd to either side:
'And if,' quoth he, our first debate resuming,
'They have not *well* that lesson learn'd, the thought
Torments me more than this infernal bed:
And yet, not fifty times *her* changing face,
Who here reigns sovereign, shall be re-illumined,
Ere *thou* shalt know how hard that lesson is.†
— But tell me, — so may'st thou return in peace
To the dear world above! — why are thy people

* Alluding, it is supposed, to the fact that Guido had forsaken poetry for philosophy, or preferred the latter so much above the former, as to think lightly of Virgil himself in comparison with Aristotle.

† He foretells Dante's own expulsion from his country within fifty months.

In all their acts so mad against my race?'
— 'The slaughter and discomfiture,' said I,
'That turn'd the river red at Mont-Aperto,
Have caused such dire proscriptions in our temples.'
"He shook his head, deep-sighing, then rejoin'd,—
'I was not *there* alone; nor without cause
Engaged with others; but I *was* alone,
And stood in her defence with open brow,
When all our council, with one voice, decreed
That Florence should be razed from her foundation.'
"'So may thy kindred find repose, as thou
Shalt loose a knot which hath entangled me!'
Thus I adjured him: — 'ye foresee what time
(If rightly I have heard) will bring to pass,
But to the present, otherwise, are blind.'
"'We see, like him who hath an evil eye,
Far distant things,' said he; 'so highest God
Enlightens us: but yet, when they approach,
Or when they are, our intellect falls short;
Nor can we know, save by report from others,
Aught of the state of man beneath the sun.
Hence may'st thou comprehend how all our knowledge
Shall cease for ever from the point that shuts
The portal of the future.' *
"At that moment
Compunction smote me for my recent fault,
And I cried out — 'Oh! tell that fallen one,
His son is yet among the living. — Say,
That if I falter'd to reply at first
With that assurance, 'twas because my thoughts
Were harass'd by the doubt which thou hast solved.'" †

* The end of time, when their tombs were to be closed up.

† "'O Tosco! che per la città del foco
Vivo ten' vai così parlando onesto
Piacciati di restare in questo loco:
La tua loquela ti fa manifesto
Di quella nobil patria natio,
Alla qual forse fui troppo molesto.'
Subitamente questo suono uscìo
D'una dell' arche: pero m'accostai,
Temendo, un poco più al duco mio.
Ed ei mi disse: 'Volgiti, che fai?
Vedi là Farinata, che s'è dritto.
Dalla cintola 'n su tutto 'l vedrai.'
I'avea già 'l mio viso nel suo fitto;
Ed ei s'ergea col petto, e con la fronte,
Come avesse lo 'nferno in gran dispitto;
E l'animose man del duca, e pronte,
Mi pinser tra le sepolture a lui;
Dicendo: 'Le parole tue sien conte.'
Tosto ch' al piè della sua tomba fui,
Guardommi un poco, e poi, quasi disdegnoso,

The reader of these lines (however inferior the translation may be), cannot have failed to perceive by what

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Mi dimandò: — 'Chi fur gli maggior tui?'
Io, ch' era d' ubbidir desideroso,
Non gliel celai, ma tutto glielo apersi:
Ond' ei levò le ciglia un poco in soso:
Poi disse: — 'Fieramente furo avversi
A me, e à miei primi, e à mia parte,
Sì che per duo fiate gli dispersi.'
'S' ei fur cacciati, e' tornar d'ogni parte,'
Risposi lui, 'l'una e l'altra fiata,
Ma i vostri non appresser ben quell' arte.'
Allor surse alla vista scoperchiata
Un' ombra lungo questo infino al mento;
Credo, che s'era inginocchion levata.
D' intorno mi guardò, come talento
Avesse di veder, s'altri era meco;
Ma, poi che 'l sospicciar fu tutto spento,
Piangendo disse; — 'Se per questo cieco
Carcere vai per altezza d'ingegno,
Mio figlio ov' è, e perchè non è teco?'
Ed io a lui: 'Da me stesso' non vegno;
Colui, ch' attende là, per quì mi mena,
Forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno.'
Le sue parole, e'l modo della pena
M'avevan di costui già letto il nome;
Però fu la risposta così piena.
Di subito drizzato gridò; — 'Come
Dicesti, egli ebbe? non viv' egli ancora?
Non fiere gli occhi suoi lo dolce lome?'
Quando s'accorse d'alcuna dimora,
Ch' i' faceva dinanzi alla risposta,
Supin ricadde, e più non parve fuora.
Ma quell' altro magnanimo, a cui posta
Restato m' era, non mutò aspetto,
Ne mosse collo, nè piegò sua costa:
'E se,' continuando al primo detto,
'Egli han quell' arte,' disse, 'male appresa
Ciò mi tormenta più che questo letto.
Ma non cinquanta volte fia raccesa
La faccia della donna, che quì regge,
Che tu saprai quanto quell' arte pesa.
E se tu mai nel dolce mondo regge,
Dimmi, perche quel popol è si empio
Incontr' a miei in ciascuna sua legge?'
Ond' io a lui; 'Lo strazio e 'l grande scempio,
Che fece 'l Arbia colorata in rosso,
Tale orazion fa far nel nostro tempio.'
Poi ch' ebbe sospirando il capo scosso,
'A ciò non fu' io sol,' disse, 'nè certo
Sanza cagion sarei con gli altri mosso;
Ma fu' io sol colà, dove sofferto
Fu per ciascun di torre via Fiorenza,
Colui, che la difesi a viso aperto.'
'Deh! se riposi mai vostra semenza!'
Prega' io lui, 'solvetemi quel nodo
Che quì ha inviluppata mia sentenza;
E par, che voi veggiate, se ben odo,
Dinanzi quel, che 'l tempo seco adduce,
E nel presente tenete altro modo.'
'Noi veggiam, come quei, ch' ha mala luce,
Le cose,' disse, 'che ne son lontano;

natural action and speech the paternal anxiety of Cavalcante respecting his son is indicated. On his bed of torture he hears a voice which he knows to be that of his son's friend; he starts up, looks eagerly about, as expecting to see that son; but observing the friend only, he at once interrupts the dialogue with Farinata, and in broken exclamations enquires concerning him. Dante happening to employ the past tense of a verb in reference to what his "Guido" might have done, the miserable parent instantly lays hold of that minute circumstance as an intimation of his death, and asks questions of which he dreads the answers, precisely in the manner of Macduff when he learns that his wife and children had been murdered by Macbeth. The poet hesitating to reply, Cavalcante takes the worst for granted, falls back in despair, and appears not again. Thus,

"Even from *his* tomb the voice of Nature cries."

Dante, however, at the close of the scene, unexpectedly recurs to his own fault with the tenderness of compunction and delicacy of respect due to an unfortunate being, whom he had unintentionally agonised with his silence, and sends a message to the old man that his son yet lives.* Contrasted with this trembling sensibility of

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Cotanto ancor ne splende 'l sommo duce:
Quand 's appressano, o son, tutto è vano
Nostro 'ntelletto, e s' altri non ci apporta,
Nulla sapem di vostro stato umano.
Però comprender puoi, che tutta morta
Fia nostra conoscenza da quel punto,
Che del futuro fia chiusa la porta.'
Allor, come di mia colpa compunto,
Dissi; 'Or direte dunque a quel caduto,
Che 'l suo nato è co' vivi ancor congiunto;
E s'io fu' dianzi alla risposta muto,
Fat' ei saper, che 'l fei, perchè pensava
Già nell' error, che m'avete soluto."

* There are few instances (notwithstanding his tremendous denunciations against bodies of men, the inhabitants of whole cities or states) in which Dante forgets courtesy towards individual sufferers; and, in general, he expresses the most honourable sympathy towards his very enemies, when he finds them such. In the case of Bocca degli Abati, who, at the battle of Monte Aperto, traitorously smote off the right hand of the Florentine standard-bearer, the patriotic poet shows no mercy; but having accidentally kicked him in the face as he stood wedged up to the chin in ice, he afterwards tears the locks from the wretch's head to make him tell his

a father's affection, stronger than death, and out-feeling the pains of hell, is the stern, calm, patient dignity of Farinata, who, though wounded to the quick by the retort of Dante at the moment when their discourse was broken upon, stands unmoved in mind, in look, in posture, till the interlude is ended; and then, without the slightest allusion to it, he takes up the suspended argument at the last words of his opponent, as though his thoughts had all the while been ruminating on the disgrace of his friends, the afflictions of his family, and the inextinguishable enmity of his countrymen against himself. His noble rejoinder, on Dante's reference to the carnage at Monte Aperto as the cause of his people's implacability, is above all praise. Indeed, it would be difficult to point out, in ancient or modern tragedy, a passage of more sublimity or pathos, in which so few words express so much, yet leave so much more to be imagined by any one who has "a human heart," as the whole of this scene in the original exhibits.

Dante's poem is certainly neither the greatest nor the best in the world; but it is, perhaps, the most extraordinary one which resolute intellect ever planned, or persevering talents successfully executed. It stands alone; and must be read and judged according to rules and immunities adapted to its peculiar structure, plot, and purpose, formed upon principles affording scope to the exercise of the highest powers, with little regard to precedent. If these principles, then, have intrinsic excel-

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name; — forgetting, by the way, that in every other case the spirits were intangible by him, though they appeared to be bodily tormented. — Dell' Inferno, xxxii. And towards the friar Alberigo de' Manfredi, who, having quarrelled with some of his brethren, under pretence of desiring to be reconciled, invited them and others to a feast, towards the conclusion of which, at the signal of the fruit being brought in, a band of hired assassins rushed upon the guests and murdered the selected victims on the spot; whence arose a saying, when a person had been stabbed, that he had been served with some of Alberigo's fruit: — towards this wretch Dante (by an ambiguous oath and promise to relieve him from a crust of tears which had been frozen like a mask over his face), having obtained his name, behaves with deliberate inhumanity, leaving him as he found him, with this cool excuse, —

"E cortesia fu lui esser villano."

"'Twas courtesy to play the knave to him."

Dell' Inferno, canto xxxiii.

lence, and the work be found uniformly consistent with them, fulfilling to the utmost the aims of the author, the "Divina Commedia" must be allowed to stand among the proudest trophies of original genius, challenging, encountering, and overcoming unparalleled difficulties. Though the fields of action, or rather of vision, are nominally Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise,—the Paradise, Purgatory, and Hell of Dante, with all their terrors, and splendours, and preternatural fictions, are but representations of scenes transacted on earth, and characters that lived antecedently or contemporaneously with himself. Though altogether *out* of the world, the whole is *of* the world. Men and women seem fixed in eternal torments, passing through purifying flames, or exalted to celestial beatitude; yet in all these situations they *are* what they *were;* and it is their former history, more than their present happiness, hope, or despair, which constitutes, through a hundred cantos, the interest, awakened and kept up by the successive exhibition of more than a thousand individual actors and sufferers. Of every one of these something terrible or touching is intimated or told, briefly at the utmost, but frequently by mere hints of narrative or gleams of allusion, which excite curiosity in the breast of the reader; who is surprised at the poet's forbearance, when, in the notes of commentators, he finds complex, strange, and fearful circumstances, on which a modern versifier or novelist would expend pages, treated here as ordinary events, on which it would be impertinent to dwell. These, in the author's own age, were generally understood; the bulk of the materials being gathered up during a period of restlessness and confusion among the republican states of Italy.

Hence, though the first appearance of the "Divina Commedia," in any intelligible edition, is repulsive from the multitude of notes, and the text is not seldom difficult and dark with the oracular compression of strong ideas in few and pregnant words, yet will the toil and patience of any reader be well repaid, who perseveringly proceeds but a little way, quietly referring, as occasion may

require, from the obscurity of the original to the illustrations below; for when he returns from the latter to the former (as though his own eye had been refreshed with new light, the darkness having been in it, and not in the verse), what was colourless as a cloud is radiant with beauty, and what before was undefined in form becomes exquisitely precise and symmetrical, from comprehending in so small a compass so vast a variety of thought, feeling, or fact. Dante, in this respect, must be studied as an author in a dead language by a learner, or rather as one who employs a living language on forgotten themes; then will his style grow easier and clearer as the reader grows more and more acquainted with his subject, his manner, and his materials. For whatever be the corruptions of the text (which perhaps has never been sufficiently collated), the remoteness of the allusions, and our countrymen's want of that previous knowledge of almost every thing treated upon, which best prepares the mind for the perception and highest enjoyment of poetical beauty and poetical pleasure, Dante will be found, in reality, one of the most clear, minute, and accurate writers in sentiment, as he is one of the most perfectly natural and graphic painters to the life of persons, characters, and actions. His draughts have the freedom of etchings, and the sharpness of proof impressions. His poem is well worth all the pains which the most indolent reader may take to master it.

Ordinary poetry is often striking and captivating at first view, but all its merit is at once elicited; and frequently that which charmed so much at first becomes less and less affecting, less and less defined, the more it is examined, till light turns to mist, and mist to shadow in the end; whereas the highest order of poetry — that which is *intellectual* — the longer it is dwelt upon, the lovelier, the nobler, the more delightful it appears, and when fully understood remains imperishable in its graces and effects; repetition a thousand times does not impair it; its creations, like those of nature, — familiar,

indeed, as the sun and the stars, — are never less glorious and beautiful, though daily before us. Dante's poetry (extravagant and imaginative as he often may be) is thoroughly intellectual; there is no enthusiasm of feeling, but there is much of philosophical and theological subtlety, and of course much absurdity in some of his reveries; yet his passion is always pure and unaffected, his descriptions are daylight realities, and his heroes men of flesh and blood. Probably no other work of human genius so far exceeds in its development the expectation of prejudiced or unprepared readers, as the "Divina Commedia;" or performs, in fact, so much more than it seems to promise.

Dante has created a hell, purgatory, and paradise of his own; and, being satisfied with the present world as a nursery for his personages, he has peopled his ultramundane regions with these, assigning to all their abodes "sulphureous or ambrosial," or refining those who were yet corrigible after death, according to his own pleasure, his theological views, and his moral feelings. It must be confessed that, whatever were his passions, prejudices, or failings, his attachments or antipathies, as an arbiter of fate he appears honestly to have distributed justice, to the best of his knowledge, to all whom he has cited before his tribunal, leaving in the case of every one (perhaps) a judgment unimpeachable and unappealable; so forcibly does he impress the mind with the truth and reality of the evidence of their merit or turpitude, which he produces to warrant his sentences. As a man, he is, indeed, fierce, splenetic, and indignant at times, especially in execrating his countrymen for their profligacy and injustice towards himself; yet (though there may have been primary motives less noble than the apparent ones, at the bottom of his heart, unsuspected even by himself,) his anger and his vengeance seem always directed against those who deserved to be swept from the face of the earth, as venal, treacherous, parricidal wretches. With the wonders which he beheld in his invisible world, in his complicated travels through its

triple round of labyrinths; — as, in hell, wheel within wheel, diminishing downward to the centre; in purgatory, circle above circle, terminating in the garden of Eden; and, in his paradise, orb beyond orb, through the solar system to the heaven of heavens, where he "presumed, an earthly guest, and drew empyreal air;"— with these he has constructed a poem of a thousand pages, exhibiting the greatest diversity of characters, scenes, circumstances, and events, that were ever embraced in an equal compass; while all are made perfectly to harmonise and conduce to one process, carried on at every step of his pilgrimage, namely, the gradual purification of the poet himself, by the examples which he sees and the lessons which he hears; as well as by the toils he undergoes, the pains he endures, and the bliss he partakes, in his long and dreary path down into the nether regions, where there is no hope; up the steep hill, where, though there is suffering, there is no fear of ultimate release; and on his flight through the "nine-enfolded spheres," where all are as happy as they can be in their present station, yet, as they pass from stage to stage, rise in capacity and means of enjoyment to fulness of felicity in the beatific vision.

Dante was the very poet, and the "Divina Commedia" the very poem, to be expected from the influence of all existing circumstances in church and state at the time when he flourished. The poet and his age were homogeneous, and his song was as truly in season as that of the nightingale in spring; the winter of barbarism had broken up, the summer heat of refinement had not yet come on: a century earlier there would have been too much ignorance, a century later too much intelligence, to form such a theme and such a minstrel; for though Dante, in any age, must have been one of its greatest bards, yet the bard that he was he could not have been in any other than that in which he lived.

Dante, as hath already been intimated, is the hero of his own poem; and the "Divina Commedia" is the only

example of an attempt triumphantly achieved, and placed beyond the reach of scorn or neglect, wherein, from beginning to end, the author discourses concerning himself individually. Had this been done in any other way than the consummately simple, delicate, and unobtrusive one which he has adopted, the whole would have been insufferable egotism, disgusting coxcombry, or oppressive dulness,—whereas this personal identity is the charm, the strength, the soul of the book: he lives, he breathes, he moves through it; his pulse beats or stands still, his eye kindles or fades, his cheek grows pale with horror, colours with shame, or burns with indignation; we hear his voice, his step, in every page; we see his shape by the flames of hell, his shadow in the land where there is no *other* shadow ("Purgatorio"), and his countenance gaining angelic elevation from "colloquy sublime" with glorified intelligences in the paradise above. Nor does he ever go out of his actual character;—he is, indeed, the lover from infancy of Beatrice, the aristocratic magistrate of a fierce democracy, the valiant soldier in the field of Campaldino, the fervent patriot in the feuds of Guelfs and Ghibellines, the eloquent and subtle disputant in the schools of theology; the melancholy exile, wandering from court to court, depending for bread and shelter on petty princes who knew not his worth, except as a splendid captive in their train; and, above all (though not obtrusively so), he is the poet anticipating his own assured renown, and dispensing at his will honour or infamy to others, whom he need but to name, and the sound must be heard to the end of time, and echoed from all regions of the globe. Dante, in his vision, is Dante as he lived, as he died, and as he expected to live in both worlds beyond death, —an immortal spirit in the one, an unforgotten poet in the other. Pride of birth, consciousness of genius, religious feeling almost to fanaticism, and the sense of wrongs, under which he is alternately inflamed with rage, withered with disappointment, or saddened with despair, —these are continually reminding the reader of the man

as he was; stimulating his jaded hope with the bitter sweet of revenge, which he could wreak at will upon his enemies; and solacing a wounded spirit with the thought of fame in *possession*, which his fellow-citizens could not confiscate, and fame in *reversion*, of which contemporaries could not cut off the entail.

Yet while he is thus in every point an individual, he is at the same time an exemplar of the whole species; and he may emphatically say to the reader who can follow him in his journeys, receive his inspirations, and share in his troubles, anxieties, joys, and disappointments: — "Am I not a man and a brother?" Dante, though in this sense the hero of his own poem, is any thing but a hero, either in the vulgar or the chivalrous sense of the term. He is a human being, with all the faults, frailties, and imperfections of our common nature, as they really existed in himself, and as they more or less exist in every other person; nor can a less sophisticated character be found in all the volumes of prose and rhyme that have appeared since this auto-biographical poem. He assumes nothing; he conceals nothing; his fears, his ignorance, his loves, and his enmities, are all undisguisedly set forth, as though he were all the while communing with his own heart, without the cowardly apprehension of blame, or the secret desire of applause from a fellow-creature. He is always, indeed, noble, manly, and candid, but travelling continually in company of some superior intelligence, — Virgil in hell and purgatory, and Beatrice in purgatory and heaven, — he always defers to the one or the other in difficulty, doubt, or danger, and clings for protection, as well as looks up for instruction, with childlike simplicity and docility; returning with the most reverent and affectionate gratitude every token of kindness received from either.

Marvellous and incredible, it must be confessed, are many of the stories which he tells; but he tells them with the plainness and straight-forwardness of a man who is speaking the truth, and nothing else, of his own knowledge.

In the last cantos of the "Purgatorio," and throughout the "Paradiso," there is a prodigious putting forth of power to describe ineffable and eternal things; with inexhaustible prodigality of illustration, and transmutation of the same symbols, to constitute different gradations of blessedness and glory. Of these, however, there are scarcely any types except light, colour, sound, and motion, variously combined to represent spiritual beings, their forms, their occupations, and manner of discoursing; but even amongst such inexpressible, nay, unimaginable scenes and passages, the human nature which cleaves to the poet, and shows itself, under every transmigration, allied to flesh and blood, gives an interest which allegorical pictures of invisible realities can never keep up beyond the first brilliant impression. Yet the vitality and strength of the poem reside chiefly in the first and second parts; diminishing just in proportion as the author rises above the regions which exhibit the sins and sufferings of creatures like ourselves, punished with everlasting destruction in hell, or "burnt and purged away," through the penal inflictions of purgatory. It may, however, be said, with regard to the whole, that no ideal beings, ideal scenes, or ideal occurrences, in any poem or romance, have ever more perfectly *personified* truth and nature than those in this composition, which, though the theatre is figuratively beyond the limits of human action, is nevertheless full of such action in its most common as well as its most extraordinary forms.

There is scarcely a decorous attitude of the human frame, a look expressive of the most concealed sentiment, or a feeling of pain, pleasure, surprise, doubt, fear, agony, hope, delight, which is not described with a minuteness of discrimination alike curious and admirable; the poet himself frequently being the subject of the same, and exciting our sympathy by the lively or poignant remembrance of having ourselves done, looked, felt like him, when we were far from being ingenuous enough to acknowledge the weakness implied. There is scarcely a phenomenon in the visible heavens, the earth, the sea,

and the phases of nature, which he has not presented in the most striking manner. In such instances he frequently descends to the nicest particulars, that he may realise the exact view of them which he wishes to be taken; they being necessarily illustrations of invisible and preternatural subjects. This leads to the remark, that the poem abounds with similes of the greatest variety, beauty, and elegance; often, likewise, of the most familiar, touching, or grotesque character. Among these, birds are favourite images, especially the stork and the falcon, — the two last that an English poet of the nineteenth century would think of, but which happily remind us, as often as they are seen here, of the country of the author, while they present pictures of times gone by, — the stork having long ago deserted our shores, and falconry, poetical and captivating as it is to the eye and the fancy, having been abandoned in the fashionable rage for preserves, where game are bred like poultry, and massacred by wholesale on field-days. Next to birds, children are the darlings, in the similes, of this stern, and harsh, and gloomy being, as he is often, though unjustly, represented to have been. Amidst his most dazzling, terrific, or monstrous creations, these little ones, in all their loveliness and hilarity, are introduced, to re-invigorate the tired thoughts, and cool the over-heated imagination with reminiscence of that which, in this world, may be looked upon with the least pain, and which cannot be looked upon with pleasure without our being the better for it; the love of children, and the delight of seeing them happy, being a test of every other species of kindness towards our fellow-creatures.

It is unnecessary to pursue general criticism further. Any analysis of the plot would be preposterous here; for nothing less than a progressive abstract of the whole, with examples from every stage, would be satisfactory, or indeed intelligible, to those who are not acquainted with the original, or the translation into English by the Reverend H. F. Cary, which may be said to fail in nothing except the versification — and that, perhaps, only in consequence

of the writer's attention to what constitutes the chief merit of his performance, fidelity to the meaning of the text.

It was the purpose of the writer of the foregoing memoir to have concluded his strictures on the "Divina Commedia" with a series of newly-translated specimens from the same (like the foregoing ones), in the various kinds of style for which the author was distinguished, in order to give the English reader some faint idea of this poet's very peculiar manner of handling his subject, and the general cast of his mind and mode of thinking: but the limits of the present work precluding any further extension of this article, these are reserved, and may be laid before the public at some future opportunity.

PETRARCH.

Francesco Petrarca was of Florentine extraction, and sprung from a respectable family. His progenitors had been notaries. His great grandfather has been distinguished for his integrity, benevolence, and long life: his youth had been active, his old age was serene; he died in his sleep when more than 100 years old, an age scarcely ever heard of in Italy. His father exercised the same profession as those who had gone before him; and, being held in great esteem by his fellow citizens, he had filled several public offices. When the Ghibelines were banished Florence in 1302, Petraccolo was included in the number of exiles; his property was confiscated, and he retired with his wife, Eletta Canigiani, whom he had lately married, to the town of Arezzo in Tuscany. Two years after, the Ghibeline exiles endeavoured to reinstate themselves in their native city by force of arms, but they failed in their enterprise, and were forced to retreat. The attempt took place on the night of the 20th of July, 1304; and, on returning discomfited on the morrow, Petraccolo found that during the intervening hours his wife had, after a period of great difficulty and danger, given birth to a son. The child was baptized Francesco, and the surname of di Petracco was added, as was the custom in those days, to distinguish him as the son of Petracco. Orthography, at that time, was very inexact; and the poet's ear for harmony caused him to give a more euphonious sound to his patronymic: he wrote his name Petrarca, and by this he was known during his life, and to all posterity.

1305. When the child was seven months old his mother was permitted to return from banishment, and she established herself at a country house belonging to her husband near Ancisa, a small town fifteen miles

from Florence. The infant, who, at his birth, it was supposed, would not survive, was exposed to imminent peril during this journey. In fording a rapid stream, the man who had charge of him, carried him, wrapped in his swaddling clothes, at the end of a stick; he fell from his horse, and the babe slipped from the fastenings into the water; but he was saved, for how could Petrarch die until he had seen Laura? His mother remained for seven years at Ancisa. Petraccolo meanwhile wandered from place to place, seeking to earn a subsistence, and endeavouring to forward the Ghibeline cause. He visited his wife by stealth on various occasions, and she gave birth during this period to two sons; one of whom died in infancy, and the other, Gherardo, or Gerard, was the companion and friend of Francesco for many years.

1312. Ætat. 8.

When Petrarch was eight years of age, his parents removed to Pisa, and remained there for nearly a year; when, finding his party entirely ruined, Petraccolo resolved to emigrate to Avignon; for, the pope having fixed his residence in that city, it became a resort for the Italians, who found it advantageous to follow his court. Petraccolo embarked with his wife and two children at Leghorn, and proceeded by sea to Marseilles. They were wrecked and exposed to great danger when not far from port; but landing at last in safety, they proceeded to Avignon. The eyes of the young Petrarch had become familiar with the stately cities of his native country: for the last year he had lived at Pisa, where the marble palaces of the Lung' Arno, and the free open squares surrounded by majestic structures, were continually before him. The squalid aspect of the ill-built streets of Avignon were in painful contrast; and thus that veneration for Italy, and contempt for transalpine countries, which exercised a great influence over his future life, was early implanted in Petrarch's heart.

1313. Ætat. 9.

The papal court, and consequent concourse of strangers, filled Avignon to overflowing, and rendered it an

expensive place of residence. Accordingly Petraccolo quitted it for Carpentras, a small rural town twelve miles distant. A Genoese named Settimo, lately arrived at Avignon with his wife and young son, had formed an intimacy with Petraccolo, and joined him in this fresh migration.

1315. Ætat. 11.

The youth of Petrarch was obscure in point of fortune, but it was attended by all the happiness that springs from family concord, and the excellent character of his parents. His father was a man of probity and talent, attentive to his son's education and improvement, and, at the same time, kind and indulgent. His mother was distinguished for the virtues that most adorn her sex; she was domestic, and affectionate in her disposition; and he had two youthful friends, in his brother Gerard and Guido Settimo, whom he tenderly loved. Add to this, he studied under Convennole, a kind-hearted man, to whom he became warmly attached. Under his care, and during several visits to Avignon, Petrarch learned as much of grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric, as suited his age, or was taught in the schools which he frequented; and how little that was, any one conversant with the learning of those times can readily divine.*

At the age of fifteen Petrarch was sent to study at the university of Montpellier, then frequented by a vast concourse of students. Petraccolo intended his son to pursue the study of the law, as the profession best suited to insure his reputation and fortune; but to this pursuit Francesco was invincibly repugnant. "It was not," he tells us, in the account he wrote for the information of Posterity, "that I was not pleased with the venerable authority of the laws, full, as they doubtless are, of the spirit of ancient Rome, but because their use was depraved by the wickedness of man; and it was tedious to learn that by which I could not profit without dishonour." Petraccolo was alarmed by the dislike shown

1319. Ætat. 15.

* Epist. ad Posterit.

by his son for the career for which he destined him, and by the taste he displayed for literature. He made a journey to Montpellier, reproached him for his idleness, and seizing on the precious manuscripts, which the youth vainly endeavoured to hide, threw them into the fire: but the anguish and cries of Petrarch moved him to repent his severity: he snatched the remnants of Virgil and Cicero from the flames, and gave them back, bidding him find consolation in the one, and encouragement in the other, to pursue his studies.

1323. Ætat. 19. He was soon after sent to Bologna. The chairs of this university were filled by the ablest professors of the age; and, under them, Petrarch made considerable progress in the study of the law, moved to this exertion, doubtless, by the entreaties of his excellent father. He proved that indolence was not the cause of his aversion to this profession. His master of civil law, Cino da Pistoia, gives most honourable testimony of his industry and talents. "I quickly discovered and appreciated your genius," he says, in a letter written some time after, "and treated you rather like a beloved son than as a pupil. You returned my affection, and repaid me by observance and respect, and thus gained a reputation among the professors and students for morality and prudence. Your progress in study will never be forgotten in the university. In the space of four years you learned by heart the entire body of civil law, with as much facility as another would have acquired the romance of Launcelot and Ginevra."

1326. Ætat. 22. After three years spent at Bologna, Petrarch was recalled to France by the death of his father. Soon after his mother died also, and he and his brother were left entirely to their own guidance, with very slender means, and those diminished by the dishonesty of those whom their father had named as trustees to their fortune. Under these circumstances Petrarch entirely abandoned law, as it occurred to both him and his brother that the clerical profession was their best resource in a city where the priesthood reigned supreme.

They resided at Avignon, and became the favourites and companions of the ecclesiastical and lay nobles who formed the papal court, to a degree which, in after-times, excited Petrarch's wonder, though the self-sufficiency and ardour of youth then blinded him to the peculiar favour with which he was regarded. His talents and accomplishments were, of course, the cause of this distinction; besides that his personal advantages were such as to prepossess every one in his favour. He was so handsome as frequently to attract observation as he passed along the streets: his complexion was between dark and fair; he had sparkling eyes, and a vivacious and pleasing expression of countenance. His person was rather elegant than robust; and he increased the gracefulness of his appearance by a sedulous attention to dress. "Do you remember," he wrote to his brother Gerard, many years after, "our white robes; and our chagrin when their studied elegance suffered the least injury, either in the disposition of their folds, or in their spotless cleanliness? do you remember our tight shoes and how we bore the tortures which they inflicted without a murmur? and our care lest the breezes should disturb the arrangement of our hair?"

Such tastes befit the season of youth, which, always in extremes, is apt otherwise to diverge into negligence and disorder. But Petrarch could not give up his entire mind to frivolity and the pleasures of society: he sought the intercourse of the wise, and his warm and tender heart attached itself with filial or fraternal affection to his good and learned friends. Among these was John of Florence, canon of Pisa, a venerable man, devoted to learning, and passionately attached to his native country. With him Petrarch could recur to his beloved studies and antique manuscripts. Sometimes, however, the young man was seized with the spirit of despondency. During such a mood, he had one day recourse to his excellent friend, and poured out his heart in complaints. "You know," he said, "the pains I have taken to distinguish myself from the crowd, and

to acquire a reputation for knowledge. You have often told me that I am responsible to God for the use I make of my talents; and your praises have spurred me on to exertion: but I know not why, even at the moment when I hoped for success in my endeavours, I find myself dispirited, and the sources of my understanding dried up. I stumble at every step; and in my despair I have recourse to you. Advise me. Shall I give up my studies? shall I enter on another career? Have pity on me, my father: raise me from the frightful condition into which I have fallen."

Petrarch shed tears as he spoke; but the old man encouraged him with sagacity and kindness. He told him that his best hopes for improvement must be founded on the discovery he had made of his ignorance. "The veil is now raised," he said, "and you perceive the darkness which was before concealed by the presumption of youth. Embark upon the sea before you: the further you advance, the more immense it will appear; but do not be deterred. Follow the course which I have counselled you to take, and be persuaded that God will not abandon you."

These words re-assured Petrarch, and gave fresh strength to his good intentions. The incident is worthy of record, as giving a lively picture of an ingenuous and ambitious mind struggling with and overcoming the toils of learning.

At this period commenced his friendship with Giacomo Colonna, who had resided at Bologna at the same time with him, and had even then been attracted by his prepossessing appearance and irreproachable conduct, though he did not seek to be acquainted with him till their return to Avignon.

The family of Colonna was the most illustrious of Rome: they had fallen under the displeasure, and incurred the interdict, of pope Boniface VIII. who confiscated their estates and drove them into exile. The head of the family was Stefano, a man of heroic and magnanimous mind. He wandered for many years a banished man

in France and Germany, and a price was set on his head. On one occasion, a band of armed men, desirous of earning the ill reward attendant on delivering him up to his enemies, seized on him, and asked his name, under the belief that he would fear to acknowledge himself. He replied, "I am Stefano Colonna, a citizen of Rome;" and the mercenaries into whose hands he had fallen, struck by his majesty and resolution, set him free. On another occasion, he appeared suddenly in Italy, on a field of battle, to aid his own party against the papal forces. Being surrounded and pressed upon by his foes, one of his friends exclaimed, "O, Stefano, where is your fortress?" He placed his hand upon his heart, and with a smile replied, "Here!" This illustrious man had a family of ten children, all distinguished by their virtues and talents. The third among them was Giacomo. Petrarch describes his friend in glowing colours. "He was," he says, "generous, faithful, and true; modest, though endowed with splendid talents; handsome in person, yet of irreproachable conduct: he possessed, moreover, the gift of eloquence to an extraordinary degree; so that he held the hearts of men in his hands, and carried them along with him by force of words." Petrarch was readily ensnared in the net of his fascinations. Giacomo introduced his new friend to his brother, the cardinal Giovanni Colonna, under whose roof he subsequently spent many years, and who acted towards him, not as a master, but rather as a partial brother.* Petrarch records the kindness of his patrons, in the language of enthusiastic gratitude. Doubtless, they deserved the encomiums of his free spirit, a spirit to be subdued only by the power of affection. We must, however, consider them peculiarly fortunate in being able to command the society of one whose undeviating integrity, whose gentleness, and fidelity, adorned talents which have merited eternal renown. The peculiar charm of Petrarch's character is warmth of heart, and a native

* Epist. ad Posterit.

ingenuousness of disposition, which readily laid bare his soul to those around: there was nothing factitious, nothing put on for show, in the temper of his mind; he desired to be great and good in God's eyes, and in those of his friends, for conscience sake, and as the worthy aim of a Christian man. He did not, therefore, wish to hide his imperfections; but rather sought them out, that he might bring a remedy; and betrayed the uneasiness they occasioned, with the utmost simplicity and singleness of mind. When to this delightful frankness were added splendid talents, the charm of poetry, so highly valued in the country of the Troubadours, an affectionate and generous disposition, vivacious and engaging manners, and an attractive exterior; we cannot wonder that Petrarch was the darling of his age, the associate of its greatest men, and the man whom princes delighted to honour.

Hitherto the feelings of friendship had engrossed him: love had not yet robbed him of sleep, nor dimmed his eyes with tears; and he wondered to behold such weakness in others.* Now at the age of twenty-three, after the fire of mere boyhood had evaporated, he felt the power of a violent and inextinguishable passion.

1327. Ætat. 23.

At six in the morning, on the 6th of April, A. D. 1327 (he often fondly records the exact year, day, and hour), on occasion of the festival of Easter, he visited the church of Sainte Claire at Avignon, and beheld, for the first time, Laura de Sâde. She was just twenty years of age, and in the bloom of beauty,—a beauty so touching and heavenly, so irradiated by purity and smiling innocence, and so adorned by gentleness and modesty, that the first sight stamped the image in the poet's heart, never hereafter to be erased.

Laura was the daughter of Audibert de Noves, a noble and a knight: she lost her father in her early youth; and at the age of seventeen, her mother married her to Hugh de Sâde, a young noble only a few years older

* Canzone iv.

than his bride. She was distinguished by her rank and fortune, but more by her loveliness, her sweetness, and the untainted purity of her life and manners in the midst of a society noted for its licentiousness.* Now she is known as the subject of Petrarch's verses; as the woman who inspired an immortal passion, and, kindling into living fire the dormant sensibility of the poet, gave origin to the most beautiful and refined, the most passionate, and yet the most delicate, amatory poetry that exists in the world.

Petrarch beheld the loveliness and sweetness of the young beauty, and was transfixed. He sought acquaintance with her; and while the manners of the times prevented his entering her house †, he enjoyed many opportunities of meeting her in society, and of conversing with her. He would have declared his love, but her reserve enforced silence. "She opened my breast," he writes, "and took my heart into her hand, saying, 'Speak no word of this.'" Yet the reverence inspired by her modesty and dignity was not always sufficient to restrain her lover: being alone with her, and she appearing more gracious than usual, Petrarch, on one occasion, tremblingly and fearfully confessed his passion, but she, with altered looks, replied, "I am not the person you take me for!" Her displeasure froze the very heart of the poet, so that he fled from her presence in grief and dismay.‡

* Secretum Francisci Petrarchæ. † Abbé de Sâde.

‡ Canzone iv. In this, one of the most beautiful of his canzoni, Petrarch narrates the early story of his love. In it occur the following lines: —

"I' segui' tanto avanti il mio desire,
Ch' un dì cacciando si com' io solea,
Mi mossi; e quella fera bella e cruda
In una fonte ignuda
Si stava, quanto 'l Sol più forte ardea.
Io, perchè d' altra vista non m' appago,
Stetti a mirarla: ond' ella ebbe vergogna,
E per farne vendetta, o per celarse,
L' acqua nel viso con le mane mi sparse.
Vero dirò, forse e parrà menzogna:
Ch' i, senti, trarmi della propria imago;
Ed un cervo solitario, e vago,
Di selva in selva ratto mi transformo,
Ed ancor de' miei can' fuggo lo stormo."

The abbé de Sâde, commenting on this poem with true French dryness

No attentions on his part could make any impression on her steady and virtuous mind. While love and youth drove him on, she remained impregnable and firm; and when she found that he still rushed wildly forward, she preferred forsaking, to following him to the precipice down which he would have hurried her. Meanwhile, as he gazed on her angelic countenance, and saw purity painted on it, his love grew as spotless as herself. Love transforms the true lover into a resemblance of the object of his passion. In a town, which was the asylum of vice, calumny never breathed a taint upon Laura's name: her actions, her words, the very expression of her countenance, and her slightest gestures were replete with a modest reserve combined with sweetness, and won the applause of all.*

The passion of Petrarch was purified and exalted at the same time. Laura filled him with noble aspirations, and divided him from the common herd. He felt that her influence made him superior to vulgar ambition; and rendered him wise, true, and great. She saved him in the dangerous period of youth, and gave a worthy aim to all his endeavours. The manners of his age permitted one solace; a Platonic attachment was the fashion of the day. The troubadours had each his lady to adore, to wait upon, and to celebrate in song; without its being supposed that she made him any return beyond a gracious acceptance of his devoirs, and the allowing him to make her the heroine of his verses. Petrarch endeavoured to merge the living passion of his soul into this airy and unsubstantial devotion. Laura permitted the homage: she perceived his merit, and was proud of his admir-

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of fancy, supposes that the scene actually occurred, and would point out the very spot in the environs of Avignon; not perceiving that the poet, in an exquisite allegory, founded on the story of Acteon, describes the wanderings of his mind, and the reveries in which he indulged concerning her he loved; and that both lady and fountain are the creations of his imagination, which so duped and absorbed him; that passion changed him to a solitary being, and his thoughts became the pursuers that perpetually followed and tormented him.

* I adopt Petrarch's own words, here and elsewhere, translated from the "Secretum Francisci Petrarchæ."

ation; she felt the truth of his affection, and indulged the wish of preserving it and her own honour at the same time. Without her inflexibility, this had been a dangerous experiment: but she always kept her lover distant from her; rewarding his reserve by smiles, and repressing by frowns all the overflowings of his heart.

By her resolute severity, she incurred the danger of ceasing to be the object of his attachment, and of losing the gift of an immortal name, which he has conferred upon her. But Petrarch's constancy was proof against hopelessness and time. He had too fervent an admiration of her qualities, ever to change: he controlled the vivacity of his feelings, and they became deeper rooted. The struggle cost him his peace of mind. From the moment that love had seized upon his heart, the tenor of his life was changed. He fed upon tears, and took a fatal pleasure in complaints and sighs; his nights became sleepless, and the beloved name dwelt upon his lips during the hours of darkness. He desired death, and sought solitude, devouring there his own heart. He grew pale and thin, and the flower of youth faded before its time. The day began and closed in sorrow; the varieties of her behaviour towards him alone imparted joy or grief. He strove to flee and to forget; but her memory became, and for ever remained, the ruling law of his existence.*

From this time his poetic life is dated. He probably composed verses before he saw Laura; but none have been preserved except such as celebrate his passion. How soon, after seeing her, he began thus to pour forth his full heart, cannot be told; probably love, which turns the man of the most prosaic temperament into a versifier, impelled him, at its birth, to give harmonious expression to the rush of thought and feeling that it created. Latin was in use among the learned; but ladies, unskilled in a dead language, were accustomed to be sung by the Troubadours in their native Provençal dialect. Petrarch loved

* Secretum Francisci Petrarchæ.

Italy, and all things Italian—he perceived the melody, the grace, the earnestness, which it could embody. The residence of the popes at Avignon caused it to be generally understood; and in the language of his native Florence, the poet addressed his lady, though she was born under a less favoured sky. His sonnets and canzoni obtained the applause they deserved: they became popular: and he, no doubt, hoped that the description of his misery, his admiration, his almost idolatry, would gain him favour in Laura's heart.

Petrarch had always a great predilection for travelling: the paucity of books rendered this a mode,—in his eyes, almost the only mode,—for the attainment of the knowledge for which his nature craved. The first journey he made after his return from Bologna, was to accompany Giacomo Colonna on his visit to the diocese of Lombes, of which he had lately been installed bishop. Lombes is a small town of Languedoc, not far from Thoulouse; it had been erected into a bishopric by pope John XXII., who conferred it on Giacomo Colonna, in recompence of an act of intrepid daring successfully achieved in his behalf. It was the summer season, and the travellers proceeded through the most picturesque part of France, among the Pyrenees, to the banks of the Garonne. Besides Petrarch, the bishop was accompanied by Lello, the son of Pietro Stefani, a Roman gentleman; and a Frenchman named Louis. The friendship that Petrarch formed with both, on this occasion, continued to the end of their lives: many of his familiar letters are addressed to them under the appellations of Lælius and Socrates; for Petrarch's contempt of his own age gave him that tinge of pedantry which caused him to confer on his favourites the names of the ancients. Lello was a man of education and learning; he had long lived under the protection of the Colonna family, by the members of which he was treated as a son or brother. The transalpine birth of Louis made Petrarch call him a barbarian; but he found him cultivated and refined, endowed with a lively imagination, a gay temper, and

1330. Ætat. 26.

addicted to music and poetry. In the society of these men, Petrarch passed a divine summer; it was one of those periods in his life, towards which his thoughts frequently turned in after-times with yearning and regret.*

On his return from Lombes, Petrarch became an inmate in the house of cardinal Colonna. He had leisure to indulge in his taste for literature: he was unwearied in the labour of discovering, collating, and copying ancient manuscripts. To him we owe the preservation of many Latin authors, which, buried in the dust of monastic libraries, and endangered by the ignorance of their monkish possessors, had been wholly lost to the world, but for the enthusiasm and industry of a few learned men, among whom Petrarch ranks pre-eminent. He thought no toil burthensome, however arduous, which drew from oblivion these monuments of former wisdom. Often he would not trust to the carelessness of copyists, but transcribed these works with his own hand. His library was lost to the world, after his death, through the culpable negligence of the republic of Venice, to which he had given it; but there still exists, in the Laurentian library of Florence, the orations of Cicero, and his letters to Atticus in Petrarch's handwriting.

His ardour for acquiring knowledge was unbounded, —the society of a single town, and the few books that he possessed, could not satisfy him. He believed that travelling was the best school for learning. His great desire was to visit Rome; and a journey hither was projected by him and the bishop of Lombes. Delays intervening, which prevented their immediate departure, Petrarch made the tour of France, Flanders, and Brabant: "For which journey," he says, "whatever cause may have been alleged, the real motive was a fervent desire of extending my experience."† He first visited Paris, and took pleasure in satisfying himself of the

1331. Ætat. 27.

* Epist. ad Posterit. † Ibid.

truth or falsehood of the accounts he had heard of that city. His curiosity was insatiable; when the day did not suffice, he devoted the night to his enquiries. He found the city ill built and disagreeable, but he was pleased with the inhabitants; describing them, as a traveller might of the present day, as gay, and fond of society; facile and animated in conversation, and amiable in their assemblies and feasts; eager in their search after amusement, and driving away care by pleasure; prompt to discover and to ridicule the faults of others, and covering their own with a thick veil.*

From Paris, Petrarch continued his travels through Liege, Aix-la-Chapelle, and Cologne. In all places he searched for ancient manuscripts. At Liege he discovered two orations of Cicero, but could not find any one capable of copying them in the whole town: it was with difficulty that he procured some yellow and pale ink, with which he transcribed them himself.† From Cologne he turned his steps homeward, passing through Ardennes on his way to Lyons. His heart warmed at the expectation of returning to his friends; and the image of Laura took possession of his imagination. Whilst wandering alone through the wild forest, which armed men feared to traverse, no idea of danger occurred to him; love occupied all his thoughts: the form of Laura flitted among the trees; and the waving branches, and the song of birds, and the murmuring streams, made her movements and her voice present to his senses with all the liveliness of reality. Twilight closed in, and imparted a portion of dismay, till, emerging from the dark trees, he beheld the Rhone, which threaded the plains towards the native town of the lady of his love; and at sight of the familiar river, a joyous rapture took place of gloom. Two of the most graceful of his sonnets were written to describe the fantastic images that haunted him as he traversed the forest, and the kindling of his soul when, emerging from its depths, he was, as it were,

* Epist. ad Posterit. † Epist. Fam.

serenely welcomed by the delightful country and beloved river which appeared before him.*

At Lyons a disappointment awaited him: he met, on his arrival, a servant of the Colonna family, whom he eagerly questioned concerning his friends; and heard, to his infinite mortification, that Giacomo had departed for Italy, without waiting for his return. Deeply hurt by this apparent neglect, he wrote a letter to the bishop, full of bitter reproaches, which he enclosed to cardinal Colonna, to be forwarded to his brother; while he delayed somewhat his homeward journey, spending some weeks at Lyons. He was absent from Avignon, on this occasion, scarcely more than three months.

On his return, he found that Giacomo Colonna was not to blame; he having repaired to Rome by command of the pope, that he might pacify the discontented citizens, and quell the disturbances occasioned by the insurgent nobles. Petrarch did not immediately join his friend: he had a duty to perform towards cardinal Colonna; and the chains which Laura threw around him, made him slow to quit a city which she inhabited. At length he embarked, and proceeded by sea to Cività Vecchia. The troubled state of the country around Rome rendered it unsafe for a solitary traveller. Petrarch took refuge in the romantic castle of Capranica, and wrote to his friends, announcing his arrival. They came instantly to welcome and escort him. Petrarch at length reached the city of his dreams. His excited imagination had painted the fallen mistress of the world in splendid colours; and, warned by his friends, he had feared disappointment. But the sight of Rome produced no such effect: he was too real a poet, not to look with awe and reverence on the mighty and beautiful remains which meet the wanderer's eye at every turn in the streets of Rome. Petrarch's admiration grew, instead of di-

1335. Ætat. 31.

* Sonnets 53, 54. The Abbé de Sâde notices these sonnets. They prove that the order of time is not preserved in the arrangement of his sonnets; as his letters prove that this journey through the forest of Ardennes preceded many events recorded in poems which are represented as if of an earlier date.

minishing. He found the eternal city greater and more majestic in her ruins than he had before figured; and, instead of wondering how it was that she had given laws to the whole earth, he was only surprised that her supremacy had not been more speedily acknowledged.*

He found inexhaustible gratification in contemplating the magnificent ruins scattered around. He was accompanied in his researches by Giovanni da San Vito, brother of Stefano Colonna, who, enveloped in the exile of his family, had wandered for many years in Persia, Arabia, and Egypt. Stefano Colonna himself resided in the capital; and Petrarch found in him an image of those majestic heroes who illustrated the annals of ancient Rome.

On leaving Italy, Petrarch gratified his avidity for travel by a long journey through Spain to Cadiz, and northward, by the sea-shore, as far as the coasts of England. He went to escape from the chains which awaited him at Avignon; and, seeking a cure for the wounds which his heart had received, he endeavoured to obtain health and liberty by visiting distant countries. It is thus that he speaks of this tour in his letters. But, though he went far, he did not stay long; for, on the 16th of August of the same year, he returned to Avignon.

He came back with the same feelings; and grew more and more dissatisfied with himself, and the state of agitation and slavery to which the vicinity of Laura reduced him. The young wife was now the mother of a family, and more disinclined than ever to tarnish her good name, or to endanger her peace, by the sad vicissitudes of illicit passion. Disturbed, and struggling with himself, Petrarch sought various remedies for the ill that beset him. Among other attempts to divert his thoughts, he made an excursion to Mont Ventoux, one of the highest mountains of Europe; which, placed in a country where every other hill is much lower, commands a splendid and ex-

April 20. 1336. Ætat. 32.

* Epist. Fam.

tensive view. There is a letter of his to his friend and spiritual director, father Dionisio Robertis, of San Sepolcro, whom he knew in Paris, giving an account of the expedition. It was a work of labour to climb the precipitous mountain; with difficulty, and after many fatiguing deviations from the right road, he reached its summit. He gazed around on the earth, spread like a map below; he fixed his eyes on the Alps, which divided him from Italy; and then, reverting to himself, he thought—"Ten years ago you quitted Bologna: how are you changed since then!" The purity of the air, and the vast prospect before him, gave subtlety and quickness to his perceptions. He reflected on the agitation of his soul, but not yet arrived in port, he felt that he ought not to let his thoughts dwell on the tempests that shook his nature. He thought of her he loved, not, as before, with hope and animation, but with a sad struggling love, for which he blushed. He would have changed his feeling to hate; but such an attempt were vain: he felt ashamed and desperate, as he repeated the verse of Ovid—

"Odero, si potero; si non, invitus amabo."

For three years this passion had reigned over him without control: he now combated it; but his struggles saddened, while they sobered him. Again he turned his eyes from his own heart to the scene around. As the sun declined, he regarded the vast expanse of the distant Mediterranean, the long chain of mountains which divides France from Spain, and the Rhone which flowed at his feet. He feasted his eyes long on this glorious spectacle, while pious emotions filled his bosom. He had taken with him (for Petrarch was never without a book) the volume of St. Augustin's Confessions: he opened it by chance, and his eyes fell on the following passage:—"Men make journeys to visit the summits of mountains, the waves of the sea, the course of rivers, and the immensity of ocean, while they neglect their own souls." Struck by the coincidence, Petrarch turned

his thoughts inward, and prayed that he might be enabled to vanquish himself. The moon shone upon their descent from the mountain (he was accompanied by his brother Gerard, whom he had selected from among his friends to join him in his excursion); and arriving at Maulaçene, a town at the foot of Mont Ventoux, Petrarch relieved his mind by pouring out his heart in a letter to Dionisio Robertis.

The immediate result of the reflections thus awakened, was his retirement to Vaucluse. When a boy, he had visited this picturesque valley and its fountain, in company with his father, mother, and brother. He had then been charmed by its beauty and seclusion: and now, weary of travelling, and resolved to fly from Laura, he took refuge in the solitude he could here command.

He bought a small house and field, removed his books, and established himself. Since then Vaucluse has been often visited for his sake; and he who was enchanted by its loneliness and beauty, has described, in letters and verses, with fond and glowing expressions, the charm that it possessed for him. The valley is narrow, as its name testifies — shut in by high and craggy hills; the river Sorgue traverses its depth; and on one side, a vast cavern in the precipitous rock presents itself, from which the fountain flows, that is the source of the river. Within the cave, the shadows are black as night; the hills are clothed by umbrageous trees, under whose shadow the tender grass, starred by innumerable flowers, offers agreeable repose. The murmur of the torrent is perennial: that, and the song of the birds, are the only sounds heard. Such was the retreat that the poet chose. He saw none but the peasants who took care of his house and tended his little farm. The only woman near was the hard-working wife of the peasant, old and withered. No sounds of music visited his ears: he heard, instead, the carolling of the birds, and the brawling waters. Often he remained in silence from morning till night, wandering among the hills while the sun was yet low; and taking refuge, during the heat of the day,

in his shady garden, which, sloping down towards the Sorgue, was terminated on one side by inaccessible rocks. At night, after performing his clerical duties (for he was canon of Lombes), he rambled among the hills; often entering, at midnight, the cavern, whose gloom, even during the day, struck the soul with awe.

The peasantry about him were poor and hard-working. His food was usually black bread; and he was so abstemious, that the servant he brought with him from Avignon quitted him, unable to endure the solitude and privations of his retreat. He was then waited on by the neighbouring cottager, a fisherman, whose life had been spent among fountains and rivers, deriving his subsistence from the rocks. "To call this man faithful," says Petrarch, "is a tame expression: he was fidelity itself." Without being able to read, he revered and cherished the books his master loved; and, all rude and illiterate, his pious regard for the poet raised him almost to the rank of a friend. His wife was yet more rustic. Her skin was burned by the sun till it resembled nothing human. She was humble, faithful, and laborious; passing her life in the fields, working under the noonday sun; while the evening was dedicated to indoor labour. She never complained, nor ever showed any mark of discontent. She slept on straw: her food was the coarsest black bread; her drink water, in which she mingled a little wine, as sour as vinegar.

It was here that Petrarch hoped to subdue his passion, and to forget Laura. "Fool that I was!" he exclaims in after-life, "not to have remembered the first school-boy lesson — that solitude is the nurse of love!" How, with his thoughts for his sole companions, preying perpetually on his own heart, could he forget her who occupied him exclusively in courts and cities? And thus he tells, in musical and thrilling accents, how, amidst woods, and hills, and murmuring waves, her image was painted on every object, and contemplated by him till he forgot himself to stone, more dead than the living rocks among which he wandered. It is almost

impossible to translate Petrarch's poetry; for his subtle and delicate thoughts, when generalised, seem common-place; and his harmony and grace, which have never been equalled, are inimitable. The only translations which retain the spirit of the original, are by lady Dacre; and we extract her version of one of the canzoni, as a specimen of his style, and as affording a vivid picture of his wild melancholy life among the solitary mountains.

"From hill to hill I roam, from thought to thought,
With Love my guide; the beaten path I fly,
For there in vain the tranquil life is sought:
If 'mid the waste well forth a lonely rill,
Or deep embosom'd a low valley lie,
In its calm shade my trembling heart is still;
And there, if Love so will,
I smile, or weep, or fondly hope or fear,
While on my varying brow, that speaks the soul,
The wild emotions roll,
Now dark, now bright, as shifting skies appear;
That whosoe'er has proved the lover's state
Would say, 'He feels the flame, nor knows his future fate.'

"On mountains high, in forests drear and wide,
I find repose, and from the throng'd resort
Of man turn fearfully my eyes aside;
At each lone step thoughts ever new arise
Of her I love, who oft with cruel sport
Will mock the pangs I bear, the tears, the sighs;
Yet e'en these ills I prize,
Though bitter, sweet — nor would they were removed;
For my heart whispers me, 'Love yet has power
To grant a happier hour:
Perchance, though self-despised, thou yet art loved.'
E'en then my breast a passing sigh will heave,
Ah! when, or how, may I a hope so wild believe?

"Where shadows of high rocking pines dark wave,
I stay my footsteps; and on some rude stone,
With thought intense, her beauteous face engrave:
Roused from the trance, my bosom bathed I find
With tears, and cry, 'Ah! whither thus alone
Hast thou far wander'd? and whom left behind?'
But as with fixed mind
On this fair image I impassion'd rest,
And, viewing her, forget awhile my ills,
Love my rapt fancy fills;
In its own error sweet the soul is blest,
While all around so bright the visions glide;
O! might the cheat endure, — I ask not aught beside.

"Her form portray'd within the lucid stream
Will oft appear, or on the verdant lawn,
Or glossy beech, or fleecy cloud, will gleam
So lovely fair, that Leda's self might say,
Her Helen sinks eclipsed, as at the dawn
A star when cover'd by the solar ray:
And, as o'er wilds I stray,
Where the eye nought but savage nature meets,

There Fancy most her brightest tints employs;
But when rude truth destroys
The loved illusion of those dreamed sweets,
I sit me down on the cold rugged stone,
Less cold, less dead than I, and think and weep alone.

"Where the huge mountain rears his brow sublime,
On which no neighbouring height its shadow flings,
Led by desire intense the steep I climb;
And tracing in the boundless space each woe,
Whose sad remembrance my torn bosom wrings,
Tears, that bespeak the heart o'erfraught, will flow.
While viewing all below,
From me, I cry, what worlds of air divide
The beauteous form, still absent and still near!
Then chiding soft the tear,
I whisper, low, haply she, too, has sigh'd
That thou art far away; a thought so sweet
Awhile my labouring soul will of its burden cheat.

"Go thou, my song, beyond that Alpine bound,
Where the pure smiling heavens are most serene:
There, by a murmuring stream, may I be found,
Whose gentle airs around
Waft grateful odours from the laurel green;
Nought but my empty form roams here unblest,
There dwells my heart with her who steals it from my breast." *

Petrarch's Italian poetry, written either to please his lady or to relieve the overflowing of his heart, bears in every line the stamp of warm and genuine, though of refined and chivalric, passion. It has been criticised as too imaginative, and defaced by conceits: of the latter there are a few, confined to a small portion of the sonnets. They will not be admired now, yet, perhaps, they are not those of the poems which came least spontaneously from the heart. Those have experienced little of the effects of passion, of love, grief, or terror, who do not know that conceits often spring naturally from such. Shakspeare knew this; and he seldom describes the outbursts of passion unaccompanied by fanciful imagery which borders on conceit. Still more false is the notion, that passion is not, in its essence, highly imaginative. Hard and dry critics, who neither feel themselves nor sympathise in the feelings of others, alone can have made this accusation: these people,

* The envoi shows that this canzone was written in Italy, probably when Petrarch was residing at Parma, a few years after. Yet being able to quote only a poem of which there exists a worthy translation, I could not refrain from extracting it; and though alluding to another country, and finished there, it is almost impossible not to believe that it was conceived at Vaucluse, and that it breathes the spirit that filled him in that solitude.

whose inactive and colourless fancy naturally suggests no new combination nor fresh tint of beauty, suppose that is a cold exercise of the mind, when

> "The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven."

As they with difficulty arrive at comprehending poetic creations, they believe that they were produced by dint of hard labour and deep study. The truth is the opposite of this. To the imaginative, fanciful imagery and thoughts, whose expression seems steeped in the hues of dawn, are natural and unforced: when the mind of such is calm, their conceptions resemble those of other men; but when excited by passion, when love, or patriotism, or the influence of nature, kindles the soul, it becomes natural, nay, imperative to them to embody their thoughts, and to give "a local habitation and a name" to the emotions that possess them. The remarks of critics on the overflowings of poetic minds remind one of the traveller who expressed such wonder when, on landing at Calais, he heard little children talk French.

Petrarch, on the other hand, would deceive us, or rather deceived himself, when he alludes depreciatingly to his Italian poetry. Latin was the language of learned men: he deemed it degrading to write for the people; and, fancying that the difficulty of writing Latin was an obstacle glorious to overcome, he treated with disdain any works expressed in the vulgar tongue. Yet even while he said that these compositions were puerile, he felt in his heart the contrary. He bestowed great pains on correcting them, and giving them that polished grace for which they are remarkable. Still his reason (which in this instance, as in others, is often less to be depended upon than our intuitive convictions,) assured him that he could never hold a high place among poets till he composed a Latin poem.

While living in solitude at Vaucluse, yet ambitious that the knowledge of his name should pass beyond the confines of his narrow valley, and be heard even in

Italy, he meditated some great work worthy of the genius he felt within him. He at first contemplated writing a history of Rome, from Romulus to Titus; till one day the idea of an epic poem, on the subject of his favourite hero, Scipio Africanus, struck him. He instantly commenced it with all the ardour of a first conception, and continued for some time to build up cold dull Latin hexameters. It is curious to mark how ill he succeeded: but the structure and spirit of the language he used was then totally unknown; so that, while we lament the mis-spending of his time, we cannot wonder at his failure.

He passed several years thus almost cut off from society: his books were his great resource; he was never without one in his hand. He relates in a letter, how, as a playful experiment, a friend locked up his library, intending to exclude him from it for three days; but the poet's misery caused him to restore the key on the first evening:—"And I verily believe I should have become insane," Petrarch writes, "if my mind had been longer deprived of its necessary nourishment." The friend who thus played with his passion for reading, was Philip de Cabassoles, bishop of Cavaillon. Cavaillon is a pretty but insignificant town, situated on the slope of a mountain near the Durance, twelve miles distant from Avignon, and six from Vaucluse. He became intimate with Petrarch here, and they cemented a friendship which lasted his life. Sometimes Petrarch visited Cabassoles at Cabrières, where he resided; often the bishop came to the poet's cottage. They frequently passed the livelong day together in the woods, without thinking of refreshment, or whole nights among their books, when morning often dawned upon them unawares. After two years' residence in this seclusion, Petrarch continued so pleased with it, that he wrote to Giacomo Colonna, who had endeavoured, by promises of preferment and advantage, to entice him from it, imploring him to let him remain in a position so congenial to his disposition. "You know," he says, "how false and vain are the

enticements of a court; and that the men most in favour there are the fools and rogues who attain dignities and places through adulation and simony. Why, then, should you, a man of honour, desire that I should return to a court? And even if it were possible that I should obtain any thing from the munificence of the pope, the detestable vices of the court are horrible to me. When I quitted the papal residence, know that I sang the psalm 'In exitu Israel ex Ægypto.' I enjoy, in the delightful solitude of Vaucluse, a sweet and imperturbable tranquillity, and the placid and blameless leisure of study. Any spare time I may have I go to Cabrières to amuse myself. Ah! if you were permitted to take up your abode in this valley, you would assuredly be disgusted, not only with the pope and cardinals, but the whole world. I am firmly resolved never to behold the court again."

In this letter, however, he but half expresses the cause of his hatred to Avignon; for he does not allude to Laura, while it was the memory of her that not only made him fly the city in which she lived, but tremble at the mere thought of how near he still was. And while he describes the heavenly tranquillity of his seclusion, and the beauty that adorned it, he exclaims, "But the vicinity of Avignon poisons all." So deep was his fear of reviving his passion by seeing its object, that he never even visited that city for a few days. On one occasion, hearing that his friend, William da Pastrengo, had arrived there, he repaired thither instantly to see him: but, on his arrival within the precincts of the fatal walls, he felt his chains fall so heavily around him, that, resolved to cast them off at once, without tarrying an hour, without seeing his friend, the same night he returned to Vaucluse, and then wrote to excuse himself; alleging, as his motive, his desire to escape from the net of passion that enveloped him in that town. At the same time, with the contradictory impulses of a lover, he entreated the painter, Simon Memmi, a pupil of Giotto, just arrived in Provence, and in high esteem

with the pope and cardinals, to execute for him a small portrait of Laura.* Simon consented; and was so pleased with the model thus presented him, that he frequently afterwards introduced her face into his pictures of saints and angels. Petrarch repaid his friend's complaisance by two sonnets of praise and commendation.

In the imaginary conversations which Petrarch pictures himself to have held with St. Augustine, the saint tells him that he is bound by two adamantine chains — love and glory. To free himself from the first of these he had retreated to Vaucluse, and found the attempt vain. The second passion of his soul became even more strong, allying itself to the first, for he wished Laura's lover to be renowned. This was also more successful, as, beside the honour in which he was held by all who knew him, it proved that his name was heard in distant countries, and his merit acknowledged. He had before entertained a vague wish for the laurel crown of poetry; but it was beyond his hopes, when, on the same day, the 24th of August, 1340, while at Vaucluse, he received letters from the Roman senate, and from the chancellor of the university of Paris, inviting him to receive it. Hesitating to which city to yield the preference, he wrote to ask the advice of cardinal Colonna; and, counselled by him, as well as following his own predilection, decided in favour of Rome.

1340. Ætat. 36.

Another circumstance influenced Petrarch in this choice. Not long before, his friend Dionisio Robertis had visited him at Vaucluse on his way to the court of

* This was not a painting, but a small marble medallion. It has been, since the fourteenth century, in possession of the Peruzzi family at Florence. Behind the portrait of Laura are four Italian verses, not inserted in any editions of Petrarch: —

"Splendida luce cui chiaro se vede
Quel bel che può mostrar nel mondo amore,
O vero exemplo del sopran valore
E d'ogni meraviglia intiera fede."

There is a medallion also of Petrarch, similar in form to the other, behind which is inscribed —

"Simion de Senis me fecit,
Sub Anno Domini MCCCXLIIII."

The authenticity of these bas-reliefs is acknowledged in Italy; a pamphlet, giving an account of them, was published in Paris, 1821, written by one of the Peruzzi family.

Robert king of Naples. From him Petrarch heard of the literary tastes and liberal disposition of this amiable monarch. He had already meditated a visit to him, and letters had been interchanged between them. The circumstance of his coronation gave him a fair excuse for paying him a visit. In the ardour of an age scarcely yet mature, he believed himself worthy of the honour conferred on him; but he tells us that he felt ashamed of relying only on his own testimony and that of the persons who invited him. Perhaps the desire of display, and of proving to the world that he was no illiterate pretender, was the stronger motive. However this might be, he made choice of the king of Naples, more illustrious in his eyes for his learning than his crown, to examine his claim to distinction, and be the judge of his deserts.*

1341 Ætat. 37.

He lost no time in repairing to the court of king Robert, who received him with a warmth of friendship that excited his deepest gratitude. Hearing the object of the poet's visit, he expressed great delight, and considered the choice made of him, among all mortals, to be the judge of his merits, as glorious to himself. During the many conversations they held together, Petrarch showed the monarch the commencement of his poem on Africa. Robert, highly delighted, begged that it might be dedicated to him: the poet gladly assented, and kept his promise, though the king died before it could be fulfilled. The examination of his acquirements lasted three days, after which the king declared him worthy of the laurel, and sent an ambassador to be present on his part when the crown was conferred. Petrarch repaired to Rome for the ceremony, and was crowned in the capitol with great solemnity, in presence of all the nobles and high-born ladies of the city. "I then," writes Petrarch, "thought myself worthy of the honour: love and enthusiasm bore me on. But the laurel did not increase my knowledge, while it gave birth to envy in the hearts of many."†

April 17. 1341.

* Epist. ad Posterit.

† Ibid.

Leaving Rome soon after his coronation, Petrarch intended to return to Avignon, but passing through Parma he was detained by his friend Azzo Correggio, who ruled the city, governing it with incomparable wisdom and moderation. The friendship between Azzo and Petrarch had commenced at Avignon, where, for the first and only time, Petrarch had been induced to take on himself the office of a barrister, and pleaded the cause of the Correggii against their enemies the Rossi before the pope, and succeeded in obtaining a decision in their favour. This, as is mentioned, is the only occasion on which Petrarch played the advocate; and he boasts of having gained the cause for his clients without using towards their adversaries the language of derision and sarcasm.

Petrarch, meanwhile, remembering the honour he had received, was solicitous not to appear unworthy of it; and, on a day, wandering among the hills and crossing the river Ensa, he entered the wood of Selva Piana: struck by the beauty of the place, he turned his thoughts to his neglected poem of Africa; and, excited by an enthusiasm for his subject which had long been dormant, he composed that day, and on each following one, some verses. On returning to Parma he sought and found a tranquil and fit dwelling: buying the house that thus pleased him, he fixed himself at Parma, and continued to occupy himself with his poem with so much ardour, that he brought it to a conclusion with a speed that excited his own surprise.*

At this time Petrarch suffered the first of those losses which afterwards cast such gloomy shadows over his life, in the death, first of Thomas of Messina, and then of a dearer friend, Giacomo Colonna. Tommaso Caloria of Messina had studied with Petrarch at Bologna, and many of his letters are addressed to him. There existed a strict friendship between them, both loving and cultivating literature. His early death deeply affected the warm-hearted poet. The impression

* Epist. ad Posterit.

he received was so melancholy and bitter, that he desired to die also; and a fever, the consequence of his grief, made him imagine that in reality his end was approaching. To add to his disquietude, he heard of the illness of Giacomo Colonna. The bishop was at that time residing at Lombes, apart from all his family, and Petrarch was about to join him to fulfil his duties as canon. At this time he one night dreamt that he saw Giacomo Colonna, in his garden at Parma, crossing the rivulet that traversed it. He went to meet him, asking him, with surprise, whence he came? whither he was going in such haste? and wherefore unattended? The bishop replied, smiling, "Do you not remember when you visited the Garonne with me, how you disliked the thunder-storms of the Pyrenees? They now annoy me also, and I am returning to Rome." So saying he hastened on, repelling with his hand Petrarch, who was about to follow him, saying, "Remain, you must not now accompany me." As he spoke, his countenance changed, and it was overspread with the hues of death. Nearly a month after, Petrarch heard that the bishop had died during the night on which this dream had occurred. The poet was a faithful and believing son of the church of Rome, but he was not superstitious, and saw nothing supernatural in this affecting coincidence. The loss of his friend and patron grieved him deeply, and his mourning was renewed soon after by the death of Dionisio Robertis. These reiterated losses made so profound an impression, that he trembled and turned pale on receiving any letter, and feared at each instant to hear of some new disaster.

Satisfied with the tranquillity which he enjoyed at Parma, he resisted the frequent and earnest solicitations of his friends at Avignon to return among them. He did not forget Laura. Her image often occupied him. It was here we may believe that he wrote the canzone before quoted, and many sonnets, which showed with what lively and earnest thoughts he cherished the passion which had so long reigned over him. He could

not write letters; but as it is a lover's dearest solace to make his mistress aware that his attachment survives time and absence, Petrarch, we may easily suppose, was glad, by the medium of his heart-felt poetry, to communicate with her who, he hoped, prized his affection, even if she did not silently return it. Still love, while far from her, did not so pertinaciously and cruelly torment, and he was unwilling to trust himself within the influence of her presence. It required a powerful motive to induce him to pass the Alps; but this occurred after no long period of time. Italy, and especially Rome, was torn by domestic faction and the lawlessness of the nobles. Petrarch saw in the secession of the popes to Avignon the cause of these disasters. His patriotic spirit kindled with indignation, that the head of the church and the world should desert the queen of cities, and inhabit an insignificant province. He had often exerted all his eloquence to induce successive popes to return to the palaces and temples of Italy. Pope Benedict XII. died at this time, and Clement VI. was elected to fill the papal chair. One of the first incidents of his reign was the arrival of an embassy from Rome, soliciting the restoration of the papal residence. Petrarch, having been already made citizen of that city, was chosen one of the deputies.* He and Rienzi (who afterwards played so celebrated a part) addressed the pope. Their representations were of no avail; but Clement rewarded the poet by naming him prior of Migliarino in the diocese of Pisa.

1342 Ætat. 38.

Petrarch remained at Avignon. The sight of Laura gave fresh energy to a passion which had survived the lapse of fifteen years. She was no longer the blooming girl who had first charmed him. The cares of life had dimmed her beauty. She was the mother of many children, and had been afflicted at various times by illnesses. Her home was not happy. Her husband, without loving or appreciating her, was ill-tempered and jealous. Petrarch acknowledged that if her personal

* Abbé de Sâde.

charms had been her sole attraction he had already ceased to love her. But his passion was nourished by sympathy and esteem; and above all, by that mysterious tyranny of love, which, while it exists, the mind of man seems to have no power of resisting, though in feebler minds it sometimes vanishes like a dream. Petrarch was also changed in personal appearance. His hair was sprinkled with grey, and lines of care and sorrow trenched his face. On both sides the tenderness of affection began to replace, in him the violence of passion, in her the coyness and severity she had found necessary to check his pursuit. The jealousy of her husband opposed obstacles to their seeing each other.* They met as they could in public walks and assemblies. Laura sang to him, and a soothing familiarity grew up between them as her fears became allayed, and he looked forward to the time when they might sit together and converse without dread. He had a confidant in a Florentine poet, Sennucio del Bene, attached to the service of cardinal Colonna, to whom many of his sonnets are addressed, now asking him for advice, now relating the slight but valued incidents of a lover's life.

He had another confidant into whose ear to pour the history of his heart. This was the public. In those days, when books were rare, reading was a luxury reserved for a few, and it was chiefly by oral communication that a poet's contemporaries became acquainted with his productions; and there was a class of men, not poets themselves, who chiefly subsisted by repeating the productions of others: — "men," writes Petrarch, "of no genius, but endowed with memory and industry. Unable to compose themselves, they recite the verses of others at the tables of the great, and receive gifts in return. They are chiefly solicitous to please their audience by novelty. How often have they importuned me with entreaties for my yet unfinished poems! Often I refused. Sometimes, moved by the poverty or worth of my applicants, I yield to their desires. The loss is

* Abbé de Sâde.

small to me, the gain to them is great. Many have visited me, poor and naked, who, having obtained what they asked, returned, loaded with presents, and dressed in silk, to thank me." These were the booksellers of the middle ages. It was thus that the Italian poetry of Petrarch became known; and he, finding that it was often disfigured in repetition, took pains at last to collect and revise it. He performed the latter task with much care; and afterwards said, that though he saw a thousand faults in his other works, he had brought his Italian poetry to as great a degree of perfection as he was capable of bestowing.

He applied himself to Greek at this time under Bernardo Barlaam, a Calabrian by birth, but educated at Constantinople. He had come to Avignon as ambassador from the Greek emperor Andronicus, for the purpose of reconciling the Greek and Roman churches. They read several of the Dialogues of Plato together. The book entitled "The Secret of Francesco Petrarca" was written at this period. This work is in the form of dialogues with St. Augustin. Petrarch, assisted by the questions and remarks of the saint, examines the state of his mind, laying bare every secret of his soul, its weaknesses and its fears, with the utmost ingenuousness. He relates the struggles of his passion for Laura, and accuses himself of that love of glory which was the spur of so many of his actions. He speaks of the constitutional melancholy of his disposition, which often rendered him gloomy and almost despairing; and he is bid by the saint to seek a remedy for his sorrows, and make atonement for his faults, by dedicating hereafter all his faculties to God.

His literary pursuits were interrupted by a public duty. His friend Robert, king of Naples, died, and was succeeded by his daughter Giovanna, married to Andrea, prince of Hungary. The greatest dissension reigned between the royal pair; besides which, the young queen was not of an age to govern, and the pope had pretensions to supremacy during her mino-

1343. Ætat. 39.

rity. Petrarch was sent as ambassador to establish the papal claim; and he was commissioned, also, by cardinal Colonna, to obtain the release of some prisoners of rank unjustly detained at Naples.

During this mission he became attached to the party of queen Giovanna, who inherited her father's love of letters; so that afterwards, when her husband was murdered, he believed her to be innocent of all share in the crime. He was displeased, however, with the court and the gladiatorial exhibitions in fashion there. Having obtained the liberty of the prisoners, and brought his mission from the pope to a successful conclusion, he returned to Parma. This part of Italy was in a state of dreadful disturbance, arising from the wars carried on by the various lords of Parma, Verona, Ferrara, Bologna, and Padua. Petrarch, besieged, as it were, in the first-named town, was obliged to remain. He had still the house he had bought, and the books he had collected and left in Italy. He loved his cisalpine Parnassus, as he named his Italian home, in contradistinction to his transalpine Parnassus at Vaucluse; and, occupying himself with his poem of Africa, he was content to prolong his stay in his native country. At length the roads became safe, and he returned to Avignon.

1345. Ætat. 41.

And now an event occurred which electrified Italy, and filled the papal court with astonishment and disquietude. Nicola di Rienzi, inspired by a desire to free his townsmen from the cruel tyranny of the nobles, with wonderful promptitude and energy, seized upon the government of Rome, assumed the name of tribune, and reduced all the men of rank, with Stefano Colonna at their head, to make public submission to his power. The change he produced in the state of the country was miraculous. Before, travellers scarcely ventured, though armed and in bodies, to traverse the various states: under him the roads became secure; and his emissaries, bearing merely a white wand in their hands, passed unmolested from one end of Italy to the other. Order and plenty reigned through the land. The pope and car-

dinals were filled with alarm; while Petrarch hailed with glowing enthusiasm the restoration of peace and empire to his beloved country. He wrote the tribune letters full of encouragement and praise. His heart swelled with delight at the prospect of the renewed glories of Rome; and such was his blind exultation, that he scarcely mourned the death of several of the most distinguished members of the Colonna family, who fell in the struggle between the nobles and Rienzi.

He desired to return to Italy to enjoy the triumph of liberty and law over oppression and licence. More and more he hated Avignon. Pope Clement VI. was a man of refinement, and a munificent prince: but he was luxurious and dissolute; so that the vices of the court, which filled the poet with immeasurable abhorrence, increased during his reign. He had offered Petrarch the dignity of bishop, and the honourable and influential post of apostolic secretary; but the poet declined to accept the proferred rank. Love of independence was strong in his heart; and he desired no wealth beyond competence, which was secured to him by the preferment he already enjoyed. He was at this time archdeacon of Parma, as well as canon of various cathedrals. He obtained with difficulty the consent of his friends to abandon Avignon for Italy. Cardinal Colonna reproached him bitterly for deserting him; and Laura saw him depart with regret. When he went to take leave of her, he found her (as he describes in several of his sonnets) surrounded by a circle of ladies. Her mien was dejected; a cloud overcast her face, whose expression seemed to say, "Who takes my faithful friend from me?" Petrarch was struck to the heart by a sad presentiment: the emotion was mutual; they both seemed to feel that they should never meet again.

Yet, restless and discontented, he would not stay. He had no ties of home. His brother Gerard had taken vows, and become a Carthusian monk: he invited Petrarch to follow his example; but the poet's love of independence prevented this, as well as every other

servitude. Belonging to the Romish church, he could not marry; and though he had two children he was not attached to their mother, of whom nothing more is known except the declaration, in the letters of legitimacy obtained afterwards for her son, that she was not a married woman. Of these two children the daughter was yet an infant. The boy, now ten years of age, he had placed at Verona, under the care of Rinaldo da Villafranca.

1347. Ætat. 43. Leaving Avignon, Petrarch passed through Genoa, where he heard of the follies and downfall of Rienzi; instead, therefore, of proceeding to Rome, he repaired to his house at Parma.

1348. Ætat. 44. The fatal year now began which cast mourning and gloom over the rest of his life. It was a year fatal to the whole world. The plague, which had been extending its ravages over Asia, entered Europe. As if for an omen of the greater calamity, a disastrous earthquake occurred on the 25th of January. Petrarch was timid: he feared thunder — he dreaded the sea; and the alarming concussion of nature that shook Italy filled him with terror. The plague then extended its inroads to increase his alarm. It spread its mortal ravages far and wide: nearly one half of the population of the world became its prey. Petrarch saw thousands die around him, and he trembled for his friends: he heard that it was at Avignon, and his friend Sennucio del Bene had fallen its victim. A thousand sad presentiments haunted his mind. He recollected the altered countenance of Laura when he last saw her; he dreamed of her as dead; her pale image hovered near his couch, bidding him never expect to see her more. At last, the fatal truth reached him: he received intelligence of her death on the 19th of May. By a singular coincidence, she died on the anniversary of the day when he first saw her. She was taken ill on the 3d of April, and languished but three days. As soon as the symptoms of the plague declared themselves, she prepared to die: she made her will, which is dated on the 3d of

April*, and received the sacraments of the church. On the 6th she died, surrounded to the last by her friends and the noble ladies of Avignon, who braved the danger of infection to attend on one so lovely and so beloved. On the evening of the same day on which she died, she was interred in the chapel of the Cross which her husband had lately built in the church of the Minor Friars at Avignon. With her was buried a leaden box, fastened with wire, which enclosed a medal and a sealed parchment, on which was inscribed an Italian sonnet. If the sonnet were the composition of Petrarch, as the sense of it would intimate, although its want of merit renders it doubtful, this box must have been placed in the grave at a subsequent period.

The sensitive heart of Petrarch had often dwelt on the possibility of Laura's death. Although she was only three years his junior, he comforted himself by the reflection that as he had entered life first so he should be the first to quit it.† This fond hope was disappointed: he lost her who, for more than twenty years, had continually been the object of all his thoughts: he lost her at a period when he began to hope that, while time diminished the violence of his passion, it might draw them nearer as friends. The sole melancholy consolation now afforded him was derived from the contemplation of the past. That at each hour of the day her memory might be more vividly present to his thoughts, he fixed to the binding of his copy of Virgil a record of her death, written in Latin, of which the following is a translation:—

"Laura, illustrious through her own virtues, and long celebrated by my verses, first appeared to me in my youth, in the year of our Lord 1327, on the sixth day of April, in the church of Ste. Claire, at Avignon, at the ninth hour‡ of the morning. And in the same city, during the same month of April, on the same day

* Abbé de Sâde. † Secretum Francisci Petrarchæ.

‡ Petrarch uses church time, in which the ninth hour answers to six A.M.

of the month, and at the same early hour, but in the year 1348, this light was withdrawn from the world; while I, alas! ignorant of my fate, chanced to be at Verona. The unhappy intelligence reached me through the letters of my friend Louis, at Parma, in the same year, on the morning of the nineteenth of May. Her chaste and beautiful body was deposited, on the evening of her death in the church of the Minor Friars at Avignon.* Her soul, as Seneca says of Africanus, I believe to have returned to the heaven whence it came. To mingle some sweetness with the bitter memory of this miserable event, I have selected this place to record it, which often meets my eyes; so that by frequent view of these words, and by due estimation of the swift passage of time, I may be reminded that nothing henceforth can please me in life, and that, my chief tie being broken, it is time that I should escape from this Babylon; and, by the grace of God, I shall find this easy, while I resolutely and boldly reflect on the vain cares of years gone by, on my futile hopes, and on their unexpected downfall." †

Death consecrates and deepens the sentiment with which we regard a beloved object; it is no wonder, therefore, that Petrarch, whose sensibility and warmth of feeling surpassed that of all other men, should have gone beyond himself in the poems he wrote subsequent to Laura's death. Nothing can be more tender, more

* The perfect accord between this record in Petrarch's handwriting, and the inscription on the coffin of Laura de Sâde, discovered in the church of the Minor Friars at Avignon, puts the identity of the lady beyond all doubt. This seems to have taken place for the very purpose of informing posterity of who she was whom the poet had celebrated, yet whose actual name he never mentioned.

† "The Virgil to which this note is appended is preserved in the Ambrosian library at Milan. In 1795, a part of the leaf on which it was written became detached from the cover, and the librarians perceived other writing beneath. Curiosity engaged them to take off the entire leaf, in which process, the parchment being tightly glued, the writing, nearly effaced, remained on the wood of the binding. They found beneath a note in the handwriting of Petrarch, containing the dates of the loss he had once suffered of the book itself, and its restitution. There is, in addition, a record of the dates of the death of various of his friends, mingled with exclamations of regret and sorrow, and complaints of the increasing solitude to which he finds himself reduced through these reiterated bereavements." — *Ginguene.*

instinct with the spirit of passionate melancholy, and, at the same time, more beautiful, than the sonnets and canzoni which lament her loss. It was his only consolation to recur to all the marks of affection he had ever received from her, and to believe that she regarded him with tender interest from her place of bliss in heaven. He indulged, also, in another truly catholic mode of testifying his affection, by giving large sums in charity for the sake of her soul, and causing so many masses to be said for the same purpose, that, as a priest who was his contemporary, informed his congregation, in a sermon, "they had been sufficient to withdraw her from the hands of the devil, had she been the worst woman in the world; while, on the contrary, her death was holy." *

The death of Laura, overwhelming as it was, was but a prelude to numerous others. Petrarch had lived among many dear friends; but the plague appeared, and their silent graves were soon all that remained to him of them. Cardinal Colonna died in the course of this same year. He was the last surviving son of the hero Stefano, who lived to become childless in his old age. Petrarch relates in a letter, that during his first visit to Rome, he was walking one evening with Stefano in the wide street that led from the Colonna palace to the Capitol, and they paused in an open place formed by the meeting of several streets. They both leant their elbows on an antique marble, and their conversation turned on the actual condition of the Colonna family: after other observations that fell from Stefano, he turned to Petrarch with tears in his eyes, saying, "With regard to the heir of my possessions, I desire and ought to leave them to my sons; but fate has ordered otherwise. By a reversal of the order of nature, which I deplore, it is I — decrepit old man as I am — who will inherit from all my children." As he spoke, grief seized upon his heart, and interrupted further speech. Now

* Tiraboschi.

this singular prophecy was fulfilled; and Petrarch, in his letter of condolence, reminds the unhappy father of this scene. The old man, however, survived but a few months the last of his sons.

Petrarch, during the autumn, visited Giacomo da Carrara, lord of Padua, who had often invited him with a warmth and pertinacity, which he found it at length impossible to resist. He passed many months in that town, visiting occasionally Parma, Mantua, and Ferrara, being much favoured and beloved by the various lords of these cities. On occasion of the jubilee, he went to Rome in pilgrimage, to avail himself of the religious indulgences afforded on that occasion. On his way through Florence, which he visited for the first time, he saw Boccaccio, with whom he had lately entered into a correspondence. Continuing his journey, he met with a serious injury from the kick of a horse on his knee, on the road near Bolsena, which occasioned him great pain, and on his arrival at Rome confined him to his bed for some days. As soon as he was able to rise, he performed his religious duties, and, with earnest prayers and good resolutions, dedicated his future life to the practices of virtue and piety.

1350. Ætat. 46.

Returning from Rome, he passed through his native town of Arezzo. The inhabitants received him with every mark of honour: they showed him the house in which he was born, which they had never permitted to be pulled down nor altered, and attended on him during his visit with zealous affection. On his arrival at Padua he was afflicted by hearing of the death of his friend and protector Giacomo da Carrara; who, but a few days before, had been assassinated by a relative. The son of Giacomo succeeded to him, and though the difference of age prevented the same intimacy of friendship, the young lord loved and honoured Petrarch as his father had done; so that he continued to reside in the city, over which the youth ruled. Sometimes he visited Venice, to which beautiful and singular town he was much attached. The doge, Andrea Dandolo, was

his friend; and he exerted his influence to put an end to the destructive war carried on between Venice and Genoa, writing forcible and eloquent letters to the doge. His endeavours were without success; but the injuries which the republics mutually inflicted and received might make them afterwards repent that they had not listened to the voice of the peace-maker.

Nor was the poet's heart wholly closed against the feelings of love; nor could the image of the dead Laura possess all the empire which had been hers, cold and reserved as she was, during her life. His sonnets give evidence that passion had spread fresh nets to ensnare him, when the new object of his admiration died, and death quenched and scattered once again the fire which he was unable to resist.* Again, he could think only of Laura; and, on the third anniversary of her death, exclaimed, "How sweet it had been to die three years ago!" It was on this anniversary that Boccaccio arrived at Padua, bringing the decree of the Florentine republic, which reinstated him in his paternal inheritance, together with letters inviting him to accept of a professor's chair in their new university.

1351. Ætat. 47.

Such an employment scarcely suited one, who, for the sake of freedom, had declined the highest honours of the catholic church. Petrarch testified great gratitude for the restitution of his property, but passed over their offered professorship in silence. Instead of repairing, as he had been invited, to Florence, he set out to revisit Avignon and Vaucluse. "I had resolved," he writes, "to return here no more; but my desires overcame my resolution, and, in justification of my inconstancy, I have nothing to allege but the necessity I felt for solitude. In my own country I am too well known, too much courted, too greatly praised. I am sick of adulation; and that place becomes dear to me, where

* "Morte m' ha liberato un' altra volta,
E rotto 'l nodo, e 'l foco ha spento, e sparso,
Contra la qual non val forza nè 'ngegno."
Part II. Sonnet III.

I can live to myself alone, abstracted from the crowd, unannoyed by the voice of fame. Habit, which is a second nature, has rendered Vaucluse my true country." His son accompanied him on this occasion. The boy was now fourteen years of age: he was quiet and docile; but invincibly repugnant to learning, to the no slight mortification of his father, who vainly tried, by reprehension, raillery, and sarcasm, to awaken emulation in his mind.

When Petrarch arrived at Avignon, Clement VI. was very ill, and expected to die. He asked the poet's opinion concerning his disorder; and Petrarch wrote him a letter to give him his advice with regard to the choice of a physician, entreating him to adhere to one, as affording a better prospect, where all was chance, of having his malady understood. The learned body of medical men was highly offended by this letter: they attacked the writer with acrimony; and Petrarch replied in a style of vituperation, little accordant with his usual mild manner. He was highly esteemed in the papal court, and consulted by the four cardinals, deputed to reform the government of Rome; and was again solicited to accept the place of apostolic secretary, which he again refused. "I am content," he said, in reply to his friend the cardinal Talleirand: "I desire nothing more. My health is good; labour renders me cheerful; I have every kind of book; and I have friends, whom I consider the most precious blessing of life, if they do not seek to deprive me of my liberty."

This letter was written from Vaucluse. Petrarch's heart had opened to a thousand sad and tender emotions, when he returned to the valley which had so frequently heard his laments: his sonnets on his return to Provence breathe the softest spirit of sadness and devoted love. He gladly took refuge in his former home from the vices and turbulence of Avignon. He renewed the wandering lonely life he had lived twelve years before. The old peasant still lived with his aged wife; and the poet amused himself with improvements in his garden,

which an inundation of the Sorgue overwhelmed and destroyed.

On the death of Clement VI. he was succeeded by Innocent VI. He was an ignorant man; and, from Petrarch's perpetual study of Virgil (who was reputed to be an adept in the art magic), he fancied that the poet was a magician also. Petrarch was now most anxious to return to Italy, yet still lingered at Vaucluse. He made an excursion to visit the Carthusian convent, where his brother Gerard had taken the vows. Gerard had acted an admirable and heroic part during the visitation of the plague, and survived the dangers to which he fearlessly exposed himself. Petrarch was received in his monastery with respect and affection; and, in compliance with the request of the monks, wrote his treatise "On Solitary Life."

1352. Ætat. 48.

Winter advanced, and he was most anxious to cross the Alps. He visited his old friend, the bishop of Cavaillon, at Cabrieres, and was entreated by him to remain "one day more." Petrarch consented with reluctance; and on that very night such storms came on, as impeded his journey for several weeks. At length he crossed the Alps, and arrived at Milan, on his way southward, not having determined in his own mind in what town he should fix his residence, wavering between Parma, Padua, Verona, and Venice. While in this state of indecision, the hospitable reception and earnest invitation of Giovanni Visconti, lord and bishop of Milan, induced him to remain in that city.

1353. Ætat. 49.

Louis of Baviere, emperor of Germany, had been deposed by pope John XXII., and each succeeding pontiff confirmed the interdict. Clement VI. raised Charles, the son of John of Luxembourg, king of Bohemia, to the imperial throne, imposing on him, at the same time, rigorous and disgraceful conditions with regard to his rights over Italy, forcing him into an engagement never to pass a single night at Rome, but enter it merely for the ceremony of his coronation. Charles and his father had visited Avignon in the year 1346, to arrange the

stipulations.* Some time after, Petrarch wrote a long and eloquent letter to the emperor, imploring him to enter Italy, and to deliver it from the disasters that oppressed it. It is singular that two such lovers of their country, as Dante and Petrarch, should both have invited German emperors to take possession of it: but the emperor was then the representative of the sovereigns of the Western empire, and they believed that, crowned and reigning at Rome, that city would again become the capital of the world, and Germany sink into a mere province. For though Petrarch earnestly implores the emperor to enter Italy, various imprecations against the Germans are scattered through his poems.

1354. Ætat. 50.

Charles did not answer the poet's letter immediately, but he entertained a profound admiration for him; and when he entered Italy, being at Mantua, he sent one of his esquires to Milan, to invite Petrarch to come to him. The poet immediately obeyed, though frost and snow rendered his journey slow and difficult. The emperor received him with the greatest kindness and distinction. Petrarch used the utmost freedom of speech in his exhortations to the emperor to deliver Italy. He made him a present of a collection of antique medals, among which was an admirable one of Augustus, saying to him, "These heroes ought to serve you as examples. The medals are dear to me: I would not part with them to any one but you. I know the lives and acts of the great men whom they represent: this knowledge is not enough for you; you ought to imitate them."

Petrarch's admonitions were vain. After a progress through Italy, and the ceremony of his coronation at Rome; after having made a mere traffic of his power and prerogatives, Charles hastened to repass the Alps,

* The Abbé de Sade attributes to this prince the kiss bestowed on Laura at a ball, by one of royal blood. The prince with his hand beckoned aside every other elder or more noble lady, and kissed her on her brow and eyelids. Petrarch, who was present, was filled at once with envy and triumph (Sonnet cci.). If her beauty, and not the celebrity conferred on her by the poet, was the occasion of this compliment, it is difficult not to believe that it was bestowed before she had lost the bloom of youth, especially as it is mentioned that the prince put aside all ladies older than herself

and returned to Germany, as a contemporary historian observes, "with a full purse, but shorn of honour."

After the death of the bishop-lord Giovanni Visconti, Petrarch continued to reside at Milan under the protection of his nephew Galeazzo: he was sent by him at one time to Venice to negotiate a peace, and on another to Prague, on an embassy to the emperor Charles. Afterwards he was sent to Paris to congratulate king John on his return from his imprisonment in England: he was shocked, in travelling through France, to find that it had been laid waste by fire and sword. The invasion of the English had reduced the whole land to a frightful state of solitude; the fields were desolate, and no house was left standing, except such as were fortified. Paris presented a yet more painful spectacle; grass grew in the deserted streets; the sounds of gaiety and the silence of learning were exchanged for the tumult of soldiery and the fabrication of arms. Petrarch was well received, especially by the dauphin, Charles, who cultivated letters and loved literary men. Here, as in every other court he visited, the poet was solicited to remain; but he found the barbarism of Paris little congenial to his habits, and he hastened back to Italy.

1355 Ætat. 51.

1360. Ætat. 56.

When not employed on public affairs, Petrarch lived a life of peace and retirement at Milan. In the summer, he inhabited a country-house three miles from the city, near the Garignano, to which he gave the name of Linterno: when in the city, he dwelt in a sequestered quarter near the church of St. Ambrose. "My life," he says in a letter to the friend of his childhood, Guido Settimo, "has been uniform ever since age tamed the fervour of youth, and extinguished that fatal passion which so long tormented me; and though I often change place, my mode of spending my time is the same in all. Remember my former occupations, and you will know what my present ones are. It seems to me that you ought not only to know my acts, but even my dreams.

"Like a weary traveller, I quicken my steps as I

proceed. I read and write day and night, one occupation relieving another. This is all my amusement and employment: my eyes are worn out with reading, my fingers weary with holding the pen. My health is so good and robust that I scarcely feel the advance of years. My feelings are as warm as in my youth, but I control their vivacity, so that my repose is seldom disturbed by them. One thing only is the source of disquietude: I am esteemed more than I deserve, so that a vast concourse of people come to see me. Not only am I honoured and loved by the prince of this city and his court, but the whole population pays me respect: yet, living in a distant quarter of the city, the visits I receive are infrequent, and I am often left in solitude. I am unchanged in my habits as to sleep and food. I remain in bed only to sleep, for slumber appears to me to resemble death, and my bed the grave, which renders it hateful. The moment I awake I hurry to my library. Solitude and quiet are dear to me; yet I appear talkative to my friends, and make up for the silence of a year by the conversation of a day. My income is increased, I confess, but my expenditure increases with it. You know me, and that I am never richer nor poorer: the more I have, the less I desire, and abundance renders me moderate: gold passes through my fingers, but never sticks to them."

The literary work on which his busy leisure was employed, was "De Remediis utriusque Fortunæ," which he dedicated to Azzo di Coreggio. Azzo, who had formerly protected him, had been driven into exile, and, alternately a prisoner and an outcast, was reduced to a state of the heaviest adversity. Petrarch never ceased to treat him with respect; and for his comfort and consolation composed this treatise, of how to bring a remedy to the evils consequent on both prosperous and adverse fortune.

Honoured by all men, beloved by his friends, with whom he kept up a constant and affectionate correspondence, courted by monarchs, and refusing the offers

made him of the highest preferment in the church, Petrarch spent his latter years in peace and independence. His chief source of care was derived from his son. The youth was at first modest and docile, but his disinclination to literature was so great, that he abhorred the very sight of books. As he grew older he became rebellious, and a separation ensued between him and his father, soon made up again on the submission of the young man and his promises of amendment. The poet's tranquillity was at last broken in upon by the wars of the Visconti, and the plague, which again ravaged Italy. It had spared Milan by a singular exemption in the year 1348, but during its second visitation it was more fatal to this city than to any other. Petrarch had to mourn the loss of many friends; and his son, who died at this time, was probably one of its victims. Petrarch records his death in his Virgil, in these words:— "He who was born for my trouble and sorrow, who while he lived was the cause of heavy care, and who dying, inflicted on me a painful wound, having enjoyed but few happy days in the course of his life, died A. D. 1361, at the age of twenty-five."*

1361. Ætat. 57.

These combined causes induced Petrarch to take up his abode at Padua, of whose cathedral he was a canon. During the remainder of his life he usually spent the period of Lent there, and the summer at Pavia; which, belonging to Galeazzo Visconti, he visited as his guest. A great portion of his time also was passed at Venice: he had made the republic a present of his library, and a palace was decreed to him for its reception, in which he often resided. Andrea Dando was dead; his heart had been broken by the reverses which the republic suffered in its struggle with Genoa. Marino Faliero, who succeeded to him, had already met his fate; but the new doge, Lorenzo Celsi, was Petrarch's warm friend.

During this year he gave his daughter Francesca, who was scarcely twenty years of age, in marriage to Francesco Brossano, a Milanese gentleman. She was

* Ugo Foscolo.

gentle and modest, attached to her duties, and averse to the pleasures of general society: in person she resembled her father to a singular degree. Her husband had a pleasing exterior; his physiognomy was remarkably placid, his conversation was unassuming, and his manners mild and obliging. Petrarch was much attached to his son-in-law: the new married pair inhabited his house at Venice, and the domestic union was never disturbed to the end of his life.

One of his principal friends at this period was Boccaccio. Boccaccio, in the earnestness of his admiration and the singleness of his heart, sent him a copy of Dante, transcribed by his own hand, with a letter inviting him to study a poet whose works he neglected and depreciated. Petrarch, in answer, endeavoured to exculpate himself from the charge of envying or despising the father of Italian poetry. But his very excuses betray a latent feeling of irritation; and he asks, how he could be supposed to envy a man whose highest flights were in the vulgar tongue, while such of his own poems as were composed in that language he regarded as mere pastime. The poetry of Dante and Petrarch is essentially different. There is more refinement in Petrarch, and more elegance of versification, but scarcely more grace of expression. The force, beauty, and truth, with which Dante describes the objects of nature, and the sympathetic feeling that vivifies his touches of human passion, is of a different style from the outpouring of sentiment, and earnest dwelling on the writer's own emotions, which form the soul of Petrarch's verses. The characters of the poets were also in contrast.* Dante was a proud, high-spirited, unyielding man: his haughty soul bent itself to God and the sense of virtue only; he loved deeply, but it was as a poet and a boy; and his after-life, spent in adversity, is tinged only with sombre colours. He possessed the essentials of a hero. Petrarch was amiable and conciliating: he was incapable of

* Essays on Petrarch, by Ugo Foscolo.

venality or baseness; on the contrary, his disposition was frank, independent, and generous; but he was vain even to weakness; and there was a touch of almost feminine softness in his nature, which was even accompanied by physical timidity of temper. His ardent affections made him, to a degree, fear his friends; he was versatile rather than vigorous in his conceptions; and it was easier for him to plan new works, than to execute one begun, and to persevere to the end.

He wrote for the learned in Latin; he was averse to communicate with the ignorant in Italian verse, yet he never made Laura the subject of poetry except in his native tongue. Even to the last he wrote of her; and one of his latest productions, chiefly in her honour, were the "Triumphs." One of these, "The Triumph of Death," is among the most perfect and beautiful of his productions. His description of Laura's death; the assemblage of her friends who came to witness her last moments, and asked what would become of them when she was gone; her own calmness and resignation; her life fading as a flame that consumes itself away, not that is violently extinguished; her countenance fair, not pale; her attitude, reposing like one fatigued, a sweet sleep closing her beautiful eyes; all is told with touching simplicity and grace. The second part relates the imagined visit of her spirit to the pillow of her bereaved lover on the night of her death. She approached him, and, sighing, gave him her hand: delight sprung up in his heart at taking the desired hand in his. "Recognise her," she said, "who abstracted you from the beaten path when your young heart first opened itself to her." Then, with a thoughtful and composed mien, she sat, and made him sit on a bank shaded by a laurel and a beech. "How should I fail to know my sweet deity!" replied the poet, weeping, and doubtful whether he spoke to one alive or dead. She comforted and exhorted him to give up those mundane thoughts which made death a pain. "To the good," she said, "death is a delivery from a dark prison. I had approached

near the last moment; the flesh was weak, but my spirit ready, when I heard a low sad voice saying, 'O miserable is he who counts the days; and one appears to endure a thousand years—and who lives in vain—who wanders over earth and sea, thinking only of her—speaking only of her!' Then," continues Laura, "I turned my languid eyes, and saw the spirit who had impelled me and checked you; I recognised her aspect; for in my younger days, when I was dearest to you, she made life bitter, and death, which is seldom pleasant to mortals, sweet; so that at that sad moment I was happy, except for the compassion I felt for you."—"Ah! lady," said the poet, "tell me, I beseech you, did love never inspire you with a wish to pity my sufferings, without detracting from your own virtuous resolves? For your sweet anger and gentle indignation, and the soft peace written in your eyes, held my soul in doubt for many years." A smile brightened the lady's countenance as she hastily replied, "My heart never was, nor can be, divided from yours; but I tempered your fire with my coldness, for there was no other way of saving our young names from slander,—nor is a mother less kind because she is severe. Sometimes I said, 'He rather burns than loves, and I must watch;' but she watches ill who fears or desires. You saw my outward mien, but did not discern the inward thought. Often anger was painted on my countenance, while love warmed my heart;—but reason was never in me conquered by feeling. Then, when I saw you subdued by grief, I turned my eyes tenderly on you, and saved your life, and our honour. These were my arts, my deceits, my kind or disdainful treatment; and thus, either sad or gay, I have led you to the end, and rejoice, though weary."—"Lady," replied the poet, "this were reward for all my devotion, could I believe you."—"Never will I say whether you pleased my eyes in life," answered his visitant; "but the chains which your heart wore pleased me, as well as the name which, far and near, you have conferred on me. Your love needed moderation only; our

mutual affection might be equal; but you displayed yours, I concealed mine. You were hoarse with demanding pity, while I continued silent, — for shame or fear made much suffering appear slight in my eyes. Grief is not decreased by silence, nor is it augmented by complaints; yet every veil was riven when alone I listened to you singing, ' Dir più non osa il nostro amore.' My heart was with you, while my eyes were bent to earth. But you do not perceive," she continued, " how the hours fly, and that dawn is, from her golden bed, bringing back day to mortals. We must part — alas! If you would say more, speak briefly." — " I would know, lady," said the poet, " whether I shall soon follow you, or tarry long behind." She, already moving away, replied, " In my belief, you will remain on earth without me many years."

Thus fondly, in age, and after the many years which Laura had prophesied had gone over his head, Petrarch dwelt on the slight variations and events that checkered the history of his love. It may be remarked, also, that he grew to hold in slight esteem his Latin poetry; he could never be prevailed upon to communicate his " Africa," and begged that after his death it might be destroyed.

To the last he interested himself deeply in the political state of his country. He exceedingly exulted when, on the death of Innocent VI., pope Urban V. removed his court to Rome. At the same time that he refused the reiterated offer of the place of apostolic secretary, he asked his friends to solicit church-preferment for him — he cared not what, so that it did not demand the sacrifice of his liberty, nor include the responsibility attendant on the care of souls. It would seem that his income had become diminished at this time, for he often said that it was not in old age that he should seek to increase his means; doubtless his expenses increased on his daughter's account, and he had given up several of his canonicates to his friends. He was a generous man, and had many dependents always

about him; so that it is no wonder that he wished not to find his capacity of benefiting others inconveniently straitened.

1363. Ætat. 59. Boccaccio became warmly attached to Petrarch; at one time he spent the three summer months of June, July, and August, with him at Venice, in company with a Greek named Leonzio Pilato — a singular man, of a sombre, acid, and irritable disposition, but valuable to the friends as an expounder of the Greek language. Pilato left them to return to Constantinople; but his restless gloomy spirit quickly prompted him to wish to revisit Italy. He wrote Petrarch a letter, "as long and dirty," says the poet, "as his own hair and beard. This Greek," he continues, in a letter to Boccaccio, "would be useful to us in our studies, were he not an absolute savage; but I will never invite him here again. Let him go, if he will, with his mantle and ferocious manners, and inhabit the labyrinth of Crete, in which he has already spent many years." This severity was tempered afterwards, when he heard of the death of Pilato, who was struck by lightning during a storm on board ship, while returning by sea to Italy. "This unhappy man," writes Petrarch, "died as he lived, miserably. I do not think he ever enjoyed a tranquil hour: I cannot imagine how the spirit of poetry contrived to enter his tempestuous soul." (1365. Ætat. 61.)

1367. Ætat. 63. When Urban V. arrived at Rome, Petrarch wrote him a long letter, expressive of the transport he felt on this auspicious event. He praised his courage in having vanquished every obstacle; adding, "Permit me to praise you; I shall not be suspected of flattery, for I ask nothing except your benediction." The pope replied to this letter by an eulogium on its eloquence; declaring, at the same time, that he had the greatest desire to see and be of service to him.

But old age had advanced on Petrarch. He had for several years suffered, each autumn, the attacks of a tertian fever, probably the effect of the climate of Lombardy, where that malady is prevalent; and this tended rapidly to diminish his strength. When Urban V. wrote (1369. Ætat. 65.)

to him with his own hand to reproach him for not having come to Rome, and urging his instant journey, his letter found Petrarch at Padua, recovering slowly from an attack of this kind. He was unable to mount a horse, and was obliged to defer obeying the mandate. Somewhat recovered during the following winter, he prepared for his journey, making his will, which he wrote with his own hand. He then set out, but got no further than Ferrara; he there fell into a sort of swoon, in which he continued for thirty hours without giving any sign of life. The most violent remedies were administered, and he felt them no more than a marble statue. The report went abroad that he was dead, and the city was filled with mourning and lamentation. As soon as he was somewhat recovered, he would have proceeded on his journey, notwithstanding the representations of the physicians, who declared that he would not arrive at Rome alive: but he was too weak to get on horseback; so he was carried back to Padua in a gondola, and was received, on his unexpected arrival, with the liveliest demonstrations of joy, by Francesco da Carrara, the lord of the town, and by its inhabitants.

April 4. 1570. Ætat. 66.

For the sake of tranquillity, and to recover his health, he sought a house in the country, and established himself at Arquà, a village situated north of Padua, among the Euganean hills, not far from the ancient and picturesque town of Este. The country around, presenting the vast plains of Lombardy in prospect, and the dells and acclivities of the hills in the immediate vicinity, is charming beyond description. There is a luxuriance of vegetation, a richness of produce, which belongs to Italy, while the climate affords a perpetual spring. Petrarch built a small but agreeable house at the end of the village, surrounded by vineyards and gardens.

He busied himself in this retreat by finishing a work begun three years before, which he had better have left wholly undone. It was founded on a curious incident, of which he has preserved the knowledge, and which otherwise would have sunk into oblivion. There were

a set of young men at Venice, disciples of Aristotle, or rather of his Arabian translator, Averroes, who set up his philosophy as the law of the world, who despised the Christian religion, and turned the apostles and fathers of the church into ridicule: there was an open war of opinion between these men and the pious Petrarch. Four among them, in the presumption and vivacity of youth, instituted a kind of mock tribunal, at which they tried the merits of their amiable and learned countryman; and pronounced the sentence, that "Petrarch was a good sort of a man, but exceedingly ignorant." He relates this incident in his treatise, "On my own Ignorance and that of others," which he commences by pretending to be satisfied with the decision. "Be it so," he says, "I am content; let my judges be wise, while I am virtuous!" and then he goes on to prove the fallacy of their judgment by a great display of erudition.

May 7. 1371. Ætat. 67.

He continued to get weaker, and his illnesses were violent, though transient. On one occasion he was attacked by a fever, and the physician sent to him by Francesco da Carrara, declared that he could not survive the night. The next morning he was found, apparently well, risen from his bed and occupied by his books. "This," he says, "has happened to me ten times in the course of ten years." The vital powers were thus exhausted, and it was not likely that he could live to extreme age.

Padua, Jan. 5. 1372. Ætat. 68.

"You ask me how I am," he writes to a friend: "I am tranquil, and liberated from the passions of youth. I enjoyed health for a long time — during the last two years I am grown infirm. My life has been declared to be in imminent danger, yet I am still alive. I am at present at Padua, fulfilling my duties as canon. I have quitted Venice, and rejoice to have done so, on account of the war between the republic and the lord of this city. In Venice I should have been suspected; here I am beloved. I pass a great part of my time in the country, which I always prefer to town. I read,

I write, I think. I neither hate nor envy any man. During the early season of youth, I despised every one except myself—in maturer years I despised myself only —in my old age I despise almost all—and myself more than any. I fear only those whom I love, and my desires are limited to the ending my life well. I try to avoid my numerous visiters, and have a small agreeable house among the Euganean hills, where I hope to pass the rest of my days in peace—with the absent or the dead, perpetually in my thoughts. I have been invited by the pope, the emperor, and the king of France, who have often and earnestly solicited me to take up my abode at their several courts; but I have constantly refused, preferring my liberty before all things."

It is a singular circumstance that one of the last acts of Petrarch was, to read the "Decameron." Notwithstanding his intimate friendship with the author during twenty years, Boccaccio's modesty prevented his speaking of the work, and it fell into Petrarch's hands by chance. "I have not had time," he writes to his friend, "to read the whole, so that I am not a fair judge; but it has pleased me exceedingly. Its great freedom is sufficiently excused by the age at which you wrote it, the lightness of the subject, and of the readers for whom it was destined. With many gay and laughable things, are mingled many that are serious and pious. I have read principally at the beginning and end. Your description of the state of our country during the plague, appears to me very true and very pathetic. The tale at the conclusion made so lively an impression on me, that I committed it to memory, that I might sometimes relate it to my friends."

June 8, 1374. Ætat. 70.

This is the story of Griselda. Petrarch translated it into Latin for the sake of those who did not understand Italian, and often read it and had it read to him. He relates, that frequently the friend who read it broke off, interrupted by tears. Among others to whom he communicated this favourite tale was our English poet Chaucer, who in his prologue to the story of Griselda says that he

"Learned it at Padowe of a worthy clerke,
Francis Petrarch."

Chaucer had been sent ambassador to Genoa just at this time.

The letter to Boccaccio accompanying the Latin translation of the story was probably the last that Petrarch ever wrote. The life of this great and good man had nearly arrived at its conclusion. On the morning of the 19th of July, 1374, he was found by his attendants in his library, his head resting on a book. As he often passed whole hours and even days in this attitude, it at first excited no peculiar attention; but the immovability of his posture at length grew alarming, and on inspection it was found that he was no more.

The intelligence of his death spread through Arquà, the Euganean hills, and Padua, and occasioned general consternation: people flocked from far and near to attend his funeral. Francesco da Carrara, with all the nobility of the city of Padua, was present. The bishop, with the chapter and clergy, performed the ceremony. The funeral oration was pronounced by Bonaventura da Peraga, of the order of the hermits of St. Augustin. The body was first interred in a chapel of the church at Arquà, dedicated to the Virgin, which Petrarch had himself built. A short time after, his son-in-law, Francesco Brossano, erected a marble monument opposite the church, and caused the body to be transferred to it; inscribing on the tomb four bad Latin verses, which it is said that Petrarch himself composed, ordering that no epitaph of greater pretension should record his death.

Petrarch directed in his will that none should weep his death. "Tears," he says, "are useless to the dead, and they injure the living:" he requested only that alms should be given to the poor, that they might pray for his soul. He continues, "Let them do what they will with my body; it imports nothing to me." He left Francesco Brossano his heir, and begs him, as his beloved son, to divide the money he should find into two parts; to keep one himself, and to give the other to the person

he has mentioned to him. This is said to mean his daughter. He left several legacies to hospitals and religious houses. He bequeathed his good lute to Thomas Barbari, wherewith to sing the praises of God; and to Boccaccio he left fifty golden florins, to buy a robe lined with fur, for his winter studies; apologising at the same time for leaving so trifling a sum to so great a man.

This is a brief and imperfect sketch of Petrarch's life —drawn from the ample materials which his Latin prose works afford, and the careful researches of various biographers, particularly of the Abbé de Sade, who ascertained, by infinite labour and perseverance, several doubtful facts concerning the persons with whom the poet's life is chiefly connected. Much more might be said of one whose history is pregnant with profound and various interest. It will be enough if these pages contain a faithful portrait, and impress the reader with a just sense, of his honest worth, his admirable genius, his high-toned feelings, and the many virtues that adorned his long career.

BOCCACCIO.

The family of Giovanni Boccaccio derived itself originally from the Ardovini and Bertaldi, of the castle of Certaldo, a fortress of Val d'Elsa, ten miles distant from Florence. His progenitors migrated to that town, and became citizens of the republic. His father's name was Boccaccio di Chellino, derived from that of his father Michele, diminished to Michellino or Chellino; such, as in the Highlands of Scotland and other places in the infancy of society, was the mode by which the Italians formed their names; with the exception of a few, who retained the appellation of some illustrious ancestor. The son of Boccaccio was named Giovanni, and he always designated himself at full length, as Giovanni di Boccaccio da Certaldo.

Little is known of the early life of Boccaccio, except the slender and vague details which he has interspersed in his works. His father was a merchant; he was a man in good repute, and had filled several offices under the Florentine government. His commercial speculations caused him to make frequent journeys, and he lived at one time for some years at Paris. Boccaccio was most probably born in that city. His mother was a French girl of highly respectable family, though not noble. It has been disputed whether in the sequel Boccaccio di Chellino married her; but it seems likely that she died soon after the birth of her son, and never became his wife. It is certain that Giovanni was illegitimate; as he was obliged to obtain a bull to legitimise himself, when late in life he entered the ecclesiastical profession.

1313. Boccaccio was born in the year 1313, and at the age of seven accompanied his father to Florence. He tells us

of himself that he gave early tokens of his future inventive and romantic talents. When seven years old a desire of inventing fictions seized him, and he even then fabricated tales, childish and inartificial it is true, though he had never heard any stories or fables, nor frequented the society of literary men; and though he was scarcely acquainted with the first elements of letters.* His father had, however, plans with regard to him wholly at variance with these tastes. For a short time he gave him Giovanni da Strada, father of the poet Zenobio, for an instructor in the rudiments of learning, and then placed him under the charge of a merchant, from whom he was to learn arithmetic, and to be initiated in other parts of knowledge appertaining to commerce. In this way, to use his own words, he lost six valuable and irrecoverable years. Some friends then assured his father that he was better fitted for literature than trade, and his parent yielded so far to these remonstrances, as to permit him to enter on the study of the canonical law, placing him under a celebrated professor. It is very uncertain in what country he resided during this time. He travelled a good deal, and we have evidence of his visiting Ravenna, Naples, and Paris, both while he was with his mercantile instructor, and afterwards. It has been conjectured that at the former place he, as a child, knew Dante, who discovered and cherished his infant talents. But this idea rests on a very slender foundation, arising from Boccaccio speaking of him as his guide from whom he derived all good; and Petrarch, alluding to him in a letter to Boccaccio, as "he who was in your youth the first leader, the first torch that led you to study." Dante died in 1321, when Boccaccio was only eight years old; it seems probable, therefore, that Boccaccio looked on Dante as his master and guide from the reasons that made Dante give those names to Virgil; and the works of the Italian poet formed the torch that lighted his countryman in his search after knowledge. Another discussion

1323. Ætat. 10.

1329. Ætat. 16.

* Genealogia Deorum.

has arisen concerning who his master of canonical law was; it is known that he passed much time in Paris, and was familiar with the language, manners, and customs of the French; and as he was intimate with Dionisio Robertis, the friend of Petrarch, it is supposed that he studied under him.* It is certain, from his own words, that he was at that time at a distance from home, and that his father, discontented with the career he was pursuing, vexed him with reproachful letters. It would seem that Boccaccio di Chellino was a penurious and ill-tempered man.

The project of making him a lawyer did not succeed better than the former one. The imaginative youth was disgusted with the hard dry study; nor could the counsels of his preceptor, nor the continual admonitions of his parent, nor the reproaches of his friends, induce him to pursue his new career with any industry. Displeased by the little progress he made, his father put an end to the experiment, and bringing him back to his commercial pursuits, sent him to Naples, ordering him there to remain; or, as it would appear, from some allusions in his works, recalled him to his home, which was then in that city; as at one time it is certain Boccaccio lived under the paternal roof at Naples; and it is also known that at a later period he continued there, while his father lived at Florence.

1333. Ætat. 20.

Boccaccio describes himself as very happy at this time, associating on equal terms with the young nobles, with whom he practised a system of great reserve, fearing to have his independence infringed upon. But his society was courted, and his disposition and manners were formed by a familiar intercourse with the licentious but refined nobility of king Robert's court. Yet he had better thoughts and more worthy talents dormant in his heart, which only required a slight spark to kindle into an inextinguishable flame. One day, by chance, he visited the tomb of Virgil.† The tomb of the Mantuan poet is situated on the height

* Baldelli.

† Filippo Villani.

of Pausilippo: it consists of a small structure shaped like a rude hut, but evidently of ancient date. It is overgrown with rich vegetation; the wild aloe and prickly pear issue from its clefts, and ivy and other parasites climb up its sides and cling thickly to its summit. A dark rock rises immediately before; it is shut in, secluded and tranquil: but at the distance of only a few yards, a short ascent leads to the top of the hill, where the whole of the bay of Naples opens itself to the eye. The exceeding beauty of this scene fills every gazer with delight; the wide-spread sea is adorned by various islands, and by picturesque promontories, which shut in secluded bays; the earth is varied by hills, dells, and lakes, by towering heights and woody ravines; the sky, serenely though darkly blue, imparts matchless hues to the elements beneath. Nature presents her most enchanting aspect; and the voice of human genius breathing from the silent tomb, speaks of the influence of the imagination of man, and of the power which he possesses to communicate his ideas in all their warmth and beauty to his fellow creatures. Such is the tomb of Virgil now — such was it five hundred years ago, when Boccaccio's heart glowed with new-born enthusiasm as he gazed upon it. He remained long contemplating the spot, and calling to mind with admiration the fame of him whose ashes reposed in the structure before him: then he began to lament his evil fortune, which obliged him to give up his faculties to baser pursuits. Touched suddenly and deeply by an ardent desire of cultivating poetry, he, on his return home, cast aside all thoughts of business, and eagerly gave himself up to the Muses. And thus, at nearly mature age, impelled by his own wishes only, excited and led by none, his father averse, and always vituperating literature, he, untaught by any, applied to the cultivation of his understanding, devoting himself to the study of such authors as he could comprehend, with the greatest avidity and delight.* His genius and fervour

1338.
Ætat.
25.

* Geneal. Deor.

conjoined to facilitate his progress; and his father, become aware of the inutility of opposition, at length consented that he should follow his own inclinations, and gave him the necessary assistance.

Another circumstance occurred not long after to confirm his predilection for literature, and to exalt it in his eyes. He was present when Petrarch was examined by Robert, king of Naples, previous to his coronation in the Capitol. King Robert was a philosopher, a physician, and an astrologer, but hitherto he had despised poetry, being only acquainted with some Sicilian rhymes, and a few of the compositions of the Troubadours. Petrarch, discovering the ignorance of his royal patron, took an opportunity, at the conclusion of his examination, to deliver an oration in praise of poetry, setting forth its magical beauty and its beneficent influence over the minds and manners of men; and so exalted his art, that the king said, in Boccaccio's hearing*, that he had never before suspected that the foolish rind of verse enclosed matter so lofty and sublime; and declared that now, in his old age, he would learn to appreciate and understand it, asking Petrarch, as an honour which he coveted, to dedicate his poem of Africa to him. From this time the lover of Laura became the Magnus Apollo of the more youthful Boccaccio: he named him his guide and preceptor, and became, in process of time, his most intimate friend.

1341. Ætat. 28.

The liberal tastes and generous patronage of king Robert drew to his court many of the most illustrious men of the age. Boccaccio was exceedingly desirous, from boyhood, of seeing men celebrated for learning†, and he cultivated a friendship with many of those who lived at Naples. Under the Calabrian Barlaam he studied Greek. Barbato, the chancellor of the king, Dionisio Robertis, bishop of Monopoli, Paolo Perugini, royal librarian, Giovanni Barrili,—these were all his particular friends; conversing with whom, he cultivated

* Geneal. Deor.

† Ibid.

the literary tastes to which he entirely devoted himself.

An ardent love of poetry, and an assiduous cultivation of his imagination, made the study of his own nature and its impulses a principal subject of contemplation; and thus softening his heart, opened an easy entrance to the passion of love. He became attached to a lady of high rank at Naples, whom he has celebrated in many of his works.

He relates the commencement of this attachment in various and contradictory ways; on which account a celebrated Italian critic has doubted whether the truth is contained in any of his narrations *; it is more credible that they are founded on fact. The object of his passion, as is proved by a variety of circumstances, and by his own express declaration †, was a natural daughter of Robert king of Naples. To prevent the injury which would have accrued to her mother's name, had her parentage been avowed, her royal father caused her to be adopted by a noble of the house of Achino. She was educated with extreme care, and married, when very young, to a Neapolitan noble. They first saw each other at the church of San Lorenzo, on a day of high festival. She was in all the bloom of youth and beauty, dressed with splendour, and surrounded by all that rank and prosperity can impart of brilliancy. The passion was sudden and mutual.‡

April 7. 1341. Ætat. 28.

But it is in vain that he endeavours to engage our sympathy. In spite of all the interest which he tries to throw over their attachment, it bears the appearance of a mere intrigue. The lady Mary was a wife, and, in all probability, a mother. Her lover makes her relate, in one of his works §, that she was married to

* Tiraboschi. † Filocopo.

‡ This lady Mary cannot be the princess Mary, an acknowledged natural daughter of king Robert. The latter was beheaded during the troubles at Naples, a year after Boccaccio's death. The poems of Boccaccio declare that he outlived his lady Mary, Fiammetta, as he called her, many years; and his writings give proof that her royal and illegitimate origin was always preserved a secret.

§ La Fiammetta.

a noble of equal age; that until she saw Boccaccio, they were happy in each other; her husband adoring her, and she affectionately attached to him. A passion which could disturb such an union appears a phrensy as well as a crime. That the lovers suffered great misery, may serve as a warning, as well as an example, of how such attachments, from their very nature, from the separations, suspicions, and violations of delicacy and truth entailed upon them, must, under the most favourable auspices, be fruitful of solicitude and wretchedness. An adherence to truth is the noblest attribute of human nature. The perpetual infringement which results from a secret intrigue degrades in their own eyes those who practise the falsehood. In the details which Boccaccio has given of his passion, we perceive the violation of the most beautiful of social ties; while deceit is substituted for sincerity, and mystery for frankness. The lover perceived a perpetual lie on the lips of her he loved; and, had his attachment been of an ennobling nature, he would rather have given up its gratification, than have sought it in the humiliation and error of its object.

The lady Mary was eminently beautiful. Her hair, of the palest gold, shaded a forehead remarkable for its ample proportion; her brows were black and delicately marked; her eyes bright and expressive; her beautiful mouth was terminated by a small, round, and dimpled chin; her complexion was brilliant, her person well formed and elegant. She excelled in the dance and song, and, above all, in the vivacious, airy spirit of conversation. Her disposition was generous and magnificent. Boccaccio himself was handsome: his good looks were too early injured by plumpness; but, at this time, being only twenty-eight years of age, he was in the pride of life. His eyes were full of vivacity; his features regular; he was peculiarly agreeable and lively in society; his manners were polite and noble; he was proud, taking his origin from a republic where equality of rank prevailed; but, frequenting the society of the

Neapolitan nobility, he preserved a dignified independence and courteous reserve, which commanded respect.

Hitherto Boccaccio had been collecting materials, by study, for future composition; but he had written nothing. According to his own declaration, his mind had become sluggish and debased through frivolity and indolence, when his love for the lady Mary awoke him to exertion*, and incited him to pursue that career which has caused his name to be numbered among the illustrious writers of his country. His first work, written at the request of his fair mistress, in the early days of their passion, was the "Filocopo." The foundation of this tale resembles St. John's tales — those of "The Seven Wise Masters," &c., which were adopted from Arabia, and coloured, in their details, by descriptions of Eastern manners, with which the conquest of Granada by the Moors, and the expeditions of the crusaders, varied the rude chivalry of the North. A Roman noble and his wife make a pilgrimage to Spain. The husband dies fighting against the Mahometan Felix, king of Marmorina. His wife fell into the hands of the victor, and died at the court of Felix, on giving birth to her daughter Biancafiore, on the very day on which Florio, the son of Felix, was born. The children were educated together. The parentage of Biancafiore was unknown, her parents having died without declaring their names and descent from the Scipios and Cæsars; but, despite her obscure origin, Florio becomes enamoured of his lovely companion; and his father, enraged by this ill-assorted attachment, separates them; and, after cruelly persecuting the unfortunate girl, at last sells her to a merchant, who takes her to Alexandria, where she is bought by a noble, who shuts her up in a tower. Florio wanders into various countries to seek her; they go through a variety of disasters, which end in their happy marriage; and, the birth of Biancafiore being discovered, they are con-

* Rime.

verted to the Christian faith. The story is long drawn out and very unreadable; though interspersed by traits of genius peculiar to Boccaccio, natural touches of genuine feeling, and charming descriptions. Florio, during his erratic travels in search of Biancafiore, arrives at Naples: the author introduces him into the company of his lady and himself, under the names of Fiammetta and Caleone.

Having once engaged in writing, Boccaccio became very diligent: his next work was a poem, entitled the "Teseide," or the "Thesiad." The subject is familiar to the English reader, as the "Knight's Tale" in Chaucer, modernised by Dryden, under the title of "Palamon and Arcite." Boccaccio was, if not the inventor of the *ottava rima*, or octave stanza (some Sicilian and French poets are supposed to have preceded him in the use of it), yet the first to render it familiar to the Italians. It has been duly appreciated by them, and used, as peculiarly adapted to narrative poetry. The ease with which the Italian language lends itself to rhythm and to rhyme, enabled Boccaccio to dress his thoughts in the guise of poetry; but he was, essentially, not a poet. It were too long to enter here into the distinction between the power of the imagination which creates fable and character, and even produces ideal imagery, and the peculiar attributes of poetry, which consists in a greater force and concentration of language, and an ear for the framing poetic numbers. The sublimity, yet delicacy, of Dante, the grace and harmony of Petrarch, are quite unapproached by Boccaccio: nor, indeed, can he compete with even the second and third rate of Italian poets. His style is diffuse and incult, and altogether wanting in the higher graces of poetic diction. Still, there is nature, pathos, and beauty in the narration. The story of the "Thesiad," if unborrowed,—and there is no previous trace of it,—is worthy of the author of the "Decameron:" it is full of passion and variety. He had the merit, also, of discarding the machinery of dreams and visions, then so much in vogue among his

countrymen, which took from their compositions all reality and truth of feeling — giving us empty personifications, instead of fellow-creatures, formed of flesh and blood.

1342. Ætat. 29.

Boccaccio had not long enjoyed the favour of his lady, when he was obliged to return to Florence. His father had lost his wife and children, and recalled his son, to be the companion of his declining years. He separated himself from the lady Mary with infinite regret; a feeling which she so fully shared, that he afterwards wrote a work, entitled "La Fiammetta," in which she, as the narratress, gives the history of their attachment, and complains bitterly of the misery they suffered during their separation. There is less of redundancy, and more unaffected nature in this work than in his former; and the commencement calls up forcibly the author of the "Decameron," from the vividness and strength of the language. In one respect, his visit to Florence, at this time, was evidently beneficial: it familiarised him with the pure and elegant language of Tuscany: he does not allude to it; but the barbarous dialect of Naples must have injured his style; and we cannot doubt that he recognised at once, and adopted, the expressive idiom of his native town. The "Decameron" is a model of the Tuscan dialect, if such a name can be given to a tongue differing from the Italian spoken in every other portion of the peninsula, and infinitely superior to all in grace, energy, and conciseness.

He found his home, with his father, sufficiently disagreeable. * The house was gloomy and silent; nor was the sound of gaiety ever heard within its walls. His father was far advanced in years, and had grown, if he had not always been, avaricious and discourteous, discontented and reproachful; so that the necessity of seeing him every day, of each evening returning to his melancholy abode, cast a shadow over Boccaccio's life. "Ah!"

* Ameto.

he exclaims, "how happy are the independent, who possess themselves in freedom!" To add to his dissatisfaction, Florence was suffering under the oppression of Walter de Brienne, duke of Athens; whom the people had, in a moment of despondency, set over themselves, and who proved a cruel and gloomy tyrant; till, unable to endure any longer his sanguinary despotism, the citizens rose against him, and regained their liberty.

Boccaccio's chief amusement was derived from his pen. He wrote the "Ameto," a composition of mingled prose and verse, the first of a kind, since adopted by Sannazaro and sir Philip Sidney. The "Ameto" is a story somewhat resembling "Cymon and Iphigenia," in which he again introduces himself and his lady, as he informs the reader, bidding those attend who have a clear understanding, and they will find a hidden truth disclosed in his verses. But a more agreeable change was at hand, to relieve him from his painful position. His father married again, and he was permitted to return to Naples.

1344. Ætat. 31. He found great alterations in this city. King Robert was dead. His daughter Jane succeeded to him: her dissentions with her husband produced a violent party spirit among the courtiers, while the pursuit of pleasure was the order of the day. A Court of Love, in imitation of those held in Provence, was instituted, over which the lady Mary presided. The lovers continued fondly attached to each other, though jealousies and trifling quarrels somewhat diversified the otherwise even course of their loves. The lady passed several months each summer at Baiæ, amidst a society given up to amusement, and to the indulgence of the greatest libertinism. From some unknown cause, Boccaccio did not accompany her on these occasions, and he was tormented by a thousand doubts, fearing that the dissolute manners of the court would corrupt her, whom he calls a mirror of chaste love, and injure her faith towards him. During one of these absences he wrote his poem of "Filostrato," on the subject of

Troilus and Cressida, which he dedicated as a kind of peace-offering to his lady. He wrote also the "Amorosa Fiammetta," which is her fancied complaint, while he was at Florence, and the "Amorosa Visione," or Vision of Love; which is more poetic in its diction than any of his previous works in verse, though it labours under the disadvantage of being an acrostic; the initial letters of each verse forming a series of sonnets and canzoni, addressed in the same initials to "Madonna Maria."

1348. Ætat. 35.

During the period when the plague desolated the world, Boccaccio occupied himself by writing the "Decameron," to amuse, it is said, queen Jane and her court. He gives a somewhat different account in the preface. He tells us in it: "From my youth until the present time, I have been inflamed by an aspiring love for one more noble perhaps than befitted my obscure birth; for which passion I was praised even by the more discreet among those who knew of it, and held in high repute; and yet it was the cause to me of much trouble and suffering, — not certainly through the cruelty of the lady I loved, but from the pain I endured when separated from her. During which time I enjoyed so much relief from the agreeable conversation and kind consolations of a friend, that I truly believe, that but for them I had died. But it has pleased him, who decreed that all earthly things should have an end, that my attachment, which no fear, shame, nor advice could lessen, has by course of time so abated, that, while I still love, I am no longer the victim of uncontrollable passion. Yet I still remember the benefits I formerly received from those who sympathised in my pains; and I propose to myself, as a mark of gratitude to them, to afford to others, labouring as I once did, the same relief which was before bestowed upon me. And who will deny that this book belongs rather to women than men. Fearfully and with shame they conceal within their tender hearts that flame which is fiercer when hidden; and who, besides this, are so restrained from the enjoyment of pleasure by the will of those around them, that they

most frequently struggle with their feelings, and revolve divers thoughts, which cannot be all gay, within the little circuit of their chamber, which must occasion heavy grief and melancholy, if unrelieved by conversation. All which things do not happen to men; who, if afflicted, can frequent society—hunt, shoot, ride, and play—and have a thousand modes of amusing themselves. And, therefore, to counterbalance the unequal award of fortune, who gives most to bear to those who are weakest, I intend to relate, for the amusement and refuge of gentle ladies who love, one hundred stories, fables, parables, or histories, or whatever you please to call them, narrated, during the course of ten days, by seven ladies and three cavaliers, who assembled together at a villa during the late pestilence."

His description of the plague in Florence, in the introduction, is the finest piece of writing that Boccaccio ever composed: it presents a pathetic, eloquent, and vivid picture of the sufferings induced by that remorseless malady. It is a curious fact, that there is every proof that Boccaccio was residing at Naples during the visitation of the plague in 1348; but it required no violent effort of the imagination to paint the disasters of his native city, as Naples itself presented a similar tragedy: nor is there any thing in the description that stamps it as peculiarly belonging to Florence.

The seven young ladies of the tales meet on a Wednesday morning in the church of Santa Maria Novella, and there agree to leave the miserable city, and to betake themselves, with three gentlemen from among their friends, to one of the villas in the environs, and, shutting out all sight and memory of the frightful disasters they had witnessed, to strive, in the enjoyment of innocent pleasures, to escape from danger.—"Nor," the lady says, who proposed this plan, "can we be said to aban don any one, for it is we who are abandoned; and remember, that our innocent flight is less blamable than the guilty remaining of others."

The Italians have taken great pains to discover the

exact spots to which the company of the Decameron retreated. They are found not far from Florence.* The father of Boccaccio possessed a small villa in the village of Majano, and his son pleased himself by describing the adjacent country; and in particular, the pleasant uplands and fertile valleys of the hills around Fiesole, which are in the neighbourhood. It is said that Villa Gherardi was the first place to which the ladies betook themselves; and Villa Palmieri is recognised in the description of the sumptuous abode to which they afterwards removed, to escape being disturbed by visiters. In the exquisite description of the narrow valley to which Eliza conducts her companions, and where they bathe, we discern the little plain surrounded by hills, through which the Affrico flows; when, after having divided two hills, and descended from the rocky heights, it collects itself into a gentle stream, under the Claustro della Doccia of Fiesole.

The assembly being gathered together in this delightful spot, among other modes of amusing themselves, they agree that each one should narrate a tale every day; and during the ten days which form the "Decameron," a hundred tales are thus related. They give some kind of rule to their amusement, by fixing on a subject for each tale; as for instance, on one day each person is to tell a story in which, after much suffering, the disasters of the hero or heroine come to a happy conclusion. In another, the tale is to end unhappily. The stories vary from gay to pathetic, and in the last, Boccaccio is inimitable in delicacy and tenderness of feeling.

All the other works of Boccaccio would have fallen into oblivion, had he not written the "Decameron:" they are scarcely read, even though bearing his name; they are heavy and uninteresting; his poetry is not poetry; his prose is long-winded; but the "Decameron;" bears the undoubted stamp of genius. His language is a "well of Tuscan undefiled," whence, as from its purest source,

* Baldelli.

all future writers have drawn the rules and examples which form the correct and elegant Italian style. It possesses, to an extraordinary degree, the charm of eloquence. It imports little whence he drew the groundwork of his tales; yet, as far as we know, many of them are original, and the stories of Griselda and Cymon, of the pot of Bazil, and the sorrows of Ghismonda, are unborrowed from any other writer. The tenderness, the passion, the enthusiasm, the pathos, and above all, the heartfelt nature of his best tales, raise him to the highest rank of writers of any age or country. His defects were of the age. Boccaccio's mind was tarnished by the profligacy of the court of Naples. He mirrors the licentious manners of the people about him in his "Decameron:" it were better for human nature, that neither the reality nor the reflection had ever existed.

The faults of the book rendered it obnoxious, especially to the priests, whom he, in common with all the novelists of his time, treats with galling ridicule. Salvanorola preached against it, and so excited the minds of his fellow citizens, that they brought all their copies of the "Decameron," as well as of, it may be remarked, the blameless poetry of Petrarch and Dante, into the Piazza de' Signori on the last day of the carnival of 1497, and made a bonfire of them: on which account the earlier editions of these books are very rare. After Salvanorola, it continued on the list of prohibited books. This occasioned emended editions to be published,—some of which were so altered as scarcely to retain any thing of the original. It was after many years and with great industry, that the "Decameron" was restored. The first entire edition was published through the care of a society of young Florentines, who were ashamed of the disgraceful condition to which this celebrated work was reduced: this was published in 1527, and goes by the name of the "Ventisettana," or twenty-seventh, and of the "Delphin." After this, however, only mutilated editions were printed, and even now, as it still continues a prohibited book, any perfect edition

bears on the title-page the name of some protestant town, London or Amsterdam, as the place where it is printed.

To return to the author. During the year of the jubilee Boccaccio returned to Florence, and the lady Mary was spoken of no more, except in a sonnet, written many years after, on the death of Petrarch, which alludes to her death. He addresses his lost friend as having entered that heavenly kingdom after which he had long aspired, that he might again see Laura, and where his beautiful Fiammetta sat with her before God. Whether the lady died, therefore, before or after his removal to Florence cannot be told; we have his own authority for knowing, that by this time his ardent passion was subdued into calm affection. His father as well as his mother-in-law was dead, and they had left a young son Jacopo, to whom Boccaccio became guardian. His pecuniary resources had been derived through his father from Florence, and it became necessary to take his place in that city. From this time he continued to reside in Tuscany, and to fulfil the duties of a citizen. One of the occurrences that marked his return, was a visit from Petrarch, who passed through Florence on his return from his pilgrimage to Rome, on occasion of the jubilee. They were already in correspondence; and Boccaccio had seen the poet in his glory nine years before at Naples. But now they met for the first time as friends, and that intimacy commenced which lasted till the end of their lives.

1350.
Ætat.
37.

Boccaccio, on returning to his native city, entered on a busier scene of life from that which he led among the Neapolitan nobles. He was sent almost immediately on various embassies to the Ordelaffi, to Malalesta, and to Polenta, lords of various towns of Romagna, for the purpose of engaging them in a league against the Visconti, who, being lords of the powerful city of Milan, and having lately acquired the signorship of Bologna, were desirous of extending their princely dominions beyond the Apennines.

He had soon after the happiness of being the bearer

1351. Ætat. 38.

to Petrarch of the decree of the republic of Florence, which restored his patrimony, and the letters which invited him to fill a professor's chair in their new university. During this visit they cemented their friendship. Petrarch was then residing at Padua, and his friend remained some weeks in his house. Boccaccio read or copied Petrarch's works, while the other pursued his ordinary studies; and in the evening they sat in the poet's garden, which was adorned with the flowers and verdure of spring, and spent hours in delightful conversation. Their hearts were laid bare to each other, they sympathised in their taste for ancient learning, in their love for their country, and in the views they entertained for the welfare of Italy.* Boccaccio brought back to Florence Petrarch's expressed intention to visit his native city. But other feelings interposed —probably the poet was averse to mingle too nearly with the violent factions that agitated the republic. He soon after made a journey to Vaucluse, and never again entered Tuscany.

Boccaccio was more of a citizen than his friend, and he fulfilled several offices intrusted to him by the government. Florence was at that time a little empire in itself, agitated by tumults, divided by intestine quarrels, and disturbed by wars with the neighbouring states. Scarce a day passed without an event. The citizens were full of energy and fire; volatile and rash, sometimes they acted a cowardly, sometimes a magnanimous part. They were restless and versatile—but ambitious, and full of that quick intuitive genius which, even now, in their fallen state, belongs to them. They were at enmity with the Visconti, who incited against them the hostility of the great company, a band of mercenary troops, the off-pourings of the invasion of France by the English, which had entered Italy, and sold their services to different standards, or made war on their own account for booty only. The peasants of

* Petrarch's Letters.

the Florentine territory had gone out valiantly against them, and afterwards, assisted by the whole forces of the state, they attacked and destroyed these pernicious bandits. Still the Visconti continued powerful and implacable enemies. Boccaccio was sent to Bohemia to invite Louis of Bavaria, Marquis of Brandenburgh, to come to the assistance of Florence and its league. At another time he was despatched to Avignon, on occasion of the entrance of the emperor Charles into Italy, to discover the intentions of the pope with regard to this monarch.

1353. Ætat. 40.

1354. Ætat. 41.

These political negotiations could not be carried on by Boccaccio without inspiring him with violent party feelings: he hated the Visconti as tyrants, and as disturbers of the peace of Italy. He heard with pain and indignation that Petrarch had taken up his abode at Milan, under the protection of its archbishop and lord, Giovanni Visconti. He wrote to his friend to express his regret and disapprobation. "I would be silent," he wrote, "but I cannot; reverence restrains, but indignation impels me to speak. How has Petrarch forgotten his dignity, the conversations which we have held together concerning the state of Italy, his hatred of the archbishop, his love of solitude and independence, so far as to imprison himself at the court of Milan? As easily could I believe that the wolf fled the lamb, and the tiger became the prey of the fawn, as that Petrarch should act against the dictates of his conscience; and that he who called the Visconti a Polyphemus, and a monster of pride, cruelty, and despotism, should place himself under his yoke. How could Visconti win that which no pontiff, which neither Robert of Naples nor the emperor could obtain? Have you done this because the citizens of your native town have treated you with contempt, and taken back the patrimony which they at one time restored?"*

* This singular circumstance is not noticed by Petrarch in any of his letters. Did the Florentines act thus to punish him for his journey to Avignon, at the time they had invited him to take up his abode among

Petrarch's answer was moderate; his habits were peaceful and recluse, and he preferred trusting an absolute prince who was attached to him, with his safety, to confiding to the caprice of a mob. Personal intercourse also had shown him that the man whom he had denounced so bitterly from political animosity, was worthy of private friendship: he was unwilling to enter the very focus of dissention, such as Florence then was, and he sacrificed his public hatred to the gentler feelings of personal friendship and gratitude. "It is not likely," he says in his answer, "that I should learn servitude in my old age; but if I become dependent, is it not better to submit to one, than, like you, to a whole people of tyrants?" Petrarch was a patriot in an elevated sense of the word: he exerted himself to civilise his country, and to spread abroad the blessings of knowledge; peace was his perpetual cry; but in the various tyrannies that distracted Italy, he saw the same ambition under different forms; and taking no part with one against the other, but with the general good against them all, he held himself free to select his friends as sympathy and kindness dictated.

Boccaccio continued to correct and add to his Decameron, which it is conjectured was published at this time. It spread rapidly through Italy; its popularity astounded even the author, and must have gratified him, though aware of its errors, and tendency to injure the principles of social life. This sentiment increased in after-times, so that he reproached his friend Mainardo de' Cavalcanti, a Florentine by birth, but living at the court of the queen of Naples, for having promised his wife and other ladies of his house that they should read the Decameron. He entreats him to revoke this promise for his own sake, and theirs, that their minds might not be contaminated by narrations in which delicacy and even decency were forgotten; "and if not for their

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them? Yet, on another occasion, the citizens petitioned the pope to give the poet a benefice within their walls, and so induce him to inhabit their city. Perhaps the expression used in Boccaccio's letter is ironical.

sake," he continues, "for the sake of my honour. They will, on reading it, think me the most wicked and licentious of men; for who will be near to allege in my excuse that I wrote it while young, and urged to the work by commands not to be disobeyed?"

Worse for the fame of Boccaccio than the blots that slur the beauty of the Decameron, is a work, which it is to be lamented fell from his pen. This was entitled the "Corbaccio." He fell in love with a beautiful and noble widow of Florence, who treated him with scorn and derision, and he revenged himself by this production, in which he vilifies the whole sex in general, and this lady in particular, in a style that prevents any one of the present day from attempting to read it.

While we lament such gross ill taste, it is agreeable to forget it, and to record and remember the vast benefits which Boccaccio bestowed on mankind, through his ardent and disinterested love of letters, and especially his extraordinary efforts to create and diffuse a knowledge of the Greek language and writers. In this labour he far excelled Petrarch, who possessed a Homer, but was unable to read it.

He proved his enthusiasm in the most undeniable manner. He was born poor, even to privation; yet he spent large sums of money in the acquisition of ancient manuscripts: he transcribed many with his own hand. His labours in this way were immense: many volumes of the poets, orators, and historians, were copied by him: among these are mentioned the whole of the works of Tacitus and Livy, Terence and Boetius, with various treatises of Cicero and Varro, besides many of the productions of the fathers. He made journeys in search of manuscripts, and records one anecdote, which shows how often disappointment must have attended his labours. He visited the celebrated convent of Monte Cassino, under the idea that he might find some ancient manuscripts, hitherto unknown. He asked for the library, and was taken up a ladder into a loft, exposed to the wea-

ther, where the books were lying on the floor moth-eaten, and covered with damp mould. While he indignantly regarded the materials of learning which lay desolate before him, he was told, to add to his horror, that the monks were in the habit of effacing the writing from their venerable parchments, and of replacing it by scraps from the ritual, for which they found a ready sale among the neighbouring villagers.

Nor was his enthusiasm, like Petrarch's, confined to the ancients. He could not only feel and appreciate the genius of Dante, but exerted himself to inspire others with the admiration with which he was filled. He awoke the Florentines to a just sense of the merits of this sublime poet, and persuaded them to erect a professorship in their university for the explanation of the Divina Commedia. He himself first filled the chair, and wrote a commentary on several of the books, besides a Life of Dante. This has been usually considered unauthentic, but it is difficult to see on what grounds this judgment rests. He takes the account of Dante's love of Beatrice from his own work of the Vita Nuova; and in all other particulars of his life the information he gives is slight; but, as far as we are enabled to form an opinion, correct. His genuine enthusiasm for the beauties of his favourite author led him to regret that Petrarch did not sufficiently admire him. He copied for his use the whole of his poem with care and elegance, and sent it to the laureate, with a poetic epistle, in which he besought him to bestow more attention and admiration on their illustrious countryman. Petrarch was bigoted to the notion that any thing written in the vulgar tongue was beneath the regard of a learned man; and received his present with a coldness that penetrates through his assumed praises. This celebrated manuscript belongs to the Vatican library. The epistle mentioned is addressed "To Francis Petrarch, illustrious and only poet," and is subscribed "thy Giovanni da Certaldo." The manuscript is illuminated, and the arms of Petrarch, consisting of a gold bar in an azure field,

with a star, adorns the head of each canto. There are a few notes of emendation, and the whole is written in a clear and beautiful hand. By a strange oversight, no care has been taken to collate any modern edition of Dante with this celebrated copy.

Boccaccio's endeavours to promote the study of Greek were still more eminent and singular. At a time when literature was just struggling into notice, it was not strange that a foreign tongue should be entirely forgotten. The knowledge of Greek had been slightly spread during the crusades, when the inhabitants of the West frequently visited Constantinople; and afterwards the commercial relations of Venice and Genoa prevented it from being wholly extinguished. But the language thus brought into use was merely colloquial, and was to a great degree superseded by the Lingua Franca. Petrarch had read a few of the dialogues of Plato with bishop Barlaam, but his knowledge was very slight. To Boccaccio the praise is due of unwearied and successful labour in the cause of Hellenic literature. He had studied, while at Naples, under Barlaam and Paolo Perugino; but his chief efforts had their date from the period of his establishing himself at Florence. Poor as he was, he spared no expense in collecting manuscripts, so that it is suspected that all the Greek books possessed by the Tuscans, and all the knowledge of them diffused through Europe, before the taking of Constantinople, which was extensive, at least in Italy, was derived from the labours, and procured at the expense, of Boccaccio. When he visited Petrarch at Milan, the laureate mentioned to him incidentally, one Leonzio Pilato, a Calabrian, who, having spent almost all his life in Greece, called himself a native of that country. This man possessed a perfect knowledge of the language: Petrarch had met him at Verona, and they read a few passages of Homer together. Boccaccio saw in this a favourable opportunity for facilitating his laudable attempt to make the Greek language a part of the liberal education of his countrymen. Pilato was at Venice: Boccaccio

obtained a decree from the Florentine government for the erection of a Greek professorship in their university, carried it to Venice, and persuaded Pilato to accept the office, and to return with him to Florence, where he lodged him at his own house.* They laboured together to make a Latin translation of Homer, which Boccaccio transcribed with his own hand. The total want of lexicons and grammars rendered the undertaking inconceivably arduous; and not least among the difficulties with which Boccaccio had to struggle was the violent, untameable, and morose disposition of his guest. This was the man whom Petrarch supposed could never have smiled, and whose manners were so savage, that he declared that not even his love of Greek could induce him to invite him a second time to his house. His aspect was repulsive, his habits disgusting, his conversation gloomy and unsocial. He was proud and violent, and, detesting the Italians, made no secret of his abhorrence; and, discontented with himself and others, he was always wishing himself elsewhere than where he was. Yet the courteous and amiable Boccaccio, who was accustomed to the refinement of a court, and who loved the elegance and gaiety of society, kept him under his roof for three years, humouring his whims, and studying in his company.

Meanwhile his moral habits underwent a beneficial change, owing to the admonitions and example of Petrarch. He visited this excellent man at Milan, and spent several weeks in an intimate intercourse, which was of the greatest service to him to the end of his days. Petrarch, whose soul was purified by the struggles of his passion for a noble-minded woman, taught him that learning was of small avail to its possessor, unless combined with moral principle and virtuous habits. These conversations awoke in Boccaccio's mind a desire to vanquish his passions. He saw and loved the example of delicacy and honour set him by

1359. Ætat. 46.

* Guignenè.

his friend; and although he could not all at once succeed in imitating him, he became aware of what his duties were: his conscience awoke, and a love of right was engendered, which enabled him, in process of time, to triumph over the habits and vices by which he had hitherto been enslaved.

A singular circumstance achieved the work begun by his inestimable friend. Boccaccio's vivacious and sensitive mind could with difficulty be brought to act from the mere influence of reason. But the change which a love of moral truth and the dictates of good taste were inefficacious to operate, was brought about by the agency of superstition and fear.

1361. Ætat. 48.

One day a Carthusian monk arrived at Certaldo, and demanded an interview with Boccaccio, who received him with kindness, and listened to him with attention. The monk first related, that there had lately lived in his convent at Siena a brother named Pietro Petroni, a man of singular piety, who was accustomed to pray with extreme fervour for the conversion of the wicked. On his death-bed he had called his companion, Giovacchino Ciani, to his bedside, and gave him various messages, to be delivered to a number of persons, to the purport that they should change their lives, and study how to be saved. As soon as the monk was dead, Ciani departed to fulfil his commission, and in the first place came to Certaldo. He then made an exposition of Boccaccio's errors, and above all of the wide-spreading evils occasioned by his writings, and which were a snare and a temptation to the young, imploring him to turn his talents, which he had hitherto exerted in the service of the spirit of evil, to the glory of God and the saints; telling him that he had been incited by a vain glory, which made him rather seek the applause of the world than the favour of his Creator; and what reward could he expect, except eternal punishment hereafter? "I do not spare your ears," continued the zealous Ciani, "and am the less scrupulous, because Petroni speaks through me, who is now

looking down from heaven upon us. Therefore, in the words of that blessed man, I exhort, entreat, and command you to change your sinful course of life, to cast aside your poetical studies, and to become a disciple and inculcator of divine truth. If you refuse to obey my voice, I predict, in his name, a miserable end to your depravity, and a speedier death than you anticipate; so that your profane studies and life shall at once be brought to an end;" and to add the force of supernatural revelation to his words, he communicated to Boccaccio several events of his life, which he presumed to be only known to himself, but which had been revealed to the monk by Petroni; and then he took his leave, saying, that he was about to fulfil a similar mission to several others, and that among them he should visit Petrarch.

Boccaccio was aghast. Superstitious fear shook his soul; he gave credulous ear to what he was told, and resolved to give himself up to sacred studies and penitence. His first impulse was to sell his library and to abandon poetry altogether: meanwhile he communicated the visit he had received, and the effect that it had on him, to his dear friend and monitor, Petrarch.

Petrarch had subjected himself, during all his life, to moral discipline; he was a self-seeker and a self-reprover. He was not so easily shaken from the calm tenor of his piety and faith by prognostics and denunciations; he replied to his friend in a letter full of good sense and kind feeling. In those days a letter was a treatise; ancient history was ransacked, and the whole learning of the writer poured out in a torrent. But there are passages which deserve to be quoted. "Falsehood and imposture," he wrote, "often disguise themselves in the habit of religion; but I will not pronounce any decided opinion till I have seen the messenger. The age of the man, his countenance, eyes, manners, gestures, his voice and words, and, above all, the sum and purport of what he says, will serve to enlighten me. It is announced to you that you have but a short

time to live, and that you must renounce poetry and profane literature. These words at first filled me with consternation and grief. How could I anticipate your death without tears? But, on further reflection, I am led to consider that you look with terror and regret on what ought really to be a matter of rejoicing, for thus you are detached from the world, and brought, as we all ought, to meditate upon death, and to aspire to that height where no worldly temptation intrudes to contaminate the soul. You will learn from these admonitions to control your passions, and to reform your habits of life. But I exhort you not to abandon books and learning, which nauseate and injure the weak only, but which invigorate and comfort the strong-minded."

After placing these considerations in various and strong lights, Petrarch concludes by saying, "If you continue to adhere to your purpose, and determine not only to relinquish study, but to cast aside the instruments of learning, I shall be delighted to possess your books; and I would rather buy them, than that the library of so great a man should be scattered abroad in the world.* I cannot name a price, not knowing their value nor number. Think of these things, and reflect whether you cannot, as I have long wished, pass the remainder of your days with me. As to your debt to me, I do not know of it, nor understand this foolish scruple of conscience. You owe me nothing except love; nor that, since each day you pay me: except, indeed, that, receiving continually from me, you still continue to owe. You complain of poverty. I will not bring forward the usual consolations, nor allege the examples of illustrious men, for you know them already. I applaud you for having preferred poverty, combined with independence,

* It is not creditable to the learning of those times to learn, that the libraries of these two great revivers of knowledge were lost to the world soon after their deaths. Boccaccio's, it is true, was destroyed by an accident, being burnt when the convent to which he had left it was consumed by fire. But Petrarch's mouldered away in the palace given by the republic of Venice for its reception and preservation, so that dusty fragments were afterwards found to be all that remained of the venerable parchments which the laureate had expended so much time and labour in collecting.

to the riches and slavery that were offered you; but I do not praise you for refusing the solicitations of a friend. I am not able to enrich you; if I were I should use neither words nor pen, but speak to you in deeds. But what is sufficient for one is enough for two; one house may surely suffice for those who have but one heart. Your disinclination to come injures me, and it is more injurious if you doubt my sincerity."

Boccaccio was convinced by his friend, and the excess of his penitence and zeal died away; but the reform of his moral character was permanent. He adopted the clerical dress, and endeavoured to suppress those writings which scandalised the pious.

He was very poor: his patrimony was slender, and shared with his brother Jacopo, and diminished also by various expenses incurred in his zeal to procure books and advance learning. He had passed a life of freedom, however, and shrunk from servitude. The passage in Petrarch's letter which refers to this, concerns his having refused the honourable and lucrative, but onerous post, of apostolic secretary; nor was he tempted by Petrarch's invitation, being unwilling to burthen one whose means were very limited. He, however, fell into a most painful mistake when he accepted the offer of a wealthy patron, which originated pride, and not affection.

The seneschal Acciajuolo was a Florentine, settled at Naples; he had long been the counsellor and friend of Louis, prince of Tarento, second husband of queen Jane. He had accompanied him in his flight to France, and stood by him during his adversity. When the affairs of Naples were settled, and Jane and Louis restored to the throne, Acciajuolo became the first man in the kingdom: he was made seneschal; but his power and influence were limited by no mere place. He had pretensions to learning, and was the friend and correspondent of Petrarch: he was proud and arrogant, and wished to be esteemed a munificent man. He invited Boccaccio to come and take up his abode in his palace at Naples, and to employ himself in writing a history of

1363. Ætat. 50.

the seneschal's life. Boccaccio was seduced, by a belief in the reality of his friendship and the nobleness of his generosity, to accept his offer. He was received by the great man with apparent pleasure, and with many promises of future benefit; but he was undeceived as to the kindness of his welcome, when he was led to the chamber destined for his accommodation. The seneschal lived in a magnificent palace, adorned with all the luxuries known in those days: the room assigned to Boccaccio was mean and squalid; it contained one dirty, ill-furnished bed, for himself and his brother Jacopo, and he was placed at the same table with the stable boys and the lower servants of the house, together with a whole host of needy hangers-on. Boccaccio's necessities were not so great as to force him to endure this unworthy treatment, and his spirit revolted against it. He removed at once to the house of his friend, Mainardo de' Cavalcanti, by whom he was cordially and honourably received; and finding, on a second trial, to which he was urged by the servile advice of some friends, that Acciajuolo was wholly ignorant of the duties of hospitality, and totally deficient in generosity and delicacy, he left Naples and proceeded to Venice.

He here passed three happy months with Petrarch. The Greek, Leonzio Pilato, joined them. Their society consisted of either learned men, or the Venetian nobility; and the friends reaped great enjoyment from the intimacy and unreserve of their intercourse. After the lapse of three months Boccaccio returned to Florence, though the plague was raging there, and Petrarch entertained a thousand fears on his account.

An abode in Florence was nevertheless ill suited to the new course of life which he proposed to himself. The city was perpetually disturbed by domestic strife, or the treachery of the foreign princes, whom they called in to their assistance in time of war. Boccaccio retreated from this scene of discord, and took up his abode at the castle of Certaldo, where he gave himself entirely up to study: his house there is still to be seen.

Certaldo is situated on a hill, and looks down on the fertile valley watered by the river Elsa.* The country around is picturesque, adorned by various castles and rustic villages. The culture of corn, vines, and olives, adorns the depth of the valley and the uplands; and three successive harvests are brought in by the husbandman. Here Boccaccio composed most of his later works, and the influence of Petrarch is perceptible in his choice of subjects and language. This is to be greatly lamented, since his desertion of Italian was founded upon a mistake, which has given us, instead of works of imagination and genius, heavy treatises and inaccurate histories. Boccaccio's Latin is bald and tame; he knew nothing of the structure, and was unable to clothe his thoughts with the eloquence natural to him: he rattled the dry bones of the skeleton of a dead language, instead of making use of the young and vigorous tongue to which he had given birth.

His first work, under this new direction, was one of great labour and erudition for those times, and was entered upon at the suggestion of Ugo IV., king of Cyprus and Jerusalem. It treats of the genealogy of the gods, and relates the connection between the various deities of the beautiful Greek mythology. For many years it continued to be a standard book, whence the Italians drew all their knowledge of the subject; and it was doubtless a useful production. In pursuance of his plan of being the schoolmaster of his age, and introducing his countrymen to the knowledge of forgotten lore, he afterwards composed a dictionary of ancient rivers, mountains, and forests. His active mind was always finding new subjects for his pen. He discovered that the female sex possessed no historian, and he dedicated himself to their service by writing the lives of illustrious women. In this he describes the ideal of a virtuous matron, and goes to the extreme usual to a reformed libertine. Her conduct must not only be strictly

* Baldelli.

correct, but she must not even look about her; she must speak little, eat little, and avoid singing and dancing. Given up to domestic cares, she must be simple in her dress, and even love her husband moderately. He wrote after this a work entitled, "De Casibus Virorum et Fæminarum Illustrium," in which he records the disasters and adversity which history relates to have befallen royal or noble personages. Thus his time was entirely spent among his books, and he acquired a reputation for learning and purity of life, which raised him high in the opinion of his fellow citizens.

He was, in consequence, appointed, on two occasions, ambassador to pope Urban V. In fulfilment of the first mission, he went to Avignon, where he was honourably received, especially by Philip de Cabassolles, the intimate and beloved friend of Petrarch. On his return, he was very desirous of passing from Genoa to Pavia, to see the laureate; but the duties of his embassy forbade. To indemnify himself, he projected a visit to him at Venice. There is a Latin letter of his extant, which gives an interesting account of this latter journey: it is addressed to Petrarch, whom he missed, as he was again gone to Pavia. Boccaccio did not hear of this circumstance till he reached Bologna; and it almost made him give up his journey. "On my road," he writes, "I encountered Francesco (*the son-in-law of Petrarch*), to my great delight. After a glad and friendly meeting, I began to observe the person of this man. His placid countenance, measured language, and mild manners pleased me: I praised your choice, as I praise all you do." On his arrival at Venice, "I received," he says, "many invitations, and accepted that of Francesco Allegri. I would not avail myself of your kind offer, and take up my abode under your daughter's roof, during the absence of her husband. I should have preferred going to an inn to being the cause of the scandal that might have arisen, despite my grey hairs and fat unwieldy figure.

1365. Ætat. 52.

"I went, however, to see Francesca; who, when she

heard of my arrival, came to meet me with gladness, as if you yourself had returned: yet, when she saw me, she was abashed, blushed, and cast down her eyes; and then, after a timid welcome, she embraced me with filial and modest affection. After conversing together some little time, we went into your garden, and found several of your friends assembled. Here, in explicit and kind terms, she offered me your house, your books, and every thing belonging to you, in a matronly and becoming manner. While we were conversing, your beloved little granddaughter came up: she looked smilingly at me, and I took her with delight in my arms. At first, methought I saw my own child *: her face resembles hers — the same smile, the same laughing eyes; the gestures, gait, and carriage of her person, though a little taller — for mine was only five years and a half old when I last saw her — were all similar: if their dialect had been the same, their expressions would have resembled in their simplicity. I saw no difference, except that yours has golden hair, and that of mine was black. Alas! while caressing and charmed by her talk, the recollection of my loss drew tears from my eyes; so that I turned my face away, to conceal my emotion.

"I cannot tell you all that Francesco said and did upon his return; his frequent visits when he found that I would not remove to his house; and how hospitably he entertained me. One incident will suffice: knowing that I was poor, which I never denied, on my departure from Venice, at a late hour, he withdrew with me into another part of his house; and, after taking leave, he stretched out his long arms, and, putting a purse into my hands, made his escape, before I could expostulate with or thank him."

After having been gratified by these tokens of real friendship, Boccaccio suffered one of those mortifying disappointments which too often occur to those who are

* It is unknown who was the mother of this child, or grandchild, who died so young. Boccaccio had, besides, one son established at Florence, whom he does not mention in his will, but who presided at his funeral, and erected a tomb over his remains.

ready to trust to the good-will and offers of assistance of men who call themselves their friends. Niccolo di Montefalcone, abbot of the celebrated Carthusian monastery of San Stefano in Calabria, invited him to take up his abode with him, describing the agreeable situation of his house, its select library, and the leisure to be enjoyed there. Boccaccio accepted the invitation, and made the journey. He arrived late at night before the gates of the secluded monastery; but, instead of the welcome he expected, he found that the abbot had left the convent hastily, in the middle of the night, on purpose to avoid him. Boccaccio, justly indignant, wrote an angry letter, and, leaving the inhospitable retreat, repaired to Naples, where he was again cordially received by his friend Mainardo de' Cavalcanti.

1370. Ætat 57.

During his visit to Naples, Boccaccio received many offers of hospitality and patronage: among others, queen Jane of Naples, and Giacomo king of Majorca, endeavoured to persuade him to enter into their service; but Boccaccio was naturally proud and independent: he had been duped by an appearance of friendship, but recoiled from a state of servitude: he preferred his quiet home at Certaldo to the favours of the great; nor could the renewed solicitations of Petrarch induce him to change his mind; and he returned to Tuscany. When he visited Naples again, it was merely for the sake of seeing his friends, without any ulterior view, and he quickly returned to the quiet of Certaldo, where he busied himself in the publication of his work of the "Genealogy of the Gods."

1372. Ætat. 59.

1373. Ætat. 60.

Age and infirmity advanced on him before their time: he was attacked by a painful and disagreeable disease, which rendered life a burthen to him. He lost his strength, and the powers of his understanding; his limbs became heavy, and the light of heaven intolerable; his memory was impaired, and his books no longer afforded him any pleasure. His thoughts were fixed upon the tomb, towards which he believed himself to be rapidly approaching. After having con-

tinued in this state for several months, he was one day seized with a violent fever, which increased towards night. His disturbed thoughts turned towards the past: his life appeared to him to have been wasted, and fruitful only of remorse. No friend was near him: his sole attendant was an old nurse, who, unable to penetrate the cause of his disquietude, annoyed him by her meaningless and vulgar consolations. His fever increased; he believed himself to be dying, and he feared to die. His courage, which had until now sustained, all at once deserted him. Hitherto he had avoided physicians, having no faith in the art: he was now driven to send for one, whose remedies afforded him relief, and restored him to some portion of health.*

The energy of his mind returned with his bodily strength. He had laboured long to induce the Florentine government to bestow some honourable testimonial on the memory of the illustrious Dante. At length, a decree was promulgated, instituting a professorship for the public explanation of the "Divina Commedia," so to promote, as it was expressed, the advancement of learning and virtue among the living and their posterity. The professorship was bestowed upon Boccaccio: he received a salary of one hundred florins a year, and delivered his lectures in the church of San Stefano. The result was his commentary on the first seventeen cantos of the "Inferno," written in a clear, simple, and elegant style, full of excellent criticism and valuable illustrations.

Thus the remnants of his failing strength were spent upon doing honour to the memory of the celebrated poet, whose genius he so warmly and generously admired, and a depreciation of whom is the sole blot on the otherwise faultless character of Petrarch: but, while he roused his intellects to understand and comment upon the delicate and sublime beauties of Dante, his physical strength decayed, and his sensibility received a severe shock from the death of his beloved friend

* Baldelli, Cod. San. Epist. i.

Petrarch. He heard it first by public report; and it was afterwards confirmed to him in a letter from Francesco Brossano, the laureate's son-in-law, who transmitted to him the legacy of fifty florins, for the purchase of a fur dress for his winter studies. Boccaccio wrote, in return, a letter full of grief and admiration. "He did not mourn," he said, "for the dead, who was receiving the reward of his virtues, but for those who survived him, and were abandoned to the tempestuous sea of life without a pilot." He would have visited his tomb had his health permitted; and he besought Brossano to take care of his posthumous reputation, and to publish his poem of "Africa," which was only known to the world in fragments. In compliance with his request, Brossano had the poem copied, and sent it to him; but he did not live to receive it.

1374. Ætat. 61.

He felt his end approaching, and Petrarch's death loosened his last tie to earth. He made his will, and named the sons of his brother Jacopo his heirs. He left legacies to those to whom he owed return for friendship and services; and he concluded, by leaving his library, in the first instance, to his spiritual director, Martino da Signa, to go, after his death, to the convent of the Spirito Santo, at Florence, for the benefit of the studious.

He survived Petrarch one year only, and died at Certaldo, on the 21st December, 1375, in the 63d year of his age. His death was occasioned by a malady of small moment in itself, but fatal in his debilitated state, and aggravated by his continual application. He was buried at Certaldo, in the church of SS. Jacopo and Filippo. His son presided at his funeral, and erected a tomb, on which was inscribed a Latin epitaph, composed by Boccaccio himself, in which he mentions that honourable love of literature which characterised him through life:—"*Patria Certaldum; studium fuit alma poesis.*" He was lamented throughout Italy; but his loss was chiefly deplored in his native city, as, during his residence there, he had redeemed his early follies

by a course of life devoted to the cultivation of literature and religion, and the duties of a citizen. While all read with delight the purer productions of his imaginative genius, the learned of every age must feel grateful to his unwearied labours in the preservation of the ancient manuscripts, many of which, but for him, had been lost for ever to the world.

LORENZO DE' MEDICI

(CONSIDERED AS A POET);

FICINO, PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, POLITIAN, THE PULCI, ETC.

After the deaths of Petrarch and Boccaccio, the cause of learning was, to a certain degree, lost. The study of Greek and the search for manuscripts was discontinued. The first person who brought that language again into notice, was Emanuel Chrysoloras, a noble Greek, who was frequently sent into Italy on embassies by the emperor of Constantinople, and employed his leisure in teaching his native tongue in Florence. His disciples were numerous: among these, Poggio Bracciolini was the most distinguished. He discovered and collected a vast number of the most valuable manuscripts. Besides the philosophic and beautiful poem of Lucretius, we owe to him the complete copies of Quintilian, Plautus, Statius, Silius Italicus, Columella, and many others. Several of these exist only from the copy found by him, and were thus rescued from certain destruction. "I did not find them in libraries," he says, "which their dignity demanded, but in a dark and obscure dungeon at the bottom of a tower, in which they were leading the life of the damned. Filelfo was also an ardent collector. The discussions between the Roman and Greek churches brought several Greek scholars and philosophers into Italy, and through them the Platonic doctrines were known to the Italians. Gemisthus Pletho, who had been master of Chrysoloras, but who survived him many years, was their chief promulgator. They were in opposition to the Aristotelian philosophy, which had so long been the only one taught

1438.

in the schools of Italy; but their glowing beauty and imagination were adapted to enchant all who heard them. Cosmo de' Medici became their convert, and resolved to establish an academy at Florence for their study and propagation. He caused Marsiglio Ficino, the son of his favourite physician, to be educated for this purpose by the teachers of Platonic philosophy.
1453. Cosmo was also the founder of the Medicean library. The taking of Constantinople by the Turks aided the advancement of learning; and while Cosmo protected many learned Greeks who took refuge at Florence, they spread refinement and knowledge throughout the peninsula.

1464. Cosmo died soon after; and as his son Piero did not long survive him, Lorenzo succeeded to his wealth and political influence. Lorenzo had been brought up with solicitous attention. He was fortunate in his mother, Madonna Lucretia, a lady of considerable talents and accomplishments, a lover of learning, and patroness of learned men. He was first the pupil of Gentile d' Urbino, bishop of Arezzo; and afterwards of Christofero Landino; and a warm attachment subsisted between master and pupil. He soon gave manifestations of the magnificence of his disposition; and his love of poetry developed itself at an early age. After the death of Cosmo, and his father Piero, however, his life was no longer one of studious leisure or youthful enjoyment; but visited by many disastrous occurrences.
1478. The conspiracy of the Pazzi was directed against his life and that of his brother. Giuliano was its victim; while he with difficulty escaped from the poniard of the assassin. He was scarcely free from these domestic dangers, when he encountered greater foreign ones, from the implacable enmity of Sixtus VI. This pope leagued almost all Italy against Florence, declaring at the same time that Lorenzo was the object of their attack; and that if he were sacrificed, Florence should obtain peace. Lorenzo maintained the weight of
1479. this coalition with firmness and dignity. With heroic

gallantry he took the whole responsibility on his own person, and threw himself into the hands of the king of Naples. His firmness and talents enabled him to induce this monarch to conclude a treaty beneficial and 1480. honourable to Florence, and his authority in the republic was thus confirmed greater than ever. From this time he occupied himself by establishing an enduring peace in Italy; not pursuing his object by pusillanimous concessions, but by an unremitted attention to the course of events, and sound policy in preserving the balance of power among the Italian states.

From the anxieties and cares attendant on his public life, he was glad to find relaxation in the cultivation of poetry and the pursuits of philosophy. He loved literature and the fine arts, and devoted much of his time and fortune to their cultivation. He encouraged Greek learning, and was an enthusiastic Platonist. His chief friends were literary men — Politian, Marsiglio Ficino, and the three brothers of the name of Pulci. He busied himself in raising and giving reputation to the university of Pisa. He instituted a yearly celebration of the anniversary of Plato's birth and death, and was the cause that his refined philosophy became the fashion in Italy. All the learned wrote and spoke Plato; and in Florence in particular, classic learning was an indispensable qualification in a well-educated man.

One of the chief merits of Lorenzo is derived from the revival of his native language. A century had elapsed since the golden age of Petrarch and Boccaccio, but the Italian language, instead of redeeming the promise of its birth, had remained mute and inglorious. The neglect which so speedily darkened the native literature, may be attributed to these very men, and especially to Petrarch, who cast disgrace over what he called the vulgar tongue, and taught that Latin was the only worthy medium by which learned men should communicate their ideas—and such Latin! However, the spirit of improvement, which is the most valuable attribute of

human nature, led the students who succeeded him to cultivate and understand the implement he placed in their hands. They applied themselves to a critical examination of Latin; and after all, it is perhaps, to the bald, unformed Latinity of Petrarch, that we owe the knowledge which the scholar of the present day possesses of the construction and delicacies of that language. If he had not taught the world, that the object chiefly worthy of their ambition was to imitate the works of Virgil and Cicero, no one had spent the labour necessary to the entire understanding of the language of the Romans.

Yet, while this advantage was derived from his mistake, imagination and genius were silenced; little prose and no poetry, either in Latin or the vulgar tongue, appeared in Italy. The writers educated by Cosmo, Politian, and Ficino, still adhered to the hereditary error, and wrote in Latin. Lorenzo first broke through these rules, and expressed in his native language the fragile and delicate ideas inspired by a poetic imagination. He ranks high as a poet: he does not possess the sublimity and grace of Dante, nor the elegance, tenderness, and incomparable sweetness of Petrarch; but his merits are original and conspicuous: simplicity and vivacity adorn his verses. His love poems are full of fire, and come from the heart; his descriptions are delightful, from their truth, elegance, and flow of fancy throughout; his diction is that of a genuine poet.

It is singular, that although Lorenzo possessed the germ of real poetry in his mind, he began to work himself up to writing verses in a manner that appears cold to our northern imaginations: he resolved to love, and resolved to write verses on her he loved; yet, being a poet, and a man whose heart easily opened itself to the warmer affections, no doubt a great deal of real feeling accompanied his aspirations. He himself gives the account of all these circumstances in a commentary written on his first sonnets.

His brother Guiliano had been deeply attached to a lovely girl named Simonetta, who died in the bloom of beauty: it is supposed, that he alludes to her when he describes the excitement caused by the public funeral of a beautiful young lady, whose admirers crowded round her open bier, and gazed, for the last time, on the pallid face of the object of their adoration, which was exposed uncovered to their view, accompanying the funeral with their tears. All the eloquence and talent of Florence were exerted to pay honour to her memory in prose and verse. Lorenzo himself composed a few sonnets, and to give them greater effect, he tried to imagine that he also was a lover, mourning over the untimely end of one beloved, and then again he reflected that he might write still more feelingly, if he could discover a living object, to whom to address his homage. He looked round among the beauties of Florence, to discover one whose perfections should satisfy his judgment, as worthy of inspiring a sincere and constant attachment. At last, at a public festival, he beheld a girl so lovely and attractive in her appearance, that, as he gazed on her, he said to himself, "If this person were possessed of the delicacy, the understanding, and accomplishments of her who is lately dead, most certainly she excels her in personal charms." On becoming acquainted with her, he found his fondest dreams realised: she was perfectly beautiful, clever, vivacious, yet full of dignity and sweetness. It is a pity that this account rather chills us as we read his sonnets, and we feel them rather as coming from the head than heart: yet they are tender and graceful; and it is not difficult for a youth of an ardent disposition, and an Italian, to love a beautiful girl, even at the word of command.

One of these sonnets possesses the simplicity and grace which distinguish Lorenzo's poetry: we give Mr. Roscoe's translation of it, and yet are not satisfied. Mr. Roscoe wrote at a time when the common-places of versification, brought in by the imitators of Pope, were still in vogue; but this observation applies chiefly

to the beginning of the sonnet; the conclusion is better, yet the whole wants the brightness and spring of the original. Happy are those who can refer to that.*

"Seek he who will in grandeur to be blest,
Place in proud halls, and splendid courts, his joy;
For pleasure or for gold his arts employ,
Whilst all his hours unnumber'd cares molest.
A little field in native flowrets drest,
A rivulet in soft numbers gliding by,
A bird, whose love-sick note salutes the sky,
With sweeter magic lull my cares to rest.
And shadowy woods, and rocks, and towering hills,
And caves obscure, and nature's freeborn train,
And some lone nymph that timorous speeds along,
Each in my mind some gentle thought instils
Of those bright eyes that absence shrouds in vain;
Ah, gentle thoughts! soon lost the city cares among."

Many sonnets and canzoni were written to celebrate this lady's perfections and his passion, but he never mentions her name. From contemporary poets, Politian and Verini, who addressed her, and Valori, who wrote a life of Lorenzo, we learn, that her name was Lucretia, of the noble family of Donati; an ancestor of whom, Cuzio Donato, had been celebrated for his military enterprises. But it is mutual love that excites our sympathy, and there is no token that Lucretia regarded her lover with more fervour than he deserved; for, however Verini may undertake to prove that he was worthy of a return for his attachment, a different opinion must be formed, when we find that he married a short time after, not the sighed for Lucretia, but Clarice degli Orsini; and although the usual excuse is given, that this marriage was consented to by him to please his relatives, and as he expresses it, "I took for a wife, or

* "Cerchi chi vuol, le pompe, e gli alti honori,
Le piazze, e tempii, e gli edeficii magni,
Le delizie, il tezor, qual accompagni
Mille duri pensier, mille dolori:
Un verde praticel pien di bei fiori,
Un rivolo, che l' erba intorno bagni,
Un angeletto che d' amor si lagni,
Acqueta molto meglio i nostri ardori:
L' ombrore selve, i sassi, e gli alti monti
Gli antri oscuri, e le fere fuggitive,
Qualche leggiadra ninfa paurosa;
Quivi veggo io con pensier vaghi e pronti
Le belle luci, come fossin vivi.
Qui me le toglie or' una, or' altra cosa."

rather was given me;" yet as Lucretia must have been the victim of his obedience, it is agreeable to find that she gave slight ear to his empty or deceptive protestations.

His other poems were composed as recreation during a busy life, and many of them are animated by glowing sensibility or light-hearted hilarity. Among them the most celebrated is "La Nencia da Barbarino," where he makes a swain praise his mistress in rustic phrase; this is a dangerous experiment, but Lorenzo perfectly succeeded. His poem is totally devoid of affectation, and is so charming for its earnestness and simplicity, that it was repeated and sung by every one in Florence. Many tried to imitate the style, but vainly; and they complained that, though many peasant girls were celebrated, La Nencia da Barbarino was the only rustic beauty who could gain the popular favour.

His Canzoni Carnaleschi are animated and original; he was the inventor of this style of song. He exerted himself, on all occasions, to vary and refine the public amusements of Florence, and during the carnival, the period of gaiety and pleasure in Catholic countries, introduced processions and dances of a novel and delightful description. It was the custom of the women to form themselves into bands of twelve, and, linked hand with hand, to sing as they danced in a circle. Lorenzo composed several canzoni a ballo, which became favourites for these occasions. One of these,—

> "Ven venga Maggio
> E 'l Gonfalon selvaggio," &c.
>
> "Welcome, May,
> And the rustic banner," &c.—

is the prettiest and most spirited song for May ever written. His processions and masquerades afforded also subjects for verse. Bands of people paraded the city in character, personating triumphs, or exhibitions of the arts; and Lorenzo wrote songs, which they chanted as they passed along. It is singular, that, free and energetic as the Florentines were, yet the songs com-

posed for them never spoke of liberty, but turned upon love only: love was all their theme — love that was often licentiousness, and yet described with such truth and beauty, as must have tended greatly to enervate, and even to vitiate, the various persons that formed these gay companies. Lorenzo's canzoni are tainted with this defect.

Lorenzo was a faithful and kind, though not a fond husband. His feelings were always held in discipline by him; and if he were too sensitive to the influence of beauty, yet his actions were all regulated by that excellent sense of justice and duty which is his admirable characteristic. There are some elegiac stanzas preserved of his, which prove that he suffered at one time the struggles and errors of passion, and was subdued by it to other thoughts than those which his reason approved. How different is this poem to those addressed to Lucretia Donati. There is no Platonic refinement, no subtlety, no conceit, no imitation of Petrarch; its diction is clear and sweet; truth and strength of feeling animate each expression; it bears the stamp of heartfelt sincerity, and is adorned by all the delicacy which real passion inspires. "Ah!" he exclaims, "had we been joined in marriage! Had you been earlier born, or had I come later into the world!" These stanzas are even left unfinished, and probably were concealed, as revealing a secret which it would have been fatal to have discovered to the world.

Besides the animated and gay songs, and choruses, in which Lorenzo is unrivalled, he wrote several descriptive poems: one long one relates the history of how his favourite country house, named Ambra, was carried away by the overflowing of the Ombrone. He figures the villa to be a nymph, of whom the river god is enamoured, and, like one of Ovid's heroines, she falls a victim to his pursuit. The descriptions in this poem are lively, true, and graceful. The "Caccia di Falcone" gives a spirited detail of the disasters that befall falconers: he bring in several of his friends by name.

" Where is Luigi Pulci," he cries, " that we do not hear him? He is gone before in that grove, for some whim has seized him, and he has retreated to meditate a sonnet."

Lorenzo died at the early age of forty-four, of a painful and inexplicable disorder, which, attacking his stomach, gave rise to the idea that he was poisoned. He was considerate and affectionate to the last; endeavouring to impress his system of policy on his son's mind, and exerting himself to lighten the grief of those around him. Potents and wonders followed his death, which even Machiavelli, then a very young man, deemed miraculous. He was universally lamented; and the downfall of his family, which occurred soon after, through the misconduct of his eldest son, Piero, renewed the grief of the friends who survived him.

April, 8. 1492.

MARSIGLIO FICINO.

The literary tastes of Cosmo, the talents and admirable qualities of Lucretia, the mother of Lorenzo, and the example and protection of Lorenzo himself, rendered his a golden era for poets and philosophers. It has been already mentioned, that for the sake of spreading abroad a knowledge of the Platonic doctrines, Cosmo had caused the son of his favourite physician to be educated in the study and cultivation of them. Marsiglio Ficino was born at Florence, on the 18th of October, 1433. His first studies were directed by Luca Quarqualio, with whom he read Cicero, and other Latin authors; applying his attention principally to the mention made of Plato, and already admiring and loving his philosophy. His father, being poor, sent him to study at Bologna, to the discontent of Marsiglio; but fortunately, one day, during a casual visit to Florence, his father led him to Cosmo de' Medici, who, struck with the intelligence exhibited in his countenance, chose him at once, young as he was, to be the future support of

his Platonic academy; and, turning to the father, said, "You were sent us by heaven to cure the body, but your son is certainly destined to cure the mind." * He adopted him in his house; and Marsiglio never ceased to testify his gratitude, and to declare that he had been to him a second father. He was given up henceforth to Platonism. At the age of twenty-three he wrote his "Platonic Institutions." Plato was his idol; he talked Plato, thought Plato, and became almost mad for Plato, and his deepest and most wonderful mysteries. The celebrated Pico della Mirandola shared his studies and enthusiasm. It was not, however, till after having written his "Institutions," that, at the advice of Cosmo, he learnt Greek, the better to understand his favourite author. He translated, as the first fruits of this study, the "Hymns of Orpheus" into Latin; he translated, also, the "Treatise on the Origin of the World," attributed to Hermes Trismegistus; and, presenting it to Cosimo, he was rewarded by him by the gift of a *podere*, or small farm, appertaining to his own villa of Caneggi near Florence, and a house in the city, besides some magnificent manuscripts of Plato and Plotinus. After this Ficino occupied himself by translating the whole of Plato's works into Latin, which he completed in five years. He afterwards assumed the clerical profession, and Lorenzo bestowed on him the cure of two churches, and made him canon of the cathedral of Florence, on which he gave up his patrimony to his brothers. He was a disinterested and blameless man: gentle and agreeable in his manners, no violent passions nor desires disturbed the calm of his mind. He loved solitude, and delighted to pass his time in the country, in the society of his philosophic friends. His health was feeble, and he was subject to severe indispositions, which could not induce him to diminish the ardour with which he pursued his studies. Sixtus IV., and Mathew Corvino, king of Hungary, tried to induce him, by magnificent offers, to take up

1468. Ætat. 35.

1475. Ætat. 42.

* Tiraboschi.

his abode at their several courts, but he would not quit Florence. Many foreigners, particularly from Germany, visited Italy for the express purpose of seeing him, and studying under him. He died on the first of October, 1499, at the age of sixty-six. In the year 1521, a marble statue was erected in Florence to his memory.

GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA.

As the name of Pico della Mirandola has been mentioned, it is impossible not to bestow some attention on a man who was the glory and admiration of Italy. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Conte della Concordia, was born in the year 1463; his father, Gian Francesco Pico, was lord of Mirandola and Concordia; his mother's name was Julia Boiarda. From his earliest years he manifested an extraordinary understanding and memory: he was naturally disposed to literary and poetic pursuits; but at the age of fourteen, being destined, as a younger son, for the church, he was sent to Bologna to study canon law. After two years spent in this way, he resolved to give himself up to philosophy, and visited the most celebrated schools of France and Italy, in which, studying under and disputing with the professors of highest reputation, he acquired an erudition that made him the wonder and delight of his contemporaries. To Greek and Latin he added a knowledge of Hebrew, Chaldaic, and Arabic. He relates how he was enticed by an impostor to purchase, at a high price, seventy Hebrew manuscripts, which he was told were genuine, and composed by order of Esdras, and contained the most recondite mysteries of religion. These were the books of the Cabala, or of the Traditions, which the Jews believe to have been collected at the command of Esdras. At the age of twenty-three Pico visited Rome, during the reign of Innocent VIII.; and here he published 900 propositions — dialectic, moral, physical, mathematical, theological, &c. &c. —

offering to dispute with any one concerning them. These propositions still exist among his works, a sorrowful monument of the pedantry of the age, which could turn aside so admirable an understanding, from loftier and more useful studies, to the subtilties and frivolities of scholastic arguments. But, in those days, they caused Pico to be considered something wonderful, and almost divine. Yet they led him into annoyance, as envy caused other learned men to denounce thirteen among the propositions to be heretical, and he wrote a long apology to clear himself. This rather increased his difficulties; twice he was cited before the papal tribunal, but was each time pronounced innocent. This persecution caused him to reform his life. Handsome, young, rich, and of attractive manners, he had hitherto enjoyed the pleasures usual to his period of life; but henceforth he gave himself up to piety, burning his love verses, and devoting himself to theology and philosophy. He spent the last years of his life at Florence, in the society of Lorenzo and his friends. He was beside Lorenzo at his last moments; and, in a cheerful conversation with him, that amiable man spent his last hours, saying, that he should meet death with more satisfaction after this interview. Pico has been praised by every writer for his beneficence and generosity; he died in the year 1494, in his thirty-second year only.

ANGELO POLIZIANO.

Politian formed a third, and was the dearest of Lorenzo's friends. He was born at Monte Pulciano, a small town not far from Florence; he was named Angelo, and his father was called Benedetto di Cini. The son adopted the place of his birth for a surname, changing Pulciano into the more euphonic appellation of Poliziano. He was born on the 24th of July, 1454: his father was poor, which occasioned him in his youth to call himself Angelo Basso. Brought to Florence

during his childhood, he studied under the most celebrated scholars of the day, Cristofero Landino, and Giovanni Agyropylo. It is uncertain whether he derived this advantage from his father's care, or from the kindness of Lorenzo de' Medici, as it is not known at what age he first became known to that munificent patron. His own words are, " From boyhood almost I was brought up in that asylum of virtue, the palace of the great Lorenzo de' Medici, prince of his flourishing republic of Florence."* These words coincide with the general idea, that at a very early age he attracted the notice of Lorenzo by his poem entitled, " Giostra di Giuliano de' Medici," written to celebrate the first tournament of Giuliano, as Luca Pulci had composed another in honour of that of Lorenzo. This poem consists of 1400 lines, and yet is left unfinished; breaking off at the moment that the tournament is about to begin. It commences by an address to Lorenzo, and then goes on to describe the youthful occupations of Giuliano, his carelessness of female beauty, and the subduing of his heart by the lovely Simonetta. A description of Venus and the island of Cyprus is introduced: it concludes abruptly, as is often the case with youthful attempts. Yet the beauty and variety of the ideas, and smoothness and elegance of the versification, render it doubtful to critics whether it was written at so early an age as fourteen. At least it must cause regret that he afterwards applied himself to compositions in Latin: for though his poetry in that language has a life and vigour which distinguishes it from any other of his age, yet it must always fall short of the genuine flow of thought, in which a poet so easily indulges when he adopts his native tongue.

From the period that he took up his abode in Lorenzo's palace, he received the instructions of the most celebrated men of the age, and his progress showed his aptitude to learn. He enjoyed here also the society of Lorenzo's

* Tiraboschi.

accomplished mother, Lucretia Tornabuoni, a lover of poetry, and herself a poetess. Lorenzo afterwards appointed him tutor to his children; but he did not agree so well with Mona Clarice. When Lorenzo was engaged in the hazardous war that disturbed the beginning of his political life, he sent his wife and children to Pistoia, with Politian as tutor, who wrote frequent letters to Lorenzo, with accounts of the well-being and occupations of his family. "Piero," he writes, "never leaves my side, nor I his. I should like to be useful to you in greater things; but since this is entrusted to me, I willingly undertake it."— "All your family are well. Piero studies moderately; and we wander through the town to amuse ourselves. We visit the gardens, of which this city is full, and sometimes the library of Maestro Zambino, where I have found several good Greek and Latin books. Giovanni * rides on his pony all day long, followed by numbers of people. Mona Clarice is well in health; but takes pleasure in nothing but the good news she receives from you, and seldom quits the house." In another letter he asks, that more power may be given to him over the studies of the boys: — "As for Giovanni, his mother employs him in reading the Psalter, which I by no means commend. Whilst she declined interfering with him, it is wonderful how he got on." Monna Clarice was not better pleased with the tutor than he with her. She writes to her husband — "I wish you would not make me the fable of Francho, as I was of Luigi Pulci; and that Messer Angelo should not say that he remains in my house in spite of me. I told you, that if you wished it, I was satisfied that he should stay, though I have suffered a thousand impertinences from him. If it is your will, I am patient; but I cannot believe that it should be so." Thus situated, Politian lamented the absence of Madonna Lucretia from Pistoia, and complained to her of the solitude he endured there. "I call it solitude," he says, in a letter written at this

* Afterwards Leo X.

time to Lucretia, "for Monsignore shuts himself up in his room, with thought for his only companion; and I always find him so sorrowful and anxious, that it increases my melancholy to be with him: and when I remain alone, weary of study, I am agitated by the thoughts of pestilence and war, regret for the past and fear for the future; nor have I any one with whom to share my reveries. I do not find my dear Mona Lucretia in her room, to whom I could pour forth my complaints, and I die of ennui." *

At the age of twenty-nine, he was appointed to the professorship of Greek and Latin eloquence in the university of Florence. Happy in the friendship of his patron, his life was disturbed only by literary squabbles, in which he usually conducted himself with forbearance and dignity. He was held in high repute throughout Italy, and received preferment in the church, and on one occasion was sent ambassador to the papal court.

1492. Ætat. 38.

His life for many years was one of singular good fortune and happiness: adversity ensued on the death of Lorenzo. There is a long letter of his to Jacopo Antiquario †, which describes the last days of his beloved patron in affecting and lively terms. He speaks of the counsels he gave his son, and his interview with his confessor, during which he prepared himself for death with astonishing calmness and fortitude. On one occasion he made some enquiry of the servants, which Politian answered,—"Recognising my voice," he writes, "and looking kindly on me, as he ever did, 'O Angelo,' said he, 'are you there?' and stretching out his languid arms, clasped tightly both my hands. I could not repress my sobs and tears, yet, trying to conceal them, I turned my face away; while he, without being at all agitated, still held my hands: but when he found that I could not speak for weeping, by degrees and naturally he set me free, and I hurried into the near cabinet, and gave vent to my grief and tears."

* Roscoe's Life of Lorenzo de' Medici, Appendix, p. 60.
† Tiraboschi.

The disasters that befel the Medici family after the death of Lorenzo, are supposed to have broken Politian's heart. The presumption and incapacity of Piero caused him and all who bore his name to be exiled. The French troops at that time invaded Italy under Charles VIII.: they entered Florence, and, in conjunction with the ungrateful citizens, plundered and destroyed the palace of the Medici; and the famous Laurentian library was dispersed and carried off in the tumult. Politian had composed a pathetic Latin monody on Lorenzo.*

> "Who from perennial streams shall bring,
> Of gushing floods a ceaseless spring?
> That through the day in hopeless woe,
> That through the night my tears may flow.
> As the reft turtle mourns his mate,
> As sings the swan his coming fate,
> As the sad nightingale complains,
> I pour my anguish and my strains.
> Oh! wretched, wretched past relief;
> O grief! beyond all other grief!"

---

* We subjoin the whole of the original. The above verses are from the translation of Mr. Roscoe: —

> "Quis dabit capiti meo
> Aquam? quis oculis meis
> Fontem lachrymarum dabit?
> Ut nocte fleam,
> Ut luce fleam.
> Sic turtur viduus solet,
> Sic cygnus moriens solet;
> Sic luscinia conqueri.
> Heu, miser, miser!
> O, dolor, dolor!
>
> "Laurus impetu fulminis
> Illa, illa jacet subito;
> Laurus omnium celebris,
> Musarum choris,
> Nympharum choris,
> Sub cujus patula coma,
> Et Phœbi lyra blandius
> Et vox dulcius insonat.
> Nunc muta omnia!
> Nunc surda omnia!
>
> "Quis dabit capiti meo
> Aquam? quis oculis meis
> Fontem lachrymarum dabit?
> Ut nocte fleam,
> Ut luce fleam.
> Sic turtur viduus solet,
> Sic cygnus moriens solet,
> Sic luscinia conqueri.
> Heu, miser, miser!
> O, dolor, dolor!"

While singing these verses, after Lorenzo's death, afflicted at the sad loss they commemorated, and by the adverse events which followed, a spasm of grief seized him, his heart suddenly broke from excess of feeling, and he died on the spot. He died on the 24th of September, 1494, having just completed his 40th year, and having survived his illustrious friend little more than two years.

BERNARDO PULCI.

More celebrated as an Italian poet than Politian, is Luigi Pulci, author of "Morgante Maggiore." Very little is known of his private history. There were three brothers of this family, which is one of the most ancient in Florence, since it carried back its origin to one of the French families who settled in that city in the time of Charlemagne: their fortunes, however, were decayed. Bernardo, the elder, wrote an elegy on Cosimo de' Medici; and another very sweet and graceful sonnet on the death of Simonetta, whom Giuliano de' Medici loved. He translated the Eclogues of Virgil into Italian, and wrote other pastoral poetry.

LUCA PULCI.

Luca Pulci wrote the "Giostra di Lorenzo," before mentioned; various poetic epistles, and two longer poems; one called the "Driadeo d' Amore," a pastoral founded on mythological fables; and the other, the "Ciriffo Calvaneo," a romantic narrative poem, deficient in that interest and poetic excellence necessary to attract readers in the present day.

LUIGI PULCI.

Luigi Pulci is the most celebrated of the brothers. It was at the instigation of Lucrezia Tornabuoni,

mother of Lorenzo de' Medici, who has been before mentioned for her talents and love of literature, that he wrote the "Morgante Maggiore;" and Bernardo Tasso, father of the great poet, relates that he read the cantos, as they were written, at the table of Lorenzo.* Nothing is known of the latter part of Luigi Pulci's life. Alessandro Zilioli, in his inedited "Memoirs of Italian Poets," cited by Apostolo Zeno, narrates that Pulci died in a state of penury at Padua, and that, from the impiety of his writings, he was denied the rites of Christian burial; but he is the only writer who mentions this, and no great faith can be reposed in him.

The poem of "Morgante Maggiore" has excited much discussion, as to whether it is intended to be considered a burlesque or serious poem. There is little of what is absolutely tragic; but much that is romantic and interesting, mingled, as in the tragedies of Shakspeare, with comedy. It is true that Pulci, while he relates wonders, does so in a language so colloquial, as to detract from the dignity of his heroes and the majesty of the adventures recounted; but in this he rather imitates than travesties real life, and especially the life of the chivalrous ages, during which there was so strange a mixture of the grand and the ridiculous. While reading the poem, it seems difficult to understand the foundation of the dispute, of whether it be impious, and whether it be burlesque: it is at once evident that the serious parts are intended to be elevated and tragic. Dr. Panizzi's essay is clear and decisive on this point; and with him we may quote Ugo Foscolo, who says, that "the comic humour of the Italian narrative poems arises from the contrast between the constant endeavours of the writers to adhere to the forms and subjects of the popular story-tellers, and the efforts made, at the same time, by the genius of those writers, to render these materials interesting and sublime." Yet, doubtless, Pulci, as well as other writers of romantic

* Tiraboschi.

narrative poems, introduces comedy, or, rather, farce, designedly. Tasso alone, in his "Gerusalemme," adhered to classic forms, and preserved the elevation of epic majesty, unmingled with wit and ridicule.

The origin of the romantic tales of Charlemagne and his Paladins, made so popular by Ariosto, and celebrated by Pulci, Boiardo, and other poets, has been much treated of. Earlier than these were "The Adventures of the Knights of the Round Table of King Arthur." French authors have asserted that these also are founded on stories of Charlemagne; but Dr. Panizzi asserts them to be of Welsh origin: he quotes Marie de France, who declares that she translated several *fabliaux* from British originals; and Chaucer, who, in the "Franklin's Tale," says—

> "These olde gentil Bretons in hir dayes
> Of diverse adventures maden layes,
> Rimeyed in hir firste Breton tongue;
> Which layes with hir instruments they songe,
> Or elles redden him for hir pleasure."

The long narrative romances of Amadis of Gaul and Palmerin of England (which the curate saved out of the general burning of Don Quixote's library) are supposed to be founded on various old lays and tales put together in regular narration. In the same way, the adventures of the French knights may be supposed to be founded on songs and romances composed to celebrate favourite heroes. The authority perpetually quoted by them all is archbishop Turpin. This romance is supposed to have been written during the time of the first crusade: pope Calistus II. quotes it in a bull dated 1122, and pronounces it to be genuine. From this, as from one source, the Italians drew, or pretended to draw, the various adventures of their heroes. In all their poems these are the same, and their peculiar characters are preserved; yet many of these personages are not even mentioned by Turpin: the events of his book are the wars of Charlemagne in Spain against the Saracens, and the defeat of the Paladins at Roncesvalles, through the treachery of Gano.

Milone, a distant relative of Charlemagne, and Bertha, the emperor's sister, were the parents of Orlando. His childhood was spent in obscurity and hardships, owing to the banishment of Milone and his wife when their marriage was discovered. He was clothed by the charity of four young friends, who brought cloth to cover him: two bought white, and two red; whence Orlando adopted his coat of arms, del quartiere. Charlemagne saw him on his road to Rome, Orlando introducing himself to his imperial uncle's notice by stealing a plate of meat for his mother. On this he was recognised; castles and lands were bestowed on him, he became the prop of the throne, and married Alda, or Aldabella, who was also connected with the royal familly.

The personage who ranks next to him in celebrity is his cousin Rinaldo of Montalbano. Montalbano, or Montauban, is a city on the banks of the Tarn, near its junction with the Garonne. It is said to have been built in 1144, after the date of archbishop Turpin's book, who makes no mention of it or its lord. It is a stronghold; and, even now, an old fortress, in the most ancient part of it, is called le Château de Renaud. Aymon, duke of Dordona, had four sons; the eldest was Rinaldo, who, having, in a transport of rage, killed Charlemagne's nephew Berthelot with a blow of a chess-board, was, with all his family, except his father, banished and outlawed. They betook themselves to the forests and the lives of banditti; and, proceeding to Gasgony, Yon, king of Bordeaux, gave his sister Clarice in marriage to Rinaldo, and permitted him to build the castle of Montauban. After several disasters, he went to the Holy Land, and, on his return, made peace with the emperor. The machinery of these poems is chiefly conducted, in the first place, by the treachery of Gano of Mayence, who is perpetually trusted by Charlemagne, and perpetually betrays him, turning his malice principally against the celebrated warriors of his court, while they are protected by Rinaldo's cousin Malagigi, or Maugis, son of Beuves, or Buovo, of Aygremont.

Malagigi was brought up by the fairy Orianda, and became a great enchanter. To vary the serious characters of the drama, Astolfo, the English cousin of Orlando, being equally descended with him from Charles Martel, is introduced. Astolfo is a boaster: he is perpetually undertaking great feats, which he is unable to perform; but he is generous, and brave to foolhardiness, courteous, gay, and singularly handsome.

The family of the heroes of romance has been the more dilated upon, as it serves as an introduction to all the poems. But to return to Pulci, who is immediately before us.

His poem wants the elevation, the elegance, and idealism of Boiardo and Ariosto; but it is not on that account merely burlesque: it has been supposed to be impious, on account of each chapter being addressed to the Divinity, or, more frequently, to the Virgin. But in those days men were on a much more familiar footing than now with the objects of their worship; and, even at present, in purely catholic countries, — in Italy, for example, — the most sacred names are alluded to in a way which sounds like blasphemy to our ears, but which makes an integral part of their religion. There is but one passage in the "Morgante," hereafter to be noticed, which really savours of unbelief. Thus, as seriously, or, at least, with as little feeling of blasphemy, as an alderman says grace before a turtle feast, Pulci begins his poem*: —

> "In the beginning was the Word next God;
> God was the Word, the Word no less was he:
> This was in the beginning, to my mode
> Of thinking, and without him nought could be.
> Therefore, just Lord! from out thy high abode,
> Benign and pious, bid an angel flee,
> One only, to be my companion, who
> Shall help my famous, worthy, old song through.

* "In principio era il Verbo appresso a Dio;
Ed era Iddio il Verbo, e 'l Verbo lui:
Questo era nel principio, al parer mio;
E nulla si può far sanza costui:
Però, giusto Signor benigno e pio,
Mandami solo un de gli angeli tui,
Che m' accompagni, e rechimi a memoria
Una famosa antica e degna storia.

"And thou, O Virgin! daughter, mother, bride
Of the same Lord, who gave to you each key
Of heaven and hell, and every thing beside,
The day thy Gabriel said, 'All hail!' to thee;
Since to thy servants pity 's ne'er denied,
With flowing rhymes, a pleasant style and free;
Be to my verses then benignly kind,
And to the end illuminate my mind."
LORD BYRON'S *Translation of Canto I. of Pulci.*

The scope of the poem is then, in true epic fashion, summed up in a few lines*: —

"Twelve paladins had Charles in court, of whom
The wisest and most famous was Orlando;
Him traitor Gan conducted to the tomb
In Roncesvalles, as the villain plann'd too,
While the horn rang so loud, and knell'd the doom
Of their sad rout, though he did all knight can do;
And Dante in his comedy has given
To him a happy seat with Charles in heaven." — *Id. ibid.*

The poet then introduces the immediate object of the poem. On Christmas day Charlemagne held his court, and the emperor was over-glad to see all his noble Paladins around him. His favour shown towards Orlando excited the spleen of Gano, who openly attacked him as too presumptuous and powerful. Orlando overhearing his words, and perceiving Charlemagne's ready credulity, drew his sword in a rage, and would have killed the slanderer, had not Ulivieri interposed. On this Orlando quits Paris, full of grief and rage, and goes forth to wander over the world in search of adventures. His first enterprise is undertaken in behalf of a convent, besieged by three giants, who amused themselves by

---

"E tu Vergine, figlia, e madre, e sposa
Di quel Signor, che ti dette le chiave
Del cielo e dell' abisso e d' ogni cosa,
Quel dì che Gabriel tuo ti disse Ave!
Perchè tu se' de' tuo' servi pietosa,
Con dolce rime, e stil grato e soave,
Ajuta i versi miei benignamente,
E'nfino al fine allumina la mente."
Morgante Mag. canto i.

* "Dodici paladini aveva in corte
Carlo; e'l più savio e famoso era Orlando:
Gan traditor lo condusse a la morte
In Roncisvalle un trattato ordinando;
Là dove il corno sonò tanto forte
Dopo la dolorosa rotta, quando
Ne la sua commedia Dante qui dice,
E mettelo con Carlo in ciel felice." *Id. ibid.*

throwing fragments of rock and trees torn up by the roots, into the courts and garden of the monastery, which kept the poor monks in perpetual alarm. Notwithstanding their dissuasions, Orlando conceives this to be an adventure worthy of him : he goes out against the pagan and monstrous assailants. He kills two in single combat, and then goes to seek the fiercest and mightiest of the three, Morgante. This ferocious giant has retired, meanwhile, to a cavern of his own fashioning, and was dreaming uneasily of a serpent who came to slay him, which was only defeated by his having recourse to the name of the Christian Saviour. This disposed him to submission and conversion, and Orlando, delighted with these good dispositions, embraces and baptizes him. The monks are very grateful for their deliverance, and desirous to keep their preserver ; but Orlando, tired of idleness, takes a kind and affectionate leave of the abbot, whom he discovers to be a cousin of his own, and departs with his convert in search of adventures.

Meanwhile, Rinaldo, enraged at his cousin's departure, and the partiality displayed by the emperor for the traitor Gano, leaves the court with Ulivieri and Dudone in search of the wanderer. They meet with a variety of adventures, and join him at last in the court of king Caradoro, whom they aid in his war with king Manfredonio, who demanded, at the sword's point, the beautiful Meridiana, daughter of Caradoro, as his wife. Manfredonio is defeated. The verses that describe his final departure, at the persuasion of Meridiana, and the force of love which caused him to submit to her decree of banishment, forms one of the prettiest episodes of the Morgante. Meridiana falls in love with Ulivieri, who had delivered her: he converts her to Christianity; but this does not prevent him from following the example of the pious Æneas, and deserting her a short time after.

Gano was not content with the dispersion and exile of the Paladins : he sent messengers to Caradoro and Manfredonio, telling who the wanderers were, and inci-

ting these monarchs to destroy them. Besides this, he invited Erminione, a Saracen king of Denmark, to attack France while unprotected by its bravest warriors. The king succeeds so well, that, besieging Paris, he took prisoner all the remaining Paladins; and poor Charlemagne, who cuts a sorry figure throughout the Morgante, sighs for the return of Orlando and Rinaldo. Gano triumphed, and offered one of the enemy's generals to deliver up Montalbano to him by treachery; Lionfante nobly refuses, and feels inclined to put the traitor to death; he is saved by the intercession of the family of Chiaramonte, who feared that if things were pushed to an extremity with him, his followers would revolt, and endanger the empire.

Orlando and his friends hearing in the course of their wanderings of the danger of Charlemagne, returned with a large army to deliver him. Gano wants to persuade the emperor that these allies are enemies in disguise; but the strength and valour of the most renowned Paladins are not to be mistaken. The magic arts of Malagigi the enchanter persuade Lionfante of the truth of the Christian religion: he is converted, and the war comes to an end, to the great discontent of the indefatigable Gano, who instantly begins to stir up another, informing Caradoro of the seduction of Meridiana, who sends a giant ambassador to complain to Charlemagne. The ambassador behaves with extreme impertinence, and is killed by Morgante.

Rinaldo, who is rather quarrelsome, has a dispute with Ulivieri, on which, at the instigation of Gano, he is banished; and he and Astolfo become bandits. Astolfo is taken by treachery, and sentenced to be hanged. Poor fellow! Astolfo, who is always good-humoured and courageous, is a kind of scape-goat, for ever in humiliating and dangerous situations. He is now worse off than ever; but while ascending the gallows, and while the halter is fitting, a tumult is made to save him, and Charlemagne, overpowered, to preserve his life and kingdom, pardons him and Rinaldo, and banishes Gano.

But this was only done to gain time. The emperor hates the race of Chiaramonte in his heart; and Ricciardetto, the youngest brother of the house, being taken prisoner while Rinaldo is absent, Charlemagne resolves to hang him. The Paladins were highly indignant, and Orlando left the court; but Ricciardetto was saved by his brother Rinaldo, who drove the emperor from his throne, and forcing him to take refuge in one of Gano's castles, took possession of the sovereignty himself; till, hearing that Orlando was imprisoned and sentenced to die by a pagan king of Persia, he restores the emperor to his throne, causes Gano to be banished, and sets out to deliver his cousin, accompanied by Ulivieri and Ricciardetto. He succeeds in his attempt by means of Antea, the daughter of the king of Babylon, who falls in love with him. It is impossible to follow all the intricacies of the adventures and the wars that ensue, the interest of which is derived from the detail and expression, both lost in a brief abstract. Antea, while she continues to be devotedly attached to Rinaldo, is, on some treacherous suggestion of Gano, induced to enter France, and takes possession of the castle of Montalbano. Rinaldo is sent by her father against the old man of the mountain, whom he takes prisoner and converts to Christianity: and Orlando, who is engaged in fighting and conquering whole armies, hurries to deliver Ricciardetto and Ulivieri, who are going to be hanged by Antea's father.

Morgante had been left behind in France, but sets out to rejoin Orlando, and in his way to Babylon falls in with Margutte. Margutte is a singular invention, a caprice of the poet. Pulci resolved to paint a fellow without conscience, religion, humanity, or care for aught but the grossest indulgences of the senses. Lord Byron has imitated a part of his confession of faith in one of his poems:—

> "I know not," quoth the fellow, "who or what
> He is, nor whence he came,—and little care;
> But this I know, that this roast capon 's fat,
> And that good wine ne'er wash'd down better fare."
>
> *Don Juan*, canto iii. v. 4

"My name is Margutte," says this strange being; "I was desirous of becoming a giant, but half way I repented, so that I am only ten feet high. I neither believe in black nor blue, but in capon, whether it be boiled or roast, and I have faith sometimes in butter and other good things; but above all, I put my trust in good wine. I believe in tarts and tartlets — the one is the mother, the other is the son;"—and he continues in a style of blasphemy more shocking to our protestant ears than those of the most pious catholics, who, as has been mentioned, are apt to allude in very familiar terms to the mysterious and almighty Beings, whom they do not the less on this account adore, and propitiate with prayer.

Margutte's adventures are conducted with a kind of straightforward wickedness which amuses from its very excess: at an inn, after eating up all that is to be got, — his appetite is enormous, — and robbing the host, he sets fire to the house, and departs with Morgante, rejoicing greatly in his success, and carrying off every thing he could lay his hands upon. They go travelling on, and meet with various adventures. Morgante is infinitely amused by his companion, but preserves a gentleness, a generosity, and kindness of heart, which contrasts agreeably with the other's unmeasured sensuality. At last, one morning, Morgante, to play him a trick, draws off Margutte's boots while he is asleep, and hides them; Margutte looks for them, and at length perceives an ape, who is putting them on and drawing them off; the sight of the animal thus engaged so tickles Margutte's fancy, that he laughs till he bursts. Morgante weeps over him, and buries him in a grotto. The whole episode of Margutte is distinct from the rest of the work. Pulci allows that it is not to be found in any of the old songs. Dr. Panizzi supposes, that under the name of Margutte is concealed some individual well known to Pulci and his friends, but at variance with an[illegible]m; and therefore made an object of sarcasm and kingdon[illegible]

[illegible] hurry on to the conclusion of this poe[illegible]

for the incidents are so multiplied and various, that it would occupy many pages to give an account of them. Poor Morgante dies—the gentle Christian giant, the defender of ladies, and fast friend of Orlando. He is on board a vessel which is wrecked, and he is saved on the back of a whale, but on landing is bitten by a crab on the heel: he ridicules the wound; but it proves fatal, and poor Morgante dies. Gano, a traitor to the end, is sent to Saragossa to treat with Marsiglio, who having been lately defeated, is to pay tribute to Charlemagne. He there schemes the destruction of Orlando, who, is to come slenderly accompanied to Roncesvalles to receive the tribute. The traitor arranges with the king that he shall advance accompanied by 600,000 men; who, divided into three armies, shall successively attack the Paladin and his few troops. One of the best passages of Pulci is the scene in which the treacherous attack of Roncesvalles is determined on between Marsiglio and Gano. After a solemn dinner they walked into the park, and sat down by a fountain in a solitary place. With the hesitation and confusion of traitors they are discussing the mode of destroying the famous Paladin, when heaven gives signs of anger by various and terrifying prodigies. Marsiglio's seat is upset; a laurel near is struck by a thunderbolt; the sun is obscured; a violent storm and earthquake fill them with alarm; then a fire breaks out above their heads, and the waters of the fountain overflowing are turned to burning blood; while the animals of the park attack each other. Gano is struck by the fall of a large fruit from a carob tree, (the tree on which Judas Iscariot is said to have hanged himself); his hair stands on end, and terror possesses his heart; but revenge is too burning within him to be quenched by fear, and the plot is proceeded in notwithstanding these frightful events. Orlando comes to Roncesvalles with a small force, rather a retinue than an army, to rereceive the gifts and submission of Marsiglio. The king is not neglectful of his part; his innumerable armies, one after the other, attack Orlando. The Paladin and his

friends perform prodigies of valour; but, like waves of the sea, their enemies come on irresistible from their number. Orlando sees all die around him, and his soul is pierced with grief; yet not till he feels himself dying will he sound the mighty horn which is to give Charlemagne notice of his peril. The emperor hears the faint echo borne on the winds three distinct times, and he and all around him feel certain that treason is at work and Orlando in danger. They turn pale with terror, and hasten to the sad spot, where they find the noble warrior dead. Rinaldo is near him. Rinaldo, at the moment that the slaughter of Roncesvalles was preparing, was far away in Asia. Malagigi his cousin puts a devil named Astoroth into a horse, which is to bring him to his cousin's aid in a few hours. This journey of Rinaldo and the evil spirit forms a curious episode. They converse together on their way concerning things divine and infernal. On coming to this passage, the reader is struck by the lofty tone the poet assumes: there is a mingled disdain, dignity, and regret in the fallen angel, that moves at once compassion and respect: he is thus described*:—

> "This was a demon fell, named Astorot;
> No airy sprite, nor wanton fairy he;
> His home was down in the infernal grot,
> And he was wise and fierce prodigiously."

It has been supposed that Pulci did not write this portion of the poem. Panizzi does not hesitate to give credit to the assertion of Tasso†, who declares that it was written by Ficino. But Tasso affirms this merely upon hearsay, which is slender authority. There is nothing to which contemporaries are more prone than to discover that an author does not write his own works. There is nothing in the style of these stanzas unlike Pulci's best and more serious verses. Rinaldo's journey,

* "Uno spirto chiamato è Astarotte,
Molto savio, terribil, molto fero,
Questo si sta giù nel' infernal grotte;
Non è spirito foletto, egli è più nero."
Morg. Mag. xxv. 119.

† Panizzi, Romantic Poetry of the Italians, p. 216.

thus accelerated, was however to no purpose in saving his cousin; he could only assist in his revenge—and the poem concludes with the hanging of Gano and Marsiglio, archbishop Turpin kindly undertaking to perform the last office for the king with his own hand, and ties him up to the famous carob tree.

The great beauty of the Morgante, besides scenes and passages of pathos and beauty, is derived from the simple, magnanimous, and tender character of Orlando. Charlemagne is a doting old man, Gano a traitor, Rinaldo a violent and headstrong warrior or robber, Astolfo vain-glorious, but all are selfish and erring, except the single-minded and generous conte di Brava. He is the model of a true knight,—compassionate, sincere, and valiant: his death is courageous and pious: he thinks of the grief of the emperor, and the mourning of his wife Aldabella, and after recommending them to God, he embraces his famous sword Durlindana, and pressing it to his heart, and comforted by an angel from God, he fixes his eyes on heaven and expires.

CIECO DA FERRARA.

The "Morgante Maggiore" is the first of a series of romantic narrative poems, which take Charlemagne and his Paladins for the heroes of their tales. The "Mambriano" of Cieco da Ferrara is one of these. The real name of the author was Francesco Bello. It has been said that he was called Cecco or Cieco from his blindness—but Cecco and Cecchino is the common Tuscan diminutive for Francesco. Little is known of this author, except the disaster that has already been mentioned, and that he was poor and lived at Ferrara, and recited the cantos of his poem, as they were written, at the table of the cardinal Ippolito da Este. Tiraboschi quotes from the dedication of Conosciuti, who published the "Mambriano" after the author's death; who therein begs the cardinal to take the poem under his care,

1509.

and with his accustomed benevolence not to deny that favour to the memory of Francesco, which he so frequently and liberally bestowed during his life. Tiraboschi adds, that such expressions do not seem to him to accord with the idea that the poet lived and died poor. The bounty of a patron is, however, various and capricious, and, unless it takes the form of an annuity, seldom relieves the wants of a dependant; and we may take Francesco's word that he was poor when he says—"The howling of winds and roaring of waves which I hear now abroad upon our sea, has so shattered the planks of my skiff, that I lament that I undertook the voyage. On the other side, penury burthens me with such need, that it seems to me, that I can never acquire any praise if I do not overcome these winds and storms."* His poem is little read, and has never been translated. We have never met with it; but from the specimens given by Panizzi, it is evident that he possessed ease of versification, and a considerable spring of poetic imagery and invention.

BURCHIELLO.

Very little is also known of this poet, whose real name was Domenico. He is supposed to have been born in Florence: he became free of the company of barbers in that city in 1432, and exercised his trade in the Contrada di Calemala. He died at Rome in 1448. His poems are a strange and capricious mixture of sayings, proverbs, and jokes, most of which are unintelligible to the Italians of the present day. From them and his name is derived the word burlesque, to signify a mock tragic style of expression.

* "Il fremito de' venti e'l suon dell' onde
Ch' iò sento adesso in questo nostro mare,
Han cosi indebolite ambo le sponde
Del legno mio, ch' io ploro il navigare;
Dall' altro canto povertà m' infonde
Tanta necessità, che' l non mi pare
Di poter mai acquistar laude alcuna,
S' io non supero i venti e la fortuna."
Mamb. xxviii. 1. *as quoted by Dr. Panizzi.*

BOJARDO.

Matteo Maria Bojardo was of an ancient and noble family. His ancestors had been counts of Rubiera, a castle between Reggio and Modena, till, in 1433, Feltrino Bojardo, then the head of the family, exchanged it for Scandiano, a small castle about seven miles from Reggio, at the foot of the Apennines, and celebrated for its excellent wine. The sovereign house of Este added to the possessions of the family, and Bojardo was count of Scandiano, and lord of Aceto, Casalgrande, Gesso, La Toricella, &c.

It appears that the poet was born in the castle of Scandiano, about the year 1434, or a little before. His father was Giovanni, son of Feltrino; and his mother, Lucia, was sprung of a branch of the famous Strozzi family, original in Florence. Two of his near relatives, on the mother's side, were elegant Latin poets. The general outline merely of Bojardo's life is known there, and such delicate tints as we may catch from his lyrical poetry. He received a liberal education, and was conversant in the Greek and Latin languages. He was a vassal of the Este family, and lived at the court of Borso the first duke of Ferrara, and afterwards of his successor Ercole, to whom, indeed, he attached himself during the life of Borso, when it was very uncertain whether he would succeed to the duchy. The services he performed for this family are nearly the sole events we collect of his life. When the emperor Frederic III. visited Italy, Bojardo was one of the noblemen sent out to meet and welcome him on his way to Ferrara, where he was entertained with extraordinary magnificence. Borso at this time was only marquis of Ferrara (though duke of Modena and Reggio), but the pope, Paul II., soon after created him duke of that city, and Bojardo accompanied him to Rome, when he went thither to receive the investiture.

1469. Ætat. 35.

1471. Ætat. 37.

1472. Ætat. 38. 1473. Ætat. 39. 1478. Ætat. 44. 1481. Ætat. 47. 1486. Ætat. 52. 1487. Ætat. 53.

Soon after, the poet married Taddea, daughter of the count of Novellara, of the noble house of Gonzaga. He continued to enjoy the kindness and friendship of duke Ercole, who selected him with other nobles to escort to Ferrara his bride Eleonora, daughter of the king of Naples. He was named by him also governor of Reggio; which place he enjoyed, except during the short interval when he was governor of Modena, till the period of his death, which occurred at Reggio on the 20th of December, 1494, at the age of sixty. He was buried in the church of Scandiano. Some traces remain to mark his character. He was so mild a governor as to excite the indignation of a learned civilian, Panciroli, who, speaking of him as a magistrate, reproves him as a man of too great benignity,—"better fitted to write verses than punish crimes." A contemporary Latin poet says, "that he was not severe to the errors of love, but kindly gave to others what he desired himself. He sat, indeed, on the seat of justice, and gave forth laws with a grave brow; but his countenance was not always severe; day and night he sang the triumphs of love, and while others studied the laws, he applied himself to tender poetry."

His lyrical poetry is extremely beautiful, tender, and spirited, being characterised by that easy flow of thought and style peculiar to him. Since the days of Petrarch, it is the fashion to affix one lady's name as the object of a poet's verses. But, unfortunately, men, whether poets or not, are apt to change. There are traces of Bojardo's being attached to at least two ladies: and he married a third. The most passionate of his verses were written from Rome in 1471, and were addressed to Antonia Caprara, a beautiful girl of eighteen, who, whether married or not, shared his affection. Perhaps this lady died; but we do not appear to have any verses to his wife, whom he married in 1472.

He was a good classical scholar, and translated the "Golden Ass" of Apuleius, the history of Herodotus, Halicarnassus, and the "Golden Ass" of Lucian. He

translated, altered, and enlarged the Pomarium of Ricobaldi, to which, in its new form, he gave the name of the "Imperial History." It is a sort of chronicle, full of romantic stories, founded on history and tradition, to which, perhaps, credence was lent at that time. He wrote also a drama called Timon, founded upon Lucian, which was among the first specimens of Italian dramas, but it does not appear to have great merit. He was the author also of Latin eclogues, the language of which is elegant and spirited.

His great work, however, is the "Orlando Innamorato," or "Loves of Orlando," founded on the old romances. His disposition naturally inclined him to revel in romance, so that it is said that he used, at Scandiano, to visit the old villagers, and draw from them their traditionary tales, rewarding them so well for the gratification he received, that it became a sort of proverb or exclamation of good-will at that place—"God send Bojardo to your house!" His "Imperial History," probably gave direction to his invention, which was prolific. He took Orlando as his hero; but deeming him uninteresting unless in love, he called into life the beautiful Angelica, whose coquetry, loveliness, and misfortunes, made sad havoc in Charlemagne's court. Mr. George Rose's prose translation of the "Orlando Innamorato" gives a spirited abstract of the story, which must here be more briefly detailed.

Charlemagne, in the midst of prosperity and glory, held a court at Paris, at which 22,030 guests were assembled. Before these the beautiful Angelica presents herself, with her brother Argalia, and four giants as attendants. Her brother defies the knights to combat. Argalia possessed an enchanted lance, which throws whoever it touches; and Angelica a ring, which, on certain occasions, renders the wearer invisible. Every one fell in love with Angelica, and in particular Orlando and Rinaldo. Angelica becomes frightened in the midst of the disturbances of the combats, and disappearing by means of the ring, flies from the scene of

the tournament. She takes refuge in the wood of Ardennes: arriving fatigued and heated, she drinks hastily of an enchanted fountain, which causes her to fall in love with the first man she may chance to see; and then reposing on the flower-enamelled turf, falls asleep. Orlando and Rinaldo pursue her, as does also her brother Argalia; and Ferrau goes after him, being at the moment of his flight engaged in combat with him. Orlando and Rinaldo arrive at Ardennes; but the latter, on entering the forest, and refreshing himself at a fountain, drinks of water enchanted by Merlin, which causes him to hate the first woman he shall behold: he then also lies down, and goes to sleep. Angelica wakes; she rises, wanders from her place of rest, and comes to the spot where Rinaldo is reposing. Her love-blinded eyes behold him, and, transported by sudden and subduing passion, she watches his waking with fondness. He opens his eyes, and holds in abhorrence the beauty who is gazing upon him, and flies from her in disdain. Argalia meanwhile arrives in the wood, pursued by Ferrau; he has lost his enchanted lance; the enemies meet, and continue the combat. Argalia is slain: while breathing his last, he implores his enemy to cast him and his armour into the river, that no trace may remain of his disgrace. Ferrau agrees, but solicits the loan of his helmet, he himself being without one, till he can get another: Argalia consents, and dies; while Ferrau, who is a Saracen, hearing of the misfortunes of his sovereign Marsiglio, who is attacked by Gradasso, king of Sericana, gives up the pursuit of Angelica, and sets out for Spain. Angelica returns to India, and Orlando departs in quest of her.

Charlemagne goes to the assistance of Marsiglio against Gradasso, who himself is a wonder of martial prowess, and is attended by an innumerable army, and several vast and fierce giants. Rinaldo has returned to court, and accompanies his imperial master: during the battle that ensues, he encounters Gradasso; but their single combat is interrupted by the hurry of the

fight, and they agree to meet in duel the next day on foot, in a solitary place by the sea-side. Gradasso's great object is to win Orlando's sword Durindana, and Rinaldo's horse Bajardo: the latter is to be his prize, if he overcomes Rinaldo on the following day.

Angelica meanwhile, burning with love for Rinaldo, revolves many schemes for bringing him to her side. She has in her power his cousin Malagigi (Maugis), who is a great enchanter. She set him at liberty, on condition that he shall bring Rinaldo to her. Malagigi first tries to persuade his cousin; but the chilly waters have wrought too powerfully, and the very name of Angelica is odious to him. Malagigi has recourse to stratagem. When Rinaldo keeps his appointment the next morning with Gradasso, he finds the sea-shore solitary: a little boat, tenantless, is anchored near the beach. Malagigi sends a fiend, in the shape of Gradasso, who, after a mock combat, take refuge in the pinnace, followed by Rinaldo. The boat drifts out to sea, the fiend vanishes, and Rinaldo is hurried away across the ocean, till he arrives near a palace and garden, where the vessel lightly drifts on shore.

Orlando wanders about to find Angelica, and hears that she is at Albracca, a castle of Catay. But he is unable to reach her, detained by a variety of adventures and enchantments, through which he is at last deprived of all memory or knowledge, and brought to a magnificent palace, where he is left. Charlemagne meanwhile is freed from Gradasso by means of Argalia's enchanted lance, which, falling into Astolfo's possession, he works miracles, unhorses the mighty king, and a peace being agreed upon, he sets out in search of Orlando and Rinaldo. Poor Rinaldo is tempted meanwhile to soften towards Angelica, but in vain. The luxuries of an enchanted palace are wasted on him, and he is exposed to the most frightful dangers, from which Angelica delivers him; but still he scorns and leaves her, while she returns disconsolate to Albracca.

Her hand is sought by various princes and nobles;

and in particular by Agricane, king of Tartary: she refuses them all; and Agricane, resolved to win her, besieges her in Albracca. She is defended by various of the Paladins, and goes herself with her ring in quest of Orlando, whom she restores to his senses. He gladly hastens to her assistance; he kills Agricane in a single contest, and in reward, as she wishes to get rid of him, Angelica sends him on a distant and perilous expedition.

The poem then enters on a new series of adventures, arising from the revenge which Agramante wishes to take on Orlando for having slain his father, king Trojano, sixteen years before. We are now introduced to several new heroes of romance, destined to play a distinguished part in the poem of Ariosto, as well as in the present one. There is Ruggeri, whose name is adopted from the Norman knight Ruggeri, who had been king of Sicily; and there is Rodomonte, the bravest, fiercest, and wildest of all warriors. Ruggeri's presence is absolutely needed for the success of Agramante's expedition; but he is imprisoned in a castle, whence he can only be delivered by Angelica's magic ring. A thievish dwarf, named Brunello, contrives to steal it from her, and Ruggeri is liberated. The expedition embarks for France, where Rodomonte, impatient of delays, had already arrived, and devastates Provence; while Marsiglio is induced, by the old traitor Gano, to invade France from the Pyrenees.

Orlando, returning from his adventure, finds Angelica besieged by Marfisa, and in great peril. He mentions, that Rinaldo is in France: the name has not lost its influence. She resolves to abandon Albracca; and, having lost her ring, is glad to be protected by Orlando, who conducts her in safety to France; and who, during the long journey, never mentions his passion, nor annoys her with any manifestation of it; though she, by her former coquetry, might well expect importunity: but his generous and fond heart renders him silent, that he may not disturb her lovely, serene countenance;

"Per non turbare quel bel viso sereno."

Poor Angelica feels not less for Rinaldo; but, arriving at Ardennes, she is delivered from her misery, by drinking of the fountain, that turns all her love to hate; while Rinaldo, also arriving, drinks of the love-inspiring waters, and with great joy seeing the lady, wonders at his past dislike, and congratulates himself now on her passion. He addresses her with tenderness; but is repulsed with scorn, while her champion Orlando is at hand to defend her. He challenges his cousin, and they fight; but Charlemagne, hearing of their arrival in his kingdom, seizes on the lady, and forces the knights to be reconciled, privately promising to both Angelica as a prize, if they will exert themselves during the impending battle with Agramante. The poem now relates the invasion of Agramante, of Mandricardo, son of the slain Agricane, of Gradasso, and Marsiglio. A great battle takes place, in which the Saracens are triumphant, Orlando being absent. Rinaldo goes in pursuit of his horse Bajardo; while his sister Bradamante, a brave heroine, falls in love with Rugeri, and withdraws from the field. Charlemagne retires to Paris, and is besieged by the whole body of Saracens. The poem ends with the commencement of a sort of episode, in which Fiordespina, mistaking the sex of Bradamante, falls in love with her. In the middle of this, the poet is interrupted. The sound of arms, which betokens the invasion of the French, and the terror and misery of Italy, call him from his task of fiction, to be the witness of real woes. He promises, if the stars will permit, to continue his narration another time. This time never came, for the French invaded Italy in 1494; and it was in about the same year that Bojardo died.

This is but a brief abstract of a poem interspersed with numerous episodes, beautiful descriptions, and interesting reverses. The poet never flags. An untired spirit animates every stanza, every verse: the life, the energy, the variety, the fertility of invention, are truly surprising, and far transcend Ariosto. But minuter criticism is deferred, till an account is given of Berni and his rifacimento.

BERNI.

Francesco Berni was born at Lamporecchio, in the Val di Nievole, towards the end of the fifteenth century. The first eighteen years of his life were spent at Florence; whence he transferred himself to Rome, and entered on the service of his relation, the cardinal Bibbiena. On the death of the cardinal, he attached himself to the nephew, Angelo Divizio Bibbiena. He was at one time obliged to leave Rome, on account of some adventure of gallantry *; and afterwards entered the service of Giberti, the papal Datario, with whom he remained seven years, accompanying him whenever Giberti's duties as a bishop took him to Verona. But Berni was a poet, and fond of pleasure, and fortune could not obtain from him the industry which might have advanced him with his patrons. His vivacity and his poetry were agreeable in society; he became courted as a literary man; and he was a distinguished member of the academy of the Vignaiuoli, or vine-dressers, composed of the first men in Rome. This learned association was established by a Mantuan gentleman, Oberto Strozzi. The members assumed names adopted from the vineyard; and its feasts became famous all over Italy. Berni was at Rome when it was plundered by the Colonna party in 1526, and was robbed of every thing: at the same time he was struck with horror at the cruelties committed by the invaders. He mentions them with horror in the "Orlando Innamorato." When describing the sacking of a town, he says, that his unhappy eyes saw similar outrages perpetrated in Rome. He quitted the service of the Datario after this, and retired to Florence, where he lived tranquilly, being possessed of a canonicate, which had before been given him in the cathedral of that city, and enjoying the protection of cardinal Ippolito de' Medici, and of the duke Alexander. There is a story

* Panizzi.

of his being solicited by each of these princes to poison the other, which is not supported by dates or facts. Alexander was afterwards murdered by Lorenzino de' Medici. The cardinal Ippolito had died before: Alexander was accused of having poisoned him; but accusations of this sort were so frequent at that time, that, according to historians and the popular voice, no man of any eminence ever died a natural death. Berni is said to have died on the 26th of July, 1536.

Berni possessed, to an extraordinary degree, a liveliness of imagination, and a facetiousness, which caused him to invent a new style of poetry, light, witty, but highly fanciful, which became the delight of his contemporaries. Mr. Stebbing speaks with great disapprobation of him, saying, "that we shall not be guilty of much injustice, if we regard him as one of those ecclesiastical Epicureans of the sixteenth century, whose infidelity and licentiousness branded them with infamy." His minor poems are witty, but indecent: they appear to be written, says Tiraboschi, with ease and rapidity, yet the original manuscripts show that he blotted and corrected them with care. He wrote also Latin elegies; and came nearer to Catullus, the critics tell us, than any other poet of the age.

The work by which he is known to us, is the Rifacimento of Bojardo's "Orlando Innamorato," which was not published till after his death. He occupied himself with this poem at Verona, while in the service of the Datario. He addresses the Po in one of the cantos of the poem, begging of it to restrain its rapid course while he writes beside its banks; and yet at this very time his letters are full of complaints of the occupations that take up all his time.

It is a curious subject to enquire, what the fault was in Bojardo's poem, that rendered it necessary that it should be rewritten. Berni was not the first to discover this, as Domenichi had already altered the style of every stanza; yet his rifacimento had not caused it to be popular. Meanwhile Ariosto wrote a continuation to it, which

he named the "Orlando Furioso," and that became the delight and glory of Italy. The choice of subject in these poets is admirable. When Milton thought of making king Arthur and his knights the heroes of a poem, he selected a subject which was devoid of any quick interest to his countrymen: wars with France and civil struggles had caused the British name to be forgotten. But the Mahometans were still the terror of Italy. After the taking of Constantinople, they pressed near upon the peninsula; Venice was kept in check, and at one time Ancona was actually taken by them. Every Italian heart felt triumph in the overthrow of a Pagan and Saracen, and warmed with interest when it was related how they were driven from France. Bojardo made choice of the subject, and he added life to it, by the introduction of Angelica. His invention, his poetic fervour, his ceaseless flow of fancy, were admirable; yet he was forgotten. Many of Ariosto's episodes are more tedious, and they are less artificially introduced; but Ariosto was a greater poet: his style is perfectly beautiful, and his higher flights entitle him to a very high rank among the writers of verse. Perhaps, in the whole range of narrative poetry, there is no passage to compete with the progress of Orlando's madness.

Berni evidently appreciated Ariosto's merits, and he saw in Bojardo's a groundwork that emulated them. His faults are doubtless greater than we can judge, since style alone occasioned his want of popularity: he has many Lombardisms; and I heard a learned Tuscan say, that nothing to their refined ear was so intolerable as the pronunciation of the north. Style, however, was his only fault; and Berni, in altering that, brought at once to light the beauty of the poem: he changed no incident, no sentiment, scarcely a thought; stanza by stanza he remodelled the expression, and this was all; yet it would almost seem that he thus communicated a Promethean spark. Nothing can be more false than the accusation, that he added any thing licentious to the poem. Tiraboschi even gives credit to this idea;

but, on the contrary, his expressions are always more reserved than those of the original. The comparison may easily be made, by collating, in the two authors, the passages which describe the meeting of Bradamante and Fiordelisa, the welcome given by Angelica to Orlando when he arrives at Albracca, and the journey of these two from Albracca to Provence; and the above assertion will at once be proved; nor is it true that Berni turned a serious poem into a burlesque. He added lightness and gaiety, but seldom any ridicule. It is now easy, since Dr. Panizzi's edition of the original poem, to compare it with the rifacimento: an Italian alone can be a competent judge; but it is easy for any one to see the difference between the earnest language of Bojardo, and the graceful wit of his improver. We will give, as a specimen of the usual style of his alterations, two stanzas, selected by chance in the poem: they describe the death of Agricane. Bojardo writes thus, speaking of Orlando, when his adversary, having received a mortal wound, asks him to baptize him*: —

"He had his face covered with tears, and he dismounted on the ground: he took the wounded king in his arms, and placed him on the marble of the fountain: he was never weary of weeping with him, entreating for pardon with a gentle voice. Then he baptized him with water from the fountain, praying God for him with joined hands. He remained but a short time,

* "Egli avea pien di lagrime la faccia,
E fù smontato in su la terra piana;
Ricolse il Re ferito ne le braccia,
E sopra 'l marmo il pose a la fontana,
E di pianger con seco non si saccia,
Chiedendogli perdon con voce umana.
Poi battezzollo a l' acqua de la fonte,
Pregando Dio per lui con le man gionte.

"Poco poi stette, che l' ebbe trovato
Freddo il viso e tutta la persona;
Onde s'avvide ch' egli era passato.
Sopra al marmor al fonte l' abbondona,
Così com' era tutto quanto armato,
Col brando in mano, e con la sua corona;
E poi verso il destrier fece riguardo,
E pargli di veder che sia Bajardo."

Orlando Inn. da Bojardo, lib. i. can. xix. stan. 16, 17

finding his face and whole person cold, whence he perceived that he was no more. He leaves him on the marble of the fountain, all armed as he was, with his sword in his hand, and his crown, and then he turned towards the horse, and thought that he recognised Bajardo."

Thus alters Berni *: —

"Having his face covered with tears, the count dismounts from Brigliadoro: he took the wounded king in his arms, and placed him on the brink of the fountain, entreating, while he kisses and embraces him, that all past injuries might be forgotten. Not able to say yes, the king inclines his head, and Orlando baptized him with water; and, at last, he found his face and whole person cold, whence he judged that he was no more; wherefore he left him on the verge of the fountain, all armed as he was, with sword in hand, and with his crown: then, turning his look upon his horse, it seemed to him that he recognised Bajardo."

This, of course, is a very clumsy mode of showing the difference; and yet it gives the mere English reader an idea of the extent of Berni's alterations.

But, although he did not materially change either event or thought, he added to the poem; and the real merits of Berni became very evident in the introductory stanzas which he appended to each canto. It seems to me that these have never been sufficiently appreciated:

"Piena avendo di lagrime la faccia
Scende di Brigliadoro in terra il Conte,
Recasi il Rè ferito nelle braccia
E ponlo su la sponda della fonte;
E pregando, lo bacia, e stretto abbraccia,
Che l' ingiurie passate siano sconte,
Non potendo dir sì, china il Re il collo,
E Orlando con l'acqua battezzollo.

"E poichè finalmente gli ha trovato
Il viso freddo, e tutta la persona,
Onde il giudica tutto trapassato,
Par sopra quella sponda l' abbandona,
Così com era tutto quanto armato,
Col brando in mano, e con la sua corona:
Poi verso il suo caval volto lo sguardo
Gli par raffigurar, che sia Bajardo."

Orlando Inn. rifatto da Berni, can. xix. stan. 19, 20.

they are not jocose nor burlesque; they are beautiful apostrophes, or observations upon the heart and fortunes of human beings, embodied in poetic language and imagery. Many of them are to be preferred to those of Ariosto, whom he imitated in these additions. We have noticed his address to the Po, which is singularly beautiful; another well-known interpolation is the introduction of a description of himself: this, it is true, is burlesque; but the style of irony is exquisite, and, surely, may be allowed, as it is directed against his own faults and person. Mr. Rose has translated this passage, and published it in his prose abstract of the "Innamorato." Dr. Panizzi has quoted it also in his work. He gives an account of his life; of his birth at Lamporecchio; of the "piteous plight" in which he sojourned at Florence till the age of nineteen; and his journey to Rome, when he attached himself to his kinsman, the cardinal Bibbiena, "who neither did him harm nor good;" and, on his death, how he passed to the nephew, —

> "Who the same measure as his uncle meted;"

and then "in search of better bread," how he became secretary to the Datario. Yet, he could not please his new patron; although

> "The worse he did, the more he had to do."

Then he describes his own disposition and person: —

> "His mood was choleric, and his tongue was vicious,
> But he was praised for singleness of heart,
> Nor taxed as avaricious or ambitious;
> Affectionate and frank, and void of art;
> A lover of his friends and unsuspicious;
> And where he hated knew no middle part:
> And men his malice and his love might rate;
> But then he was more prone to love than hate.
>
> "To paint his person, — this was thin and dry;
> Well sorting it, his legs were spare and lean;
> Broad was his visage, and his nose was high,
> While narrow was the space that was between
> His eyebrows; sharp and blue his hollow eye,
> Which, buried in his beard, had not been seen,
> But that the master kept this thicket cleared,
> At mortal war with moustache and with beard"

No one ever detested servitude as he did, though servitude was still his dole. He then whimsically describes himself as inhabiting the palace of a fairy; where, according to Bajardo, people are kept happily and merrily, amusing themselves, and passing their lives in indolence. Berni supposes himself to be one of the company, together with a French cook, Maître Pierre Buffet, who had been in the service of Giberti; and he describes his beau-ideal of the indolent life he loved. Tired with noise, lights, and music, he finds a lonely room, and causes the servants to bring a bed into it, — a large bed, — in which he might stretch himself at pleasure; and, finding his friend the cook, another bed is brought into the same room for him, and between the two a table was placed: this table was well supplied with the most savoury viands: —

> "But soup and syrup pleased the Florentine (*Berni*),
> Who loathed fatigue like death; and for his part,
> Brought neither teeth nor fingers into play,
> But made two varlets feed him as he lay.
>
> "Here couchant, nothing but his head was spied,
> Sheeted and quilted to the very chin;
> And needful food a serving man supplied
> Through pipe of silver placed the mouth within.
> Meanwhile the sluggard moved no part beside,
> Holding all motion else mere shame and sin:
> And (so his spirits and his health were broke),
> Not to fatigue this organ, seldom spoke."
>
> "The cook was Master Peter hight, and he
> Had tales at will to wile away the day;
> To him the Florentine: — 'Those fools, pardie,
> Have little wit, who dance that endless way.'
> And Peter in return: 'I think with thee.'
> Then with some merry story back'd the say,
> Swallowed a mouthful, and turned round in bed,
> And so, by starts, talked, turned, and slept, and fed."
>
> * * * *
>
> "Above all other curses, pen and ink
> Were by the Tuscan held in hate and scorn,
> Who, worse than any loathsome sight or stink,
> Detested pen and paper, ink and horn.
> So deeply did a deadly venom sink,
> So fester'd in his flesh a rankling thorn,
> While, night and day, with heart and garments rent,
> Seven weary years the wretch in writing spent.
>
> "Of all their ways to baffle time and tide,
> This seems the strangest of their waking dreams:
> Couched on their backs, the two the rafters eyed,
> And taxed their drowsy wits to count the beams.

> 'T is thus they mark at leisure which is wide,'
> Which short, or which of due proportion seems,
> And which worm-eaten are, and which are sound,
> And if the total sum is odd or round."

This is a specimen of Berni's humour, which gave the name of Bernesco to poetry of this nature. More serious and more elegant verses abound, as we have already remarked, and prove that Berni deserves a very high place among Italian poets.

ARIOSTO.

Ludovico Ariosto was born in the castle of Reggio, a city of Lombardy, on the 8th of September, 1474. Both his parents were of ancient and honourable lineage: the Ariosti had long been distinguished in Bologna, when a daughter of their house, Lippa Ariosta, a lady of great beauty and address, being married to Obizzo III., marquis of Este, brought a number of her relatives to Ferrara: these, by her influence, she so fortunately established in offices of power and emolument, that they flourished for several generations among the grandees of that petty but splendid principality.

The poet's mother, Madonna Daria, belonged to a branch of the Malegucci, one of the wealthiest and noblest families in the north of Italy. Nicolo Ariosto, his father, held various places of trust and authority under the dukes of Ferrara. In youth he had been the companion of Borso, and steward of the household of Hercules, besides being occasionally employed on embassies to the pope and the king of France; in which he is said to have received more substantial recompence than barren dignities, in ample official salaries, and rich presents for special services. At the birth of the poet he was governor of the castle and territory of Reggio, and afterwards advanced to those of Modena; but as emolument came easily, and there were abundant temptations, besides heavy family expenses, to spend it lavishly, wealth never accumulated in his hands: wherefore, having nine younger children born to him, his views with respect to the eldest, Ludovico, were prudently directed towards establishing him in some profession, whereby he might acquire riches and rank for himself by perseverance in honourable labour. At the age of fourteen or fifteen years,—when he had already signal-

ised himself by composing a drama on the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, which was performed by his little brothers and sisters, — no doubt as happily as the same subject in the Midsummer Night's Dream (whenever that happened) was enacted by Bottom the weaver and his comrades, or, rather, as happily as Oberon, Titania, and their train could have done it in fairy-land,— the young poet was sent, grievously against his will, to study civil law at Padua under two eminent practitioners, Angelo Castrinse and Il Maino. With them, like Ovid, Petrarch, Tasso, Marino, or our own Milton and Cowper, he spent five years to little profit, hating his profession, and studying so listlessly, that it became more and more manifest, the longer he drawled at it, that he never would excel in the strife of words and tournaments of tongues, by which the ample fortunes and broad lands of many families, whose founders the gods had fortunately not made poetical, were then, as now, like the prizes at hardier exercises, acquired. Nicolo Ariosto, therefore, at length abandoned the folly of spoiling a good poet to make a bad lawyer, and permitted his son to return to those learned studies and exercises of native talent, which had been either suspended, or indulged in by stealth, after his parent, "with spears and lances," had driven him from them into the toils of pleadings and precedents. Released from these trammels, (strewed as they were to his loathing eye with the mangled remains of causes, like cobwebs with sculls, wings, and fragments of flies,) Ludovico, at the age of twenty, found himself free to expatiate in that fields of classic literature, whose buried treasures, in his age, continued still to be dug up and brought to light from time to time; or to roam abroad seeking adventures suited to his youthful imagination, in the wilds of French and Spanish romance, then recently thrown open to their countrymen by Pulci and Boiardo.

However enriched his mind in earlier youth might have been with knowledge of the dead languages — and we are required to believe that he had made a very

promising Latin oration while he was a mere boy — he found, on returning to them, that he had lost so much as to need the help of a master to construe a fable of Æsop. But what he lost at law, he recovered at leisure, and added so much more to his stock, that he speedily became eminent among his contemporaries (at a time when Latin was more cultivated than Italian) for the critical skill, or, more probably, the quickness of apprehension and delicacy of taste, with which he elecidated obscure passages in Horace and Ovid. These appear to have been his favourite authors; and each of them, in the sequel, he not a little resembled, in their very dissimilar excellences. Under the tuition of Gregorio da Spoleti, a scholar of high repute, whom he has gratefully celebrated in the epistle to Bembo (Satire VI.), he so far perfected himself in the language of ancient Rome, that his verses in it were admired and commended by the greatest adepts in that factitious style of composition. It was the folly of the learned of that age and the preceding, to make Latin the universal language of writers who aimed at the honours of literature; a scheme so preposterous, that none but the learned could ever have stumbled upon it in their ignorance of every thing but what the relics of ancient books could teach them. To men of practical knowledge, it must have occurred, that all the fragments of Roman authors could, at the most, furnish a vocabulary comparatively small, and utterly inadequate to meet the demands of extending science, through new and ever-changing forms of society. Under such a servitude as made the Roman tongue itself pass under the Roman yoke, no phrase unauthorised by classic precedent could be hazarded, nor might a foreign word be engrafted upon the pure stock without appearing a barbarism. Meanwhile the very rhythm, accent, and pronunciation of the original being lost, scholars in every country were obliged to adapt these to the vernacular sounds of vowels and consonants among themselves; so that an Oxonian and a Tuscan, though they might understand each other by

the eye on paper, would be nearly unintelligible by the ear and the living voice. It is manifest that nothing better than everlasting patchwork, of the same unchangeable materials, how diversely soever combined (like the patterns produced by the kaleidoscope, ever variable, yet little distinguishable from another), would have constituted the eloquence, poetry, and polite literature of modern Europe. No people would have suffered more than the Italians themselves, by employing a defunct and unimproveable tongue, in which their brightest geniuses must have been but secondary planets, dimly reflecting, through a hazy atmosphere, the borrowed beams of luminaries, themselves obscured by distance, as well as imperfectly seen from partial eclipses. It would then have been the glory of Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto, to have written what Virgil, Cicero, and Horace would have as little relished in diction as they could have comprehended in substance, where things, persons, customs, and arts, unexistent in their time, were the burthen of every original theme. On the other hand, equally simple, obvious, and beautiful, was the only living use that could be made of the dead languages (beyond the profit and delight of studying them in their surviving models); namely, that which time has made of them by transmutation and transfusion into modern tongues of such terms as were congenial to the latter, or could be rendered so by being employed, first, in technical or peculiar, and afterwards in elegant and familiar senses, to obviate the necessity of inventing new and inexpressive words, as the occasion of science and taste required. The Italian, French, Spanish, and English languages have thus been enriched and adorned with classical interpolations, so gradually adopted, that they seemed to grow naturally out of their respective stocks, as the sphere of knowledge increased, and its details became more multiform.

This golden age of Ariosto's life was shortened by the death of his father; who left to his eldest son, with means exceedingly small, the responsibility of support-

ing his mother, and training up his nine brothers and sisters. In the sixth of his Satires, — satires which are almost wholly personal and autobiographic, — he says, that on this occasion he was obliged, at four and twenty years of age, to abandon Thalia, Euterpe, and all the nine Muses; to turn from quiet studies to active duties, and exchange Homer for waste-books and ledgers, (*squarci e vacchette*). These trusts, the young, ambitious, fiery-minded poet faithfully and self-denyingly fulfilled; and he who, under parental injunction, at the most docile period of life, would not submit to the profitable drudgery of the law, now, in the very flower and pride of his genius, with filial piety and fraternal affection, yielded to a domestic yoke, and became the father of his family. In this honourable character he so well husbanded his narrow patrimony, that he portioned off now one, then another sister, and provided education for his four brothers, who, as they grew up, entered into the service of sundry princes and nobles, as was the custom with the minor gentry in that half-feudal age. Gabriele cultivated literature, and excelled in the composition of Latin verse; but, making Statius his model, he was never worthy to compete, even in this respect, with his more illustrious brother. Galasso entered into the church, which was then the wealthy and lavish patroness of those, who, by their subserviency to her domination, or their able advocacy of it, sought the good things of the present life under the guise of having their affections fixed on higher, holier, and eternal things. Yet the latter could hardly be said to be used as a pretence for the purpose of deceiving; so lax, shameless, mercenary, and ambitious was the hierarchy of that age. Such profligacy, however, must not be laid to the charge of Galasso, of whom nothing bad is known. "Galasso, in the city of Evander, is seeking a surplice to put over his night-gown," says Ludovico in his second Satire; meaning, to obtain a bishop's robe and rochet — to become a prelate or a canon. Alexander was of a more enterprising disposition; and delighting in foreign

travel, he attached himself to the train of the cardinal Hippolito d'Este, brother to Alfonso duke of Ferrara, whom he accompanied into Hungary ; and, according to his brother's description of that imperious patron's court, appears to have fretted away his hour upon a stage of artificial manners, dissipated pleasures, and emasculating duties. Carlo, of whom nothing particular is recorded, took up his abode in the kingdom of Naples, where he died. These particulars are gathered chiefly from the sixth Satire, with the additional intelligence, in the second, that, at the time of writing it, the author had to furnish a dowry to his fifth and last sister, then about to be married. Though this must have been twenty years after the death of their father, the mother was still living with him. The allusion to her in the context has often been quoted, but it is so simply and purely beautiful, that it cannot be quoted amiss here. Excusing himself by many reasons for not going abroad ; and having mentioned, in the foregoing lines, the dispersion of all the other members of the family from their common home, except himself and her ; he says,

> " L'età di nostra madre mi percote
> Di pietà il core, che da tutti, a un tratto,
> Senza infamia lasciata esser non puote."

> " Our mother's years with pity pierce my heart,
> For, without infamy, she could not be
> By all of us, at once, forsaken." *Satire II.*

But while Ariosto, from his twenty-fourth to his forty-fifth year, was thus humbly, yet honourably, nourishing his mother and training up his brothers and sisters—though his studies were much interrupted at first, and he was obliged to abandon the Greek language altogether (which he had recently been recovering)—he maintained his reputation among the first Latin scholars ; and in the same busy interval achieved his greatest triumph in the literature of his own land. Under the voluntary burthen of domestic cares, the buoyancy of irrepressible genius bore him up from obscurity ; and whatever might have been the secret misgivings, or the

generous forecastings, of undeveloped but conscious powers, he found himself, at nine and twenty years of age, in the first circles of Italian society, courted, admired, applauded, and of course envied, both for his conversation, his learning, and his poetry. In the latter, indeed (judging by what remains), he seems to have produced nothing but two or three indifferent dramas, certain loose love elegies, with a few middling sonnets and madrigals,—all fantastic and pleasant enough in their way, but the best of them affording no great promise that their writer would ere long surpass all predecessors in one wide field of invention, and leave to successors nothing to do in it but—not to imitate him: so late and slowly, often, are the most extraordinary talents brought into exercise. It is difficult to imagine, in our cold clime, with our refractory tongue, and accustomed as we are to the phlegm of our countrymen, how such performances as the above could raise a man to celebrity: but verse was not then the pastime of every lover of verse; and reputations were not so numerous as they are in these days, when there are a thousand avenues to the temple of fame not then opened,—and quite as many out of it,—while candidates are seen crowding in such throngs as to tread on one another's heels, those behind forcing onward those in front; so that our literary ephemera resemble a procession of spectators through a palace, when a royal corpse lies in state; multitudes coming in, passing on, going out continually, a few pausing, none stopping. The Italian language, however, it must be observed, for all the minor and more exquisite forms of verse, is not less felicitously and inimitably adapted, than is the French to the *badinage* of prose. Ariosto gained credit for these *bagatelles*, in an age when Bembo, Molza, and many others were his contemporaries, who, to this hour, are chiefly known by such things, and nothing better. But, for some reason or other which is not apparent, Ariosto was certainly looked up to, and renowned by anticipation, for a long contemplated achievement of

equal daring to any of the knights' adventures which in due course he celebrated, and which proved not less successful in the issue than his own "Astolpho's Journey to the Moon;" for in this (the "Orlando Furioso)," the madness of his hero covered him with more glory than the restoring of the Paladin's lost wits did the rider of the hippogriff. Ariosto, indeed, was the very Astolpho of song, and both his Paladins and their countries must be sought in the moon, or nowhere.

He was, during the greater portion of this eventful period of his life, in the service of cardinal Hippolito d'Este, who affected to be a Mæcenas, and who, at least as much from vanity and ostentation as from genuine taste or delight in their compositions, assembled round him the prime scholars and wits of the age. By some of his biographers, the poet is said to have received munificent proofs that the princely ecclesiastic knew how to value the endowments of the Muses more than personages of his rank are wont to do. But this seems very questionable, from the poet's own account of his patron's bounty in his second Satire, which may be noticed hereafter. Leisure and competence, however, he must have enjoyed during this irksome and almost menial servitude, under which, with all its debasements, he produced his "Orlando Furioso." Having commenced the poem, he communicated the specimen and plan to his friend cardinal Bembo, who, influenced by the pedantic prejudice formerly alluded to, seriously advised him to compose it in Latin; a language in which, with all the mastery that a modern could attain over it, the licentious fables of chivalry — licentious in every sense, in diction, sentiment, plot, narrative, and morals,— would have appeared as heterogeneous and outlandish as the wrath of Achilles in Chinese, or the piety of Æneas in Sanscrit. Mr. Roscoe says of Sanazzaro and Bembo, who were brother rivals for the honours of Parnassus, that while the former "turned all his talents for the improvement of Latin poesy, the latter persevered in culti-

vating his native tongue."* Most people can give better advice than they take: Bembo, it seems, took better than he gave; and Ariosto had sagacity enough to follow his counsellor's example rather than his precept, nobly answering, "I would rather stand among the first of writers in my own tongue, than below Ovid or Virgil himself in theirs."

This task, therefore, for fifteen years, he pursued, with occasional external interruptions, but none probably from within; for, his mind being impregnated with the great conception, he could not help brooding over it by day and by night, amidst business and pleasure, in crowds and in solitude, at Rome as ambassador from the duke to the pope, and at Ferrara as a courtier in the palace of cardinal Hippolito; but especially at his birth-place, Reggio, in the retirement of a villa belonging to one of his maternal relatives, Sigismondo Malegucci. Here, in one of the chambers of an ancient tower within the domain, he elaborated canto after canto of that most anomalous yet impressive poem, which, while it appears as unconnected as a tissue of dreams in its details, (as it resembles the stuff which dreams are made of in its materials,) is nevertheless one of the most perfect webs of narrative that fancy ever spun, or genius wove, from the silkworm produce of a poet's brain. No rival composition of the same or any other class of heroic verse has yet proved equally attractive to Italian readers in every rank of life; though, in the "Gerusalemme Liberata" of Tasso, consummate skill and genius of the highest order have constructed an epic according to the strictest rules of art, to conciliate the learned, and at the same time embellished it with all the graces of romance, to charm the multitude, who love to be pleased, because they cannot help it, and care not by what means, so that these be but "rich and strange."

Meanwhile the duke of Ferrara, wishing to pacify the wrath of Julius II., who threatened him not only with the thunders of the Vatican (which were no im-

* History of Leo X. vol. i. p. 91. 4to.

potent artillery in those days), but with "force and arms," in the strongest sense of the legal verbiage, so terribly illustrated in appeals to the sword; it is no small proof of the ability and address in worldly affairs of one who lived amidst a creation of ideals of his own rearing, that Ariosto was despatched as ambassador to Rome on this occasion. Though in the sequel he did not effect his purpose of appeasing the ferocious pontiff, yet, by his eloquence, he persuaded him to feign a milder mood, and send an answer which meant less favour than the words seemed to imply. For soon afterwards, Julius, who had set his heart upon adding Ferrara to the ecclesiastical states, entered into a league with the Venetians, who coveted Padua as the quarter adjacent to their territories; and, while his holiness furnished an army, the doge sent a fleet up the Po, to attack the capital of Alfonso at once by land and by water. The papal forces, however, were defeated at the battle of Ravenna, and the republican squadron was beaten, dispersed, or captured on the river. On this occasion, Ariosto, unlike Horace (his master in verse, but not in arms), fought gallantly, and made prize of one of the enemy's richest vessels, laden with military stores. This appears to be authenticated, though he himself never alludes to the circumstance in his Satires (when he is boasting of his services, and murmuring at their ill requital), and notwithstanding his reputed timidity on the water. At the same time, the proof usually given of the latter, it must be allowed, is too equivocal to establish the fact; namely, that when he had occasion to disembark, he would pertinaciously wait till every body else had landed, before he would venture to descend from the deck, using the phrase, "*de puppe novissimus exi*:" but the coolest captain, when his ship is wrecked or foundering, makes it a point of honour and duty to be the last to abandon it. He is likewise said to have been as indifferent a horseman, as *good* seamen often are (though he was none), riding slowly and cautiously, and alighting on

the least appearance of peril or inconvenience in his way. Personally a coward he may have been, but mentally courageous he undoubtedly was: there is no deficiency of spirit traceable in his conduct on some trying occasions, any more than there is in his verses at any time. Indeed, one who had not the keenest intellectual delight in the boldest enterprises, the most appalling dangers, and difficulties insurmountable except by magic intervention, would hardly have written "Orlando Furioso;" for in no work of imagination does the author more effectually dispossess himself of himself, and become for the time being the knight or the giant whose exploits he is celebrating.

After his victories, Alfonso, still anxious to conciliate the pope, proposed a second embassy to Rome; but none of his other diplomatists being willing to hazard themselves in the presence of the fiery Julius, Ariosto was again induced to accept the charge,—no mean proof of constitutional intrepidity, or else an ascendancy of mind over nerves which few philosophers have attained. Accordingly he set out; but (as he tells us himself in one of his Satires) after escaping all the hazards of the way, every where infested by brigands in those troublous times, he met with so uncourteous a reception from the chafed pontiff, that he was glad to escape as quietly and secretly as he could, having received information that, as Alfonso's proxy, he ran no small risk of being treated as the holy father would have been happy to have treated his master, had he presented himself at the Vatican. Indeed, Julius is said to have openly threatened to throw the poet into the sea, if he did not make his way back as speedily as he might; a hint of which Ariosto promptly availed himself, not presuming to entertain a hope, had he been cast upon the mercy of the waves, that he should have the good fortune of Arion, to charm the dolphins with his minstrelsy, after finding that the sacred laurel, which even the lightning spares *,

* The lightning did *not* spare the laurelled bust of Ariosto, on his monument at Ferrara, some years ago; for the wreath (being of *iron*) was

could not make his head inviolable at Rome. Alfonso himself, in one of his fruitless negotiations with the implacable Julius, being at Rome, and under safe conduct, was so alarmed by the perfidious treatment which he experienced from the pontiff (who in the mean time, during a truce, had seized Reggio, and demanded Ferrara in exchange for his unjust capture), that he deemed it prudent to make his retreat in the various disguises of a huntsman, a livery servant, and a friar, under the protection of the family of Colonna, who by force rescued him from state-confinement in the Vatican, under the abused name of hospitality.

But the duke retaliated in a singular manner for the indignity shown to himself and his representative. The French having taken Bologna, a superb bronze statue of the military pope, by Michel Angelo, was pulled down from its pedestal, and dragged by the populace through the mire about the city, after which it was sent as a present to Alfonso. The indignant duke (a reckless barbarian in this instance), showing as little respect for the exquisite workmanship of the sculptor as he felt for the piety of the pope, with a felicity of revenge almost to be forgiven for its appropriateness, ordered the rich metal to be sent to the furnace, and re-cast into a cannon, to which he gave the name of *Julio*. The head, however, was spared, and placed as a trophy in the state museum. Julius never forgave the duke, either for the fault of his ancestors in bequeathing to him a territory which the see of Rome coveted, or for his own sin in defending that territory so successfully against both spiritual and secular violence, that he himself (the greatest warrior who ever wore the triple crown) could not wrest it from him. The disappointed pope expired, exclaiming, in his delirium, "Out of Italy, ye French! Out, Alfonso of Este!"*

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struck off from the marble temples by a flash, which entered the church during a thunderstorm.

* "At Bologna, Michel Angelo erected, in front of the church of St

The first edition of the "Orlando Furioso" appeared in 1515, eleven years after its commencement; a second and third, highly improved, followed in the course of six years; and the last from his hand, in 1532, the year of the poet's death. In each succeeding reprint, so many and such large amendments, exclusions, and variations of the original text were adopted, that the example has been very properly held up to young writers as worthy of their diligent imitation — never to think their best performances perfect while a touch is wanting which they can give to heighten their beauty, or a blemish remaining to lower it, which they can remove. In fact, Ariosto ceased not to elaborate his apparently completed work to the latest period of his life. Long after it had attained its full standard of bulk, this sole tree of his fancy continued to flourish, by the perpetuation of the same process which had reared it, putting forth fairer leaves and richer fruit, in perennial course, till the failure of further supply, from his own decay, left it to survive him in imperishable maturity. The principal interrruptions of his literary labours seem to have been the necessary dissipation of mind during the aforementioned unfortunate embassies to Rome, his brief government of the disturbed province of Graffagnana, and occasional fits of silence which came upon him when his heart was wrung and his pride wounded by the inconsiderate neglect or the more flagrant ingratitude of mean-spirited patrons. Of the latter, cardinal Hippolito was the chief; and the cause of their mutual estrangement was the refusal of the poet to

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Petronio, a statue of Julius II. in bronze, which he is said to have executed so as to express, in the most energetic manner, those qualities for which he was distinguished; giving grandeur and majesty to his person, and courage, promptitude, and ferociousness to his countenance, while even the drapery was remarkable for the boldness and magnificence of its folds. When Julius saw the model, and observed the vigour of the attitude, and the energy with which the right arm was extended, he enquired from the artist, whether he meant to represent him as dispensing his benediction or his curse. Michel Angelo prudently replied, that he meant to represent him in the act of admonishing the citizens of Bologna. In return, the artist requested to know from his holiness, whether he would have a book in his hand. 'No,' replied Julius; 'give me a sword, I am no scholar.'" — *Roscoe's Leo X.* vol. iv. p. 306. 4to edition.

accompany the haughty priest as one of his retinue on a journey to Hungary to visit his archbishopric of Segovia, which had been bestowed upon him when he was not more than eighteen years old, by king Matteo Corvino, whose queen Beatrice was sister to Leonora of Aragon, Hippolito's mother. This spoiled child of fortune was not only cardinal, priest, statesman, and warrior (in each of which characters he greatly signalised himself, according to the lax notions of morality then prevalent); but in one instance, at least, he was a lover also, and a rejected one, who wreaked upon his favoured rival a revenge which has made his memory infamous. It appears that Hippolito, and his illegitimate brother don Giulio, both paid their addresses (dishonourable ones they must have been on the cardinal's part) to a lady of Ferrara, of singularly attractive accomplishments, who (if marriage were the question to be decided by the courtship of either), it may be presumed, very naturally preferred him with whom a virtuous alliance might be formed. Hippolito, pressing her one day to acknowledge the ground of her preference, she laid the blame of her love on Giulio's beautiful eyes. The cardinal secretly determined to dissolve that charm; and soon after, accompanying his brother on the chase, in a solitary situation, he led him into an ambush of assassins, who sprang upon the unsuspecting youth, dragged him from his horse, and tore out his eyes, while Hippolito stood by, directing the operation, and exulting in the extinction of those fatal luminaries that stood in his light. Guicciardini, indeed, says, that though Giulio's eyes were plucked out (*tratti*) by the cardinal, they were replaced, without the loss of sight (*riposti senza perdita del lume nel luogo loro*), by the prompt and careful skill of the chirurgeons. Be this as it might, the man concerning whom such a story could be told, and believed by contemporaries, must have had a character for cruelty and selfishness, which renders probable the arrogance, vindictiveness, and

tyranny towards his dependents, of which Ariosto so bitterly, yet so humbly and playfully, complains in his Satires, whenever he alludes to his connection with Hippolito. The magnanimous conduct of Alfonso towards the same unfortunate youth was strikingly contrasted with the treachery and barbarity of Hippolito: for the duke not punishing the cardinal or his accomplices for this outrage, Giulio and his brother Ferdinand conspired against his life. The plot was discovered; and the brothers, having confessed their criminal purpose, were adjudged to lose their heads on the scaffold; but while the axe was suspended over them, their sentence was changed into one of perpetual imprisonment. Ferdinand, after suffering this for thirty years, died; but Giulio, at the expiration of fifty-two years, was set at liberty.*

The poet was, no doubt, proud of his own ancient blood, and jealous of his personal independence, while he coveted that leisure for the pursuits of literature, on which the felicity of his existence, and the glory of his name, in a great measure depended; feelings little understood or little regarded by superficial grandees, whether in church or state, in respect to those over whom they held authority or influence. A poet, more than any other man, lives within himself; and to do this he must have freedom, ease, and competence, however small: nor is it less for the benefit of others that he should enjoy these necessaries of literary life; since they are to reap the harvest of his hermit-thoughts, sown in secret and cherished in solitude, till they grow into beauty, like plants undistinguished till their blossoms appear, or till they shine through obscurity like stars that come out between light and darkness, because they can no longer be hidden. To writers of every other class, valuable as self-searching, self-knowledge, and self-gratification may be, for their various exercises and undertakings, they draw or collect the

* Leo X. vol. ii. p. 52.

greater portion of their materials for study and composition from their converse with ordinary and public affairs, the records of the dead or the living, past or contemporary characters, manners, and events. The historian, the moralist, or the philosopher, may please and profit his own generation, and bequeath intellectual stores of wealth to posterity, by representing the images, tastes, and employments of his own times; but the poet, the perpetual poet, he who alone is a poet in the highest sense, whatever be his theme, and how similar soever his materials may be to those of others, must mould his subject according to the archetypes in his own mind, and yet cause such an universal and undying spirit to pervade it, as shall by sympathy make his thoughts understood and enjoyed in all ages and countries, among all people who can read his language.*

Hippolito, praised as he has been for his patronage of letters and arts, and poetically canonised by Ariosto himself, throughout the "Orlando Furioso," in strains as unworthy of his genius as they were unmerited by the hero of it, seems to have been a jackdaw patron, who loved to prank himself with the peacock-feathers of court-poets, and strut before them, well plucked, in his train. It is clear that he very indifferently aypreciated those talents which were the admiration of all Italy, and as little understood the temper of their possessor. The

* Ariosto seems to have had a horror of travelling under any circumstances: —

> "Men's tastes are various: one prefers the church,
> The camp another; this his native soil,
> That foreign countries; as for me, who will
> May travel to and fro, to visit France,
> Spain, England, Hungary; but I love home.
> Lombardy, Rome, and Florence I have seen;
> The mountains that divide, and those that gird,
> Fair Italy, and either sea that bathes her;
> This is enough for me. Without expense
> Of innkeepers, I roam with Ptolemy
> O'er all the world beside, in peace or war;
> I sail on every sea, nor make vain vows
> When lightnings flash, for, safe, along the chart,
> I see more lands than from the reeling deck." *Satire IV.*

proud cardinal scarcely rated them any higher than inasmuch as they afforded him the insolent gratification of saying (to exalt himself) that such rare endowments belonged to one of the creatures whom he affected to keep about him, who would fetch and carry for their patron, while they dare not call their souls their own — if souls they had, who could sell them for the luxury of eating toads, with pleasant countenances, in the great man's presence, and deserving the contempt with which they were treated by submitting to it. To the honour of Ariosto he was not one of this reptile species, though his narrow circumstances through life compelled him to eat bitter bread at tables where he would have loved to sit, if he could have found a place there otherwise than as a dependant. In his second satire he expatiates on the degradation of that bondage, from which his own high spirit, and the cardinal's mean one, had freed him. Writing to his brother Alessandro, who had followed his highness into Hungary, he inquires whether the latter ever names him, or alludes to his pertinacity in remaining behind: he then breaks into indignant complaints against the cardinal's courtiers, for misrepresenting the motives of his conduct: — "Oh! ye, profoundly learned in adulation! the art which you most cultivate and study still countenances him to blame me beyond measure. Mad is the man who dares to contradict his master, even though he say that he has seen the stars at noon, the sun at midnight. When he commends or censures, every voice, on either hand, is heard with one accord approving; and if there be a solitary one that has not hardihood, from downright baseness, to open a mouth, with his whole visage he applauds, and every feature says,—'I too agree with that.'" The writer proceeds to recapitulate the reasons, "many and true," which he had stated to the cardinal himself, face to face, without disguise, why he should stay at home. Several of these are whimsical enough, but they show the humour of the man; and may be comprised thus summarily: —

“ I have no wish to make my life shorter than fortune and my stars shall please. Now every change, however slight, would aggravate my malady (an inveterate asthma), and I should either die of it, or my two physicians are mistaken. But over and above what they may say, I understand my own case best, and what is good and what is bad for me. My constitution ill endures hard winters, and theirs beneath the pole (Hungary beneath the pole! the poet was always a strange geographer, but here he is playing) are more intense than ours in Italy. And if the cold should not blast me, the heat would, from stoves which I abominate so much, that I shun them more than the plague. Besides all this, the folks so dress, and eat and drink, and play; in short, do every thing but sleep, in that strange land in winter, that, were I forced to gulp the air, so difficult to breathe, from the Riphean mountains, what with the vapours arising from my stomach, and the rheum falling on my lungs, I certainly should die some night of suffocation. Then heady wines, which are prohibited to me as mortal poison, are by the guests swilled down in monstrous draughts, for not to drink much and undiluted is sacrilege there. All their food too is high seasoned with pepper and spices, which my doctor condemns as pernicious for me. Here you may say, that I might sit down below stairs in a snug chimney corner, far from the ill savour of the company, where the cook would prepare my victuals to my own liking, and I might water my wine at my will, and drink little or none at all. What! while you are all well and feasting above, must I sit from morning till night alone in my cell, alone at my board, like a Carthusian? Then pots and pans for kitchen and chamber would be wanted, and I must have a dower of household furniture settled on me like a new married bride. Supposing, nevertheless, that master Pasquin, the cook, were pleased to dress dinner for me apart; once or twice he might do it, but assuredly the fourth

or sixth time, he would set all his face in arms against me (*mi farà 'l viso dell' arme*). * * * * You will reply, 'begin housekeeping then in your own way, at your own expense; your footman may be your caterer, and you can cook and eat your pullets at your own fire-side!' — Mighty well! but by my unlucky servitude under the cardinal, I have not got enough to set up an hotel for myself in his palace. And thanks to thee, Apollo! thanks to you, ye sacred college of the Muses! from your bounty I have not received so much as would buy me a cloak. 'Oh, but your patron has given you something!'* — I grant it; something more than would buy me a cloak; but that it was given me for your sake, I don't believe. He has said, and I am free to tell it to every body, that I may put my verses (there is an untranslatable quibble in the original) where I like. His praises composed by me are not the kind of services which he deems worthy of recompence; he doles out his rewards to those who ride post for him, follow him in the park and the city; who don and doff his clothes, and put his wine flasks in the well that they may be cool at the nones; he recompenses those who watch for him at nights, till the smiths rise in the morning to make nails, so that they often fall asleep with the torches burning in their hands. When I have made verses in honour of him, he says, I have done so for my own pleasure and idleness; whereas it would be far more agreeable to him to have me about his own person." After further complaints against his patron, scorn of that patron's flatterers, and vindication of himself for not being one of these, the angry poet exclaims, "What could I do in such a case? I have no skill to shoot partridges flying; nor to hold a hawk or a greyhound in leash. Let lads learn such arts, who wish to practise them. Nor can I conveniently stoop to draw on or pull off his boots and spurs, seeing I am somewhat tall. I have not much taste for victuals, and as for

* Apollo and the Muses are supposed to speak here, and Ariosto replies to them.

carving, I might very well have served that office in the age of the world when men fed on acorns. I would not choose to superintend Gismondi's* housekeeping accounts, nor does it fall to my lot to gallop again to Rome to appease the fury of the second Julius; but even if it did, at my time of life, with this cough, which I probably caught on such an occasion, it does not suit me any longer to run about the streets. If then to perform such drudgery, and seldom to go out of his presence, but stand there like Bootes by the Great Bear, —if this be required of the man who thirsts for gold, rather than enrich myself thus, I choose repose; repose, rather than to occupy myself with cares for which my studies must be abandoned and plunged into Lethe, — studies that do not, indeed, furnish pasture for the body, but feast the mind with food so noble that they deserve not to be neglected. And thus they do for me, — they make poverty less painful, and wealth to be so little desired, that for the love of it I will not part with my freedom: they cause me not to want that which I hope not to obtain; and that neither envy nor spleen consume me when my lord invites Celio and Marone, while I cannot expect to be seen at supper with his highness at Midsummer; amidst a blaze of torches, blinded with their smoke. Here I walk alone and on foot wherever I please, and when I choose to ride, I throw my saddle bags over my horse's back and mount: and this I hold to be a lesser sin than taking a bribe to recommend the cause of a vassal to the prince; or harassing a parish by iniquitous lawsuits, till the people offer pensions to stay proceedings. Wherefore I lift up both hands to heaven, and pray, that either among citizens or countrymen, I may live in peace under my own roof, and that by means of my small patrimony, I may be enabled to spend the remainder of my days without learning a new craft, or making my family blush for me." In

* The cardinal's steward.

the sequel of the epistle, the relenting poet (a freeman at heart, a slave by court habit) condescends to make an offer of certain honorary services which he could render to the cardinal at home (not having "felt himself so stout and nimble as to leap from the banks of the Po to those of the Danube"), but before he has well concluded his humiliating overture, the exasperation, of which neither scorn, philosophy, nor poetic pride could rid his wounded spirit, returns like an acccss of disease upon him, and he breaks out into a rhodomontade of defiance. In this passage it is hard to know whether the unhappy writer be most entitled to pity, censure, or admiration: pity for unmerited harshness from his patron; censure for a manifest hankering towards sycophancy; and admiration for his magnanimous resolve, at any rate, to choose freedom and penury rather than abundance and bondage. "If," he says, "for a benefice bestowed on me of five and twenty crowns every four months (yet not so well secured but that they are often litigated), his highness has a right to make me wear a chain, hold me as a bondman, and oblige me to sweat and tremble before him, without any regard, till I break down and die, — let him not imagine such a thing, but tell him plainly that, rather than be a slave, I will bear poverty in patience." He goes on: —

"An ass, all bones and gristle with hard fare,
Entering a granary through a broken wall,
Made such enormous havoc with the corn,
That his thin flanks were rounded like a tun,
And he had had enough, — which was not soon.
Then, fearing lest his hide must pay the cost,
He struggled to get back the way he came,
But found the chink too narrow now to let him.
Thus, while he fretted, pushed, and squeez'd in vain,
A rat addressed him: 'Sir, if you would pass,
You must make friends with that great paunch of yours;
Behoves you to disgorge what you have swallow'd,
And e'en grow lean again, or never hope
To thread the needle's eye of that small hole.'
— So, in conclusion, if his Eminence
Imagines he has bought me with his gifts,
'T will be no hard or bitter thing to me
Straight to return them, and reclaim my freedom."

To aggravate the poet's misfortune, about this time, or, in the words of his first English translator, sir John

Harrington, " to mend the matter, one taking occasion of this eclipse of the cardinal's favour put him in suit for a piece of land of his ancient inheritance, which was not only a great vexation to his mind, but a charge to his purse and travail to his body; for undoubtedly the clattering of armour, the noise of great ordnance, the sound of the trumpet and drum, and the neighing of horses, do not so much trouble the sweet Muses, as the brabbling of lawyers, the pattering of attorneys, and the civil war, or rather most uncivil disagreeing, of foresworn jurors."

After the death of Hippolito, who was never reconciled to him, Ariosto was persuaded to enter into the service of the cardinal's brother, Alfonso the duke, who, if he neither exalted nor enriched the poet greatly, honoured him for his genius, delighted in his society, and enabled him to build a house to his own fancy in the midst of an ample garden. This gave him an opportunity of indulging in one of his peculiar tastes, in which, however, it was not easy to please himself, for the pleasure rather consisted in trying to do so by modelling and remodelling, and making experiment after experiment on whatever he had in hand. Thus his mansion was constructed by piecemeal, pulled down in like manner, enlarged, reduced, amended over and over again before he permitted it to stand, or deemed it worthy of the following quaint inscription, which he placed over the entrance: —

> " Parva sed apta mihi, sed nulli obnoxia, sed non
> Sordida, parta meo sed tamen ære domus."

> " 'T is small but fit for me, gives none offence,
> Not mean, yet builded at my own expense."

" A verse," says sir John Harrington, with an emphasis as though he spoke from experience, " which few of the builders of this latter day could truly write, or, at least, if they could, I would lay that their houses were strongly built, indeed, for more than the third heir." When asked by a friend how it happened that

he who, in "building the lofty rhyme," had reared so many superb palaces, could submit to dwell under so humble a roof, he very ingenuously replied, "Words are sooner put together than bricks and mortar." Yet in constructing his verse he was equally fastidious; no poet probably ever bestowed more patience and pains in weighing syllables, collocating sounds, balancing periods, and adjusting the nicest points that bore upon the harmony, splendour, or fluency of his compositions; yet it is the charm of his style that the whole seems as natural as if the thoughts had told themselves in their own words. In stocking his garden, and training his flowers, Ariosto is said to have been not less fickle and capricious than in framing his habitation and adapting his poetical numbers; but with far less felicity; for, like a child impatient to witness the growth of his plants, he would pull them up from time to time to see how the roots were thriving below ground, as well as how they shot upwards. This plan, however it might suit masonry to practise on dead materials, or poetry to weave and disentangle rhythmical cadences, was ill adapted to gardening.

It was still, however, and to his life's end, the misfortune of Ariosto to struggle against the solicitudes, discomforts, and mortifications of narrow and precarious circumstances. His own family were long dependent upon him for entire subsistence, or occasional aid; yet he seems to have kept his inheritance, small as it was, unimpaired, otherwise he could not have looked to it as a last resource, when courtly favour, whether of prelate or prince, should be withdrawn. What regular stipends he might receive for his services from Hippolito and Alfonso, is nowhere recorded, beyond the five and twenty crowns every four months, bestowed by the former, when he could get them, by fair means or foul, from those who were to pay them; and according to some of his biographers, withdrawn from him by his patron, after their quarrel. But it appears that he enjoyed the revenues of some ecclesiastical benefices,

though not in priest's orders, and that, though not married, he had two sons, whom he educated liberally. In his third satire, he assigns a very equivocal reason for this not very equivocal conduct; for who will pretend that both circumstances were not greatly to his discredit, though countenanced in simony and licentiousness by the shameless practices of many of his most honourable contemporaries:—"I will not take orders, because then I can never take a wife; I will not take a wife because then I can never take orders, and I am shy of tying a knot, which, if I repent, I cannot loose." From popes, cardinals, and princes, both native and foreign, he is said to have received large gifts, in return for copies of his poems, and in compliment to those rare talents, by which he furnished the most popular, as well as the most fashionable reading of all who spoke the Italian tongue, or understood it: yet few of these are so authenticated as to confer unquestionable credit on the presumed donors.

Among Ariosto's patrons, next to Hippolito, Pope Leo X. seems to have most excited and most disappointed his reasonable expectations, not to call them his positive claims; for in some instances at least, where promises have been made to the hope, the iniquity of breaking them to the heart is only not felony, because the law cannot punish it. It is said by one (Gabriele Simeoni in his Satire on Avarice), that "to Leo, the light and mirror of courtesy, we are primarily indebted for the pleasure of hearkening to the lays of Ariosto, that pontiff having given him several hundred crowns to perfect his work." Another apocryphal authority affirms, that pope Leo X. issued a bull in favour of the "Orlando Furioso," denouncing excommunication against any one who should presume to censure its poetry or its morals. This has been explained into a mere matter of form, namely, a licence to print and publish the work, with a denunciation against those who should defraud the author of the lawful profits arising from the sale;—a licence, by the way, of little value; since we have learned

already from himself, long after the publication of the poem, that from "Apollo and the sacred college of the Muses,"—a palpable hit at the pope and the sacred college of cardinals, against whom he seldom spares a stroke of raillery,—he never received so much as would buy him a cloak. A bull of some kind or other was granted to him by Leo, according to his own confession in Satire VII.; but if that which is once well done is twice done, that which is only half done must be next to nothing: he received only a moiety of the sum raised by it, which seems to have been as little productive as some of our church briefs, or those letters of royal licence to beg, which have been granted in this country to recompense learned men for their labours, as in the case of Stow the antiquary. Paulo Rolli, himself a poet of no mean rank (who translated "Paradise Lost" into Italian), in his note on a passage in the sixth Satire, says that Leo, "otherwise the great friend of the learned, did not promote Ariosto, because his holiness inherited from Julius II. implacable hatred against Alfonso duke of Ferrara, and a greedy desire to possess that city. It did not, therefore, agree with his policy to give Ariosto a cardinal's hat, because, being a subject of Alfonso's, the poet would not only do no wrong to the duke; but, on the contrary, honoured as he was by his sovereign, he would employ all his influence to thwart the injurious designs of the pontiff against the latter. What marvel, then, that Leo, like mighty men in every age, should prefer his own ambition to the great friendship and esteem in which he held Ariosto; since ambition, when united with personal interest, swallows up all other passions!"

But what claims had Ariosto on the bounty of Leo X.? The fact is certain, that, previous to the elevation of Giovanni de' Medici, under that name, to the papal chair (not in prosperity only, but in exile and captivity after the battle of Ravenna), Ariosto had been on terms of the most cordial intimacy that can be supposed to have subsisted between persons so unequally circumstanced with regard to birth, but having in common

one passionate attachment to elegant literature. In Ariosto this was supreme, in Leo it was only secondary; hence the heartless ingratitude of the priest on the one hand, and the wormwood and gall of chagrin, that exasperated the poet on the other. But his own authority on the subject is the best; and if not the most correct, it has the merit of being the most amusing representation of the game of self-delusion at which both played and both lost (the one his honour, and the other his reward); for there is no reason to doubt of Giovanni de' Medici's affection towards his friend, and his purpose to serve him being as sincere—till he had the means of doing so—as the poet's hopes were natural and ingenuous. Time has avenged the injured party, and Ariosto's fourth Satire adds little to the glory of the golden days of Leo. While the latter was a whelp, he fondled his playmate the spaniel; when he came to lion's estate, he had too many foxes and wolves about his den to care for his former companion. "Until the time" when he went to Rome to be made lion * (Leo), I was always agreeable to him, and apparently he loved few persons more than me. Often hath he said, when he was legate and in Florence, that if need were, he would make no difference between me and his own brother. Hence some might imagine, that being at Rome, it would have been easy for me to have slipt my head out of a black hood into a green one. I answer those who may think so with an example; read it, for it will cost you less to read than me to write."

This, as well as some former and following extracts from the Satires, are given, for variety's sake, in slipshod verse:—

"The ground, one summer, was so parch'd with drought,
It seem'd as though Apollo had resign'd
His horses' reins to Phaeton again:
Dry every well, and every fountain dry;

* "E fin ch'a Roma s'andò a far leone." *Satire IV.*

"a crearlo
Leon d' umile agnel." *Satire VII.*

Lakes, streams, and rivers most renown'd, might then
Be forded without bridges.

"In that time,
There lived a pastor, rich I do not say,
Nor overstock'd with herds and woolly flocks,
Who, among others, press'd by want of water,
And having search'd in vain through every cave,
Turn'd to that Lord who never disappoints
The man that trusts in him; — and light was given,
And inspiration to his heart, that he,
Far thence, should in a valley's bottom find
The long-desired supply.

"Off, with his wife,
Children, and all that in the world he had,
He hasten'd thither, and with spade and mattock
Delved to the spring, — nor had he deep to dig.
But having nothing wherewithal to draw,
Save one scant narrow pitcher, thus he spake:
'Let none take dudgeon, if the earliest draught
Be for myself; the second for my dame;
And 't is but right my children have the third,
The fourth, and on, till all have slaked their thirst;
Then, one by one, I will the rest should drink,
According to their work and labour done,
Who sunk the well; to flocks and cattle next
Refreshment must be forth distributed,
First to the feeblest and the nearest death.'

"According to this equitable rule,
All came to drink; while each, that he might not
Be last, made most of his small services.
This, a poor magpie, once his master's pet,
Seeing and hearing, cried, 'Ah! well-a-day!
I 'm no relation, I 've not help'd to sink
The well, nor am of any further use
To be to him what I have been; 't is plain
That if I wait my turn, I 'm in the lurch,
And must drop dead with thirst unless I seek
Relief elsewhere.'

"Cousin *, with this example
I furnish you, to stop the mouths of those
Who think his holiness might have preferr'd
Me to the *Neri*, *Vanni*, *Lotti*, *Bacci*,
Nephews and kin so numerous, claiming right
To drink in the first year; then those that help'd
To robe him with the best of mantles, &c. &c. &c.
* * * *
If till all these have drunk their fill I wait,
I know not which will be the first dried up,
The well of water, or myself by thirst."

The poet, alluding in direct terms to his visit to Rome, and his specious reception by Leo, says, "I had better remain in my accustomed quiet, than try whether it be true, that whomsoever fortune exalts, she first dips in Lethe." The subtle irony that follows cannot be mis-

* Annibale Maleguccio, to whom the Satire is addressed.

taken in the original, while the indignant satirist, with the most unaffected gravity, and in right good faith, seems to acquit his patron of forgetfulness and ingratitude, — the very things with which it is certain that he means to charge him. Ariosto can keep his countenance like the Spartan boy, who, having stolen a fox, and hidden it under his cloak, suffered the animal to worry its way into his heart, without betraying, by any contortion, the secret of his theft. "Nevertheless, if it be the fact that she (Fortune) does plunge others there (in Lethe), so that all remembrances of the past are washed out, I can testify that he (Leo) had not lost his memory when I first kissed his foot; he bowed himself towards me from the blessed seat, took me by the hand, and gave me a holy kiss on either cheek; he likewise granted me most graciously one half of that same bull of which my friend Bebiena lately remitted me the balance, at my own expense; wherefore, with skirts and bosom full of hopes, but splashed from head to foot with rain and mud, I returned to supper at my inn the same night. But even if it be true that the pope means to make good all his former promises, and now intends me to reap fruit of the seed which I have sown through so many years; if it be true that he will bestow upon me as many mitres and coronets as the master of his chapel ever saw assembled when his holiness says mass; if it be true that he will fill my sleeves, my pockets, and my lap with gold, and, lest that should not be enough, cram me bodily with it up to the chin (*la gola, il ventre e le budella*); would all this glut my enormous voracity for wealth? or would the fierce thirst of my cerastes * be appeased with this? From Morocco to China, from the Nile to the Danube, and not merely to Rome, I must travel, if I would find means to satiate the unnatural cravings of avarice. Were I a cardinal, or even the great servant of servants, and yet could not

* A serpent, supposed to have horns; probably the hooded snake of the East Indies, — one of the most venomous and deadly of the kind: here it is the emblem of avarice.

find bounds to my inordinate desires, what good should I get by wearying myself with such huge leaps? I had better lie still, and tire myself less."

The fable which follows, typifies the mournful but ludicrous fact, that, while all who reach the heights they aim at are disappointed,— that *for* which they aim at these being as unapproachable at the top of the hill as from the bottom, — others are continually aspiring, through all the stages of the wearisome ascent, towards the very prize which the successful have *not* gained, though to those beneath it appears to be actually in their possession: —

> " Once on a time, — 't was when the world was young,
> And the first race of men were inexperienced,
> For there were no such knaveries then as now, —
> A certain people, whom I need not name,
> Dwelt at the foot of an enormous hill,
> Whose summit from the valley seem'd to touch
> The sky itself.
>
> " These simple folks, observing
> How oft the inconstant moon, now with a horn,
> And now without, now waxing, and now waning,
> Held through the firmament her natural course,
> Supposed that on the top they might find out
> How she enlarged, then shrunk into herself.
> One with a bag, another with a basket,
> Began to scale the precipice amain,
> Each eager in the strife to outclimb the rest;
> But finding at the peak they were no nearer,
> All fell down weary on the earth, and wish'd
> Most heartily that they had stay'd below.
> Their neighbours from the bottom seeing them
> Aloof, believed that they had reach'd the moon,
> And hurried breathless up to share the spoil.
> — This mountain is the mighty wheel of Fortune,
> Upon whose rim the stupid vulgar think
> All is tranquillity, though ne'er a bit." *

With equal spleen and pleasantry, in the seventh Satire, the author, as an experienced hand, ridicules the favourite game of mankind, — climbing the wheel of Fortune, and never finding themselves complete fools till they are quite at the top. The allusion (scarcely intelligible in this country, where it is played in earnest only, and not for pastime) is to a game of cards, of which a pack is called *tarrochi* (trumps): these are painted expressly in the manner described below, namely,

* " Ch' ogni quiete sia, nè ve n' è alcuna."

the transmigration, by instalments, of climbing men into asses; and they are used for the purpose of playing at *minchiate* (blockhead),—a common recreation at Florence, and —wherever else the reader pleases: —

> "That pictured wheel, I own, annoys me sorely,
> Which every master paints in the same way,
> And such agreement cannot be a lie,
> — When that which sits aloft they make an ass.
> Now every one may understand this riddle,
> Without the sphinx to interpret; — for, mark well,
> Each, as he climbs, begins to *ass*ify
> From top to toe; head, shoulders, arms, thence downward;
> The limbs below remaining human still:" *

that is, till having reached the summit, the man has the felicity to find himself an accomplished ass. The poet, immediately afterwards, applies this unlucky hieroglyphic to himself and his journey to Rome, to congratulate Leo X. on his accession to the triple crown. His services, expectations, and disappointments, while a worshipper of that golden calf of literary idolatry (whose rites have not yet ceased), are humorously but vindictively recapitulated. Illustrative of these, he introduces another fable in his own free and easy manner. La Fontaine himself might have borrowed from Ariosto the idea of that simple yet facetious style which distinguishes his fables. To the disgrace of both, the Frenchman seems likewise to have borrowed from the Italian the model, as well as some of the materials, for his profligate tales. "My hope," says the forlorn satirist, "came with the first leaves and blossoms of spring, but withered without waiting for September. It came on the day when the church was given for a spouse to Leo, when I saw so many of my friends clad in scarlet at the nuptials. It came with the calends, and fled with the ides: remembering this, I can never again put confidence in man. My silly hope shot up to heaven, and spread over unknown lands, when the holy

* "Vi si vide anco che ciascun che ascende
Commincia a *inasinir* le prime membre,
E resta umano quel che a dietro paude."

father took me by the hand and kissed me on the cheeks; but high as it rose, so low it fell, and oh! in how short space of time!"

> "There was a gourd which grew so lustily,
> That in few days its foliage over-ran
> The loftiest branches of a neighbouring pear-tree.
> One morn, the latter, opening wide its eyes
> After a long sound nap, beheld new fruits
> Clustering luxuriantly around its head.
> 'Holla!' it cried; 'who *are* you? and how *came* you?
> Where *were* you when these wretched eyes of mine
> To slumber I resign'd?' The gourd replied
> Frankly; declared its name and kindred; show'd
> How it was planted at his honour's foot,
> And in three months had thriven to that height.
> 'And I,' the pear-tree answer'd, 'hardly climb'd
> To this pre-eminence, through heat and cold,
> And wars with all the winds, in thirty years!
> But you, who in the twinkling of an eye
> Have sprung to heaven, shall, with the self-same speed
> As you have risen, down dwindle to the root.'"

Notwithstanding the neglect which he experienced at Rome, Ariosto was now enjoying ease and dignity at the court of Alfonso, compared with the servitude, or rather the servility, which Hippolito formerly exacted of his retainers. During this prosperous period of his life, he was appointed by his patron to a post of honour and difficulty, if not of emolument, which required the exercise of certain politic talents rarely possessed by poets, but which he must have possessed in no inconsiderable measure, judging by the trusts so repeatedly reposed in him. Graffagnana, a mountainous district lying between Modena and Lucca, and which had been wrested some years before by the pope from the duke of Ferrara, threw off the yoke, and returned to its former lord, upon the demise of Leo X. This tract of debateable land was occupied by a people proverbially rude, factious, and turbulent among themselves, as well as refractory towards the ill-established authorities set over them from time to time by their temporary sovereigns. Hence the woodlands and glens on the Apennine slopes, where their country was situated, were infested with banditti; and the inhabitants were embroiled in perpetual lawsuits before tribunals where little justice was to be obtained, or else at open variance with their own bands,

determining right by might. To that dreary province, in such a hideous state of affairs, Ariosto was sent to redress grievances, restore quiet, and advance the semi-barbarians a step or two in civilisation. This task,—on the face of it more fitted to the talents of an Orpheus or Amphion, than those of a modern minstrel; unless, like the one, he was master of the lost art of teaching stones to build themselves into temples and palaces, or, like the other, could draw rocks and forests, with their population of lions and tigers, after him, by the enchantment of his lyre,—he seems to have accomplished with moderate success among a tribe already acquainted with his romantic poetry, and prepared to honour the author. Sir John Harrington says, that "he so orderly governed, and so well quieted," these riotous hordes by his wisdom and equity, that "he left them all in good peace and concord; winning not only the love of the better sort, but also a wonderful reverence of the wilder people, and a great awe even in robbers and thieves." The latter phrase alludes to a story which has been differently told, but may be received as substantially true, of a rencontre which he had with some of his more uncouth neighbours. One day traversing a forest, accompanied by five or six horsemen, the little party was startled by the appearance of a body of armed men breaking cover, and coming suddenly upon them; these belonged to one of the gangs of brigands, which, under two audacious leaders — Domenico Marotto and Philippo Pachione — divided the peace of the country between them, allowing none to each other, and depriving every one else of it. The expected assailants, however, after curiously eying the governor and his train, permitted them to pass; which his excellency was very willing to do, though, as chief magistrate, he had found a whole nest of outlaws. Having formerly signalised himself in the river fight with the Venetians, and there being no occasion to exercise any other than "the better part of valour—discretion"—in this affair, Ariosto

felt his honour as safe as his life, in riding on without offering molestation where he experienced none. But the captain of the band, being struck with his superior presence, demanded of the hindmost of his attendants what was his master's name. "Ludovico Ariosto," replied the other: whereupon, galloping up to him, the freebooter hailed the poet (who expected a very different salutation) with the most profound respect and courtesy, introducing himself as Philippo Pachione, and regretting that, from not having previously known his person, he and his troop had not done due honour to him in passing. He then launched out into vehement praises of the "Orlando Furioso" (a poem likely enough to be the delight of such adventurers), and with all humility and frankness offered his most devoted services to its author. Baretti's version of the anecdote is to the following effect: — Ariosto one morning happened to take a walk in his night-gown and slippers beyond the castle where he resided, fell into a fit of thought, and forgot himself so much, that step after step he found himself, when he recovered, already far from home, and surrounded on a sudden by a troop of desperadoes; who certainly would have ill used, and perhaps murdered him, had not his face been known by one of the gang, who, informing his comrades that it was signor Ariosto, the chief of the banditti addressed him with intrepid gallantry, and told him, that since his excellency was the author of "Orlando Furioso," he might be sure that none of his company would injure him, but would see him, on the contrary, safe to the castle. This they did, entertaining him all the way with the passages which they most admired in his poem." Ariosto himself seems to allude to some such circumstance in the Epistle to S. Maleguccio (Satire V.), written during his residence in Graffagnana.

> "Saggio chi dal castel poco si scosta."

> "He 's wise who strays but little from the castle."

Two of his epistolary Satires are dated from that

province; where he seems to have been as little at home as Ovid in Pontus. In that first quoted, to Sigismondo Maleguccio, at the end of the first year of his honourable exile, he says,—

> "This is the earliest note, in all the time,
> Which I have warbled to the nymphs that guard
> The tree, whose leaves I once so long'd to wear:
> Such is the strangeness of the place to me,
> That I am like a bird, whose cage is changed,
> And many a day refrains his wonted song:
> My cousin, wonder not that I am mute;
> The wonder's greater that I'm not dead with spleen —
> Shut as I am, a hundred miles and more,
> By Alps and snow, and streams and woods, from her
> Who holds alone the reins of my affection." *Satire V.*

Sancho Panza, in his island of Barataria, neither administered justice more wisely, nor was interrupted more provokingly in his personal indulgences, than Ariosto in his government of Graffagnana; and, unfortunately for his comfort, the stronghold of Castelnuovo was *not* stormed at midnight by some friendly enemy, nor himself ejected by violence, to his heart's content. The poet's miserable reign lasted three long years; while the squire of Don Quixote had the happiness to be relieved from the cares of state in less than as many days. How unfit for the management of a brute people he deemed himself, may be judged from the story with which he closes this epistle.

> "Methinks that I resemble the Venetian
> To whom the king of Portugal presented
> A noble steed of Mauritanian blood;
> Who, to do justice to the royal gift,
> Nor once considering, that to turn a helm,
> And draw a bridle, are two different things,
> Mounted aloft, and with both hands held fast
> As at a rudder; then in either flank
> Cast anchor with his spurs, and bravely mutter'd,
> 'I'll warrant ye don't fling me overboard.'
> The horse, thus handled, bolted off full speed;
> Whereat the gallant seaman pull'd the harder,
> And deeper struck the rowels sharp as spears,
> Till mouth and reins were tinged with blood and foam.
> The beast, not knowing which to obey — the points
> That urged him on, or curb that held him back—
> With a few desperate plunges rid himself
> Of his strange rider; who, with shatter'd ribs,
> Crack'd collar-bone, head broken, all begrimed
> With mud and dirt, and pale with fright, crawl'd off
> In no good humour with his majesty,

> And, far away, bewail'd his horsemanship.
> Well had it been for him, and well for me,
> If for his charger he, I for my province,
> Had said, — 'O king! O duke! I am not worthy
> Of such high honour; graciously bestow
> Your bounty on some other.'"

While he was here, M. Bonaventura Pistolfo, secretary to Alfonso, wrote to invite Ariosto to accept a third embassy to Rome; not on a perilous and temporary errand, but to reside there as the representative of his sovereign, "for a year or *two*," at the court of Clement VII. The poet, however, had sagacity enough to decline putting himself again in the way of Fortune, where, instead of taking him by the hand, on former occasions, she had only splashed him with the mud from her wheel as it rolled through the streets, encumbered with aspiring asses in every stage of transmigration.* His correspondent having intimated that, besides complying with the duke's pleasure at Rome, he might stand a chance of obtaining great and fat preferments by favour of a member of the house of Medici, with which he had been so long and courteously acquainted, then filling the papal chair; since it was more probable that he should catch, if he fished in a great river, than in an ordinary stream; he thus replies, in the seventh Satire: — "I thank you, that the desire is ever fresh with you to promote my interest, and to change me from a plough-ox into a Barbary steed. You might command me with fire and sword to serve the duke, not in Rome only, but in France, Spain, or India; but if you would fain persuade me that honour and riches may be got in the way you propose, you must find a different bait, to lure your bird into that net. As for honour, I have already as much as my heart could wish: it is enough for me that, at home, I can see more then half a dozen of my neighbours doff their caps when they meet me, because they know that I sometimes sit at table with the duke, and obtain a trifling favour which I seek for myself or a friend. Then, if I have honour enough to

* See the emblem already quoted from Satire VII.

satisfy me, I should have abundance of wealth also; and my desires, which sometimes wander, would be at rest, if I had just so much that I could live, and be at liberty, without having to ask any thing of any one: more than this I never hope to attain. But, since so many of my friends have had the power to do thus much for me, and I still remain in poverty and dependence, I will not let her*, who was so backward to fly out of the box of the imprudent Epimeteus, to lead me by the muzzle like a buffalo." Towards the close of this epistle, he intimates that it is some unconfessed affection which draws him so tenderly and irresistibly towards his native nest; and adds—"It is well for me that I can hide myself among these mountains, and that your eyes cannot run a hundred miles after me, to see whether my cheeks be pale or red at this acknowledgment. Certainly, if you saw my face at the moment I am writing, far away as I am, it would appear to you as deeply crimsoned as that of the father canon was, when he let fall, in the market-place, the wine-flask which he had stolen from a brother, besides the two that he had drunk. If I were at your elbow, perhaps you would snatch up a cudgel to bastinado me, for alleging such a crazy reason why I wish not to live at a distance from you."

The attachment insinuated in the enigmatical lines, of which the above is a prose version, is with equal ambiguity alluded to in the fourth Satire, addressed to Annibale Maleguccio, where, excusing himself from going abroad, on the ground that he preferred pursuing his studies at home, and confining his voyages and travels, though they extended all over the world, to the maps and charts of Ptolemy, he breaks off thus:—"Methinks you smile and say, 'Neither the love of country nor study, but of a lady, is the cause why you will not move.' I frankly confess it: now shut your mouth; for I will

* Hope, that remained at the bottom of Pandora's fatal gift to the brother of Prometheus.

neither take up sword nor shield to defend a fib." This jest has been taken in earnest, though no man in his senses would swear on the word of a poet so uttered. Be that as it may, it is generally understood that his life was sufficiently dissolute to warrant his correspondent's suspicion; and to require him, when so charged, to escape with a pleasantry, though it were accompanied by a blush.

After three years, being released from the cares of his government, Ariosto returned, with entire devotion of his time and talents, to the "sacred college of the Muses;" perfecting his "Orlando" by almost daily touches, the fruits of habitual meditation upon its multifarious subjects, to the last year of his life. He likewise revised several comedies written in his youth, turning them from prose into metre; and composing others. These were so much admired, that they were often acted in the court of Alfonso; persons of the highest rank representing the characters. His earliest and his latest works, therefore, were dramatic, but certainly not his best: that, indeed, could not be expected; theatrical performances being comparatively new in Italy, and, in general, exceedingly crude or exceedingly pedantic. It is said that Ariosto's plays are yet read with delight by his countrymen: the titles of them are, — the "Menechini," borrowed from Plautus; "La Cassaria," "I Suppositi," "La Lena," "Il Negromante," and "La Scholastica;" of which latter, his brother Gabriele furnished the concluding act, Ludovico having left it incomplete. A curious anecdote is told of him when a youth, which is characteristic at once of his phlegm and his acuteness in the practice of his art.—His father, being displeased by some juvenile inadvertence, very severely reprimanded him in the presence of the rest of the family. Ludovico bore the infliction with perfect composure, neither expressing contrition, nor attempting to justify himself. When Nicolo had retired, his brother Gabriele remonstrated with him, both on the imputed fault, and his apparent insensibility of shame

or rebuke. Thereupon the poet so promptly and effectually cleared his conduct, that his brother, in great astonishment, asked him why he had not given the same explanation of it to their father. "Because," said the young dramatist, "I was so busily thinking, all the while, how to make the best use of what my father said, in my new comedy, in which I have just such a scene of an old man scolding his boy, that in the ideal, I forgot the real incident."

His seven Satires were also composed during the latter years of his life; but, on account of their irreverence towards high personages both in church and state, they were not published till a convenient time after his death. They are in the form of epistles; and, in fact, were written as such, on real occasions, to the several friends addressed in them. These pieces allude so much to personal and family circumstances, that Ariosto's biographers are more indebted to them than to any other equally authentic source for their materials; and it has been for the like reason, principally, that such copious extracts have been made from the same valuable documents in the foregoing pages. In these remarkable effusions of spleen and pleasantry, there is nothing gaudy or superficial, to attract ordinary readers; nothing forced or unnatural, to produce ostentatious effect. The thoughts are thick-sown; the diction seems to be without effort (the result, no doubt, of consummate art), being pungent and simple, like the best style of conversation, except when the subject, at rare intervals, becomes poetical — when at once the swan of Castaly launches upon the stream, swells into beauty, and rows in gallant state till the water runs shallow again. There is none of the stern indignation of Juvenal, nor the harshness and obscurity of Persius, in these productions; yet, lively, sarcastic, and urbane as they are, there is almost as little resemblance in them to those fine but high-toned compositions of Horace, which were, unquestionably, our author's models — though less for imitation than for rivalry. Like every other species of

literature which Ariosto tried, how much soever he may have adorned all, these bosom-communications to his intimate friends are not exempt from occasional obscenities, so repulsive and abominable, that they cannot be commended and dismissed without this mark of infamy, which no merits can efface.

Whether Ariosto, who, according to all accounts, and the lewdness of his writings, led no very chaste life, were married or not; and, if married, to whom; are questions which have puzzled his biographers, and are now of little moment to be settled: no proof of marriage would redeem his character, or purify his most beautiful poems from the moral defilement that cleaves to them. His Muse had the plague, and all her offspring are diseased. An author is not answerable to posterity for the evil of his *mortal* life, but for the profligacy of *that* life which he lives through after ages, contaminating by irrepressible and incurable infection the minds of millions — it may be, till the day of judgment, — he is amenable even in his grave. It is not necessary to enter further into judgment with the offender before us in this place.

Married, or not married, Ariosto had two sons, whom he not only openly avowed as such, but faithfully and affectionately educated them, according to his knowledge and views of what is good and honourable in society, for scholars and gentlemen, as he intended them to be. His epistle to cardinal Bembo (the sixth Satire) is highly creditable to his parental solicitude for the welfare of his children in this respect: indeed, he seems to have been exemplary in every relationship of life, except that which requires personal purity, — a virtue little regarded either by laymen or ecclesiastics in his day; and, judging by the deeper taint of their writings, as well as the evidence of their lives, often held in less esteem by the latter than the former.

Towards the close of the year 1532, Ariosto was seized with illness, brought on, it was said, by agitation, when the sumptuous theatre erected by the duke of

Ferrara, for the exhibition of his comedies, was consumed by fire; or, as his physicians, with more probability, conjectured, by indigestion, from the habit of eating fast, and bolting his food almost unmasticated. Whatever might have been the cause, the disorder terminated in his death about the midsummer following.

In the same year that he was thus mortally stricken, he had put his last hand to the "Orlando Furioso," and left the poem in that form in which it appears, in forty-six cantos; the five additional ones, which have always been deemed unworthy of such a connection, having been published for the first time in 1545, twelve years afterwards. Among what may be deemed the apocryphal traditions concerning Ariosto, it has been affirmed and contradicted, with very questionable evidence on either side, that he received the laurel from the hands of the emperor Charles V., in the city of Mantua, twelve months before his death. The very circumstance of a reasonable doubt being raised respecting a fact, which, if it had occurred, must have been known throughout all Italy, Germany, France, and Spain, seems almost sufficient to invalidate the story. One of his biographers (Minchino) says, that when Ariosto felt the crown upon his brows, placed there by so august a personage, he went beside himself for joy; and ran about the streets as much out of his wits, for the time, as his own hero. It may be remarked, that nothing could have been more out of character than such extravagance in a person of Ariosto's temperament, who (whatever licence he granted to his Muse in his writings, or to his passions in secret), in public, always maintained a dignity and manliness of demeanour, which commanded respect, and showed that he never forgot his honourable birth, or waved the consciousness of intellectual superiority; though he was careful that neither of these advantages should encroach upon the jealous or vindictive sensibility of others.

Ariosto in person was tall and strong-boned, but stooping a little, and slow in his gait as well as in all

his motions. His countenance, judging from Titian's portrait,—the lofty forehead a little bald, the black curled locks behind, and corresponding beard upon a jutting chin, the elevated brows above the dark bright eyes, the Roman nose, lips eloquently moulded, teeth "passing even and white," thin cheeks, complexion slightly olive, long visage, well-proportioned neck, and shoulders square,—his countenance, with features such as these, might altogether have been deemed the *beau idéal* which the first painter had conceived of the first poet of the age, had not contemporary testimonies assured us that the whole was not more happily than correctly copied from the living model.

There is little of tenderness, and less of stern sublimity, in any of his poems; and yet it is uniformly affirmed that his aspect and manner were grave, melancholic, and contemplative,—from habit, probably, more than from nature; for in company he was affable, and his conversation perculiarly captivating to women, whom, no doubt, he laid himself out to please, and with whom he was no small favourite. So far, also, as they could appreciate his merit, and endure that aristocracy of mind which pressed hard upon the heels of hereditary rank, or mushroom vanity raised from stercorarious heaps in ecclesiastical hotbeds, his society was courted by the greatest personages in church and state, including popes, cardinals, and sovereign princes. Unassuming, but not indifferent to slights or wrongs from the highest with whom he was associated, he led, on the whole, a feverish life between resolute poverty and precarious dependence, with the continual temptation to rise to wealth by means which he abhorred, and for which he must have abhorred himself had he stooped to employ them.

Of persons of the other sex, who, from time to time, caught his wandering affections, the names of two (whether real or disguised) have been preserved—Alexandra and Guenevra. It is understood that the former (to whom he may have been privately married) was

the mother of his two sons,—Giambattista, who devoted himself to a military life, and Virginio, who obtained distinction in literature. For the other lady, his passion might be no more than a poetical one—she being married, and a mother, in an honourable family of Florence akin to his own. Finding her one day adorning a silk coat for one of her children, so as to resemble armour by the devices—the ground silver, and the embroidery purple—against a festival spectacle, at which the lad was to figure in it on Midsummer Eve, he was so inspired by the hand and the needle, that he celebrated their performance in the twenty-fourth book of the "Orlando Furioso;" where, describing a wound, "not deep but long," received in combat with Mandricardo by Zerbino, from which the blood trickled over his splendid panoply, the poet introduces the following admired but frigid simile:—

> "Le lucide arme il caldo sangue irriga
> Per sino al piè de rubiconda riga.
> "Cosi talora un bel purpureo nastro
> Ho veduto partir tela d' argento,
> Da quella bianca man più ch' alabastro,
> Da cui partire il cor spesso mi sento."

> "The warm blood, with a crimson rivulet,
> Down to the foot his shining armour wet.
> "So have I seen a beauteous purple zone
> Divide a web of silver, by the art
> Of that white hand, outvying Parian stone,
> Which oft I feel dividing thus my heart."

This is much more in the strain of fanciful passionless ideality (like Petrarch's mistress, and his praises of her), than warm, ingenuous, honest love, "whose dwelling is the heart of man," and whose language is that of nature, which all may understand who ever knew affection. In the same vein of ingenious artificial compliment and conceit (often, indeed, elegant and captivating to the mind at ease, and amusing itself with "love in idleness") are the Elegies, Sonnets, and Madrigals of Ariosto;—all calculated more to set off the beauties of his Muse than of his mistress; and rather to command admiration of himself, than to do honour to her, whom, though a divinity in song, and adored with magnificent

rites, he worships with nearly as little devotion as an idol deserves. Of the following sonnet (the nineteenth in the series), Paolo Rolli says, "*non è stata mai scritta poesia più sublime,*"—" poetry more sublime was never written." It would be hard to persuade any Englishman of this.

" Chiuso era il Sol da un tenebroso velo,
Che si stendea fino all' estreme sponde
Dell' orizonte, e mormorar le fronde
S'udiano, e tuoni andar scorrendo il cielo.
Di pioggia, in dubbio, o tempestoso gelo,
Stav' io per gire oltre le torbid' onde
Del fiume altier che il gran sepolcro asconde,
Del figlio audace del Signor di Delo: —
" Quando apparir sull' altra ripa il lume
De bei vostr' occhij vidi, e udij parole
Che Leandro potean farmi quel giorno.
E tutto a un tempo i nuvoli d' intorno
Si dileguaro, e si scoperse il Sole,
Tacquero i venti, e tranquillossi 'l fiume."

" The sun was shrouded with a gloomy veil
That reach'd the dim horizon's utmost bound,
The forest leaves were heard to murmur round,
And distant thunder peal'd along the gale.
In doubt I stood, of rain or pelting hail,
By the proud river, rapid and profound,
Wherein Apollo's daring son was drown'd*,
Afraid to dip the oar or hoist the sail:
" When, from the farther bank, the light I saw
Of your fair eyes, and heard a voice, of power
To make Leander of me in that hour.
At once the clouds their dark array withdraw,
The sun brake forth, the rainbow climb'd the hill,
The winds were silent, and the waters still."

The foregoing version has been rendered as little paraphrastic as might be (though the eighth line is interpolated); but all rhymed translations from the Italian, in the same number of lines as the original, must be encumbered either with additional thought or verbiage — our language being altogether more brief in syllabic composition.

The society of Ariosto was courted by the learned and the polite; not for his wit and intelligence only, but for the privilege of hearing his latest compositions, as they came warm from his mind, or were gradually wrought to perfection by that patient labour for which he was

* The Po, into which Phaëton was struck from the chariot of the Sun.

distinguished, and to which he is indebted for as much of his glory as to the creative energy of his genius itself. For when he had originated, by force of invention, his most admired performances, he never ceased to improve them afterwards by touches innumerable, exquisite, and undiscerned by ordinary eyes, till the art which effected the changes at length disappeared in its own consummation, and those seemed to be the first thoughts in the first words, which were really the last transmigrations of the former through the latter. No poet of any age has more inseparably identified his conceptions with his language than Ariosto; in fact, his ideas themselves are so vernacular, that they can scarcely be made to speak any other than their native tongue; they defy translation. Nothing, indeed, can be easier than to render the literal meaning in dictionary terms; yet nothing less resembling the original in all that constitutes its prime excellence — grace, freedom, and simplicity— can be imagined than these. Of the "Orlando Furioso" there are three English versions: that by sir John Harrington, in the reign of queen Elizabeth, is coarse, careless, and unfaithful; that of Hoole, about fifty years ago, tame, diffuse, and prosaic; the recent one by W. S. Rose, esq., elegant, spirited, and probably as true to the text as any readable paraphrase can be under the difficulties aforementioned.

While this magnificently wild and sportive work was in progress, and after its first publication, during the refining process through which it was continually passing till the last year of his own life, the poet was accustomed to read, at the courts of Hippolito and Alfonso, and in other favoured circles, the cantos as they were produced, revised, or had received their final polish. This accounts partly for the manner in which the hundredfold story is told, — not as recorded in a book, but as delivered spontaneously before princes and prelates, scholars and gentry, assembled to listen to the marvellous adventures of knights and ladies, giants and enchanters, from the lips of the gifted nar-

rator. Ariosto excelled in the practice of reading aloud, whether the subjects were his own, or those of his illustrious predecessors or contemporaries; to which his melodious voice, distinct utterance, and versatile spirit gave peculiar emphasis and animation. This accomplishment was of great value after the revival of letters, when books were scarce, and authors depended, for pecuniary recompence, more upon the gratuities of patrons, than upon honourable profits from extensive sales of their writings. But though he was thus master of the rarest art of speech, — good reading, especially of verse, being seldomer attained (perhaps because it is less duly appreciated) than eloquent declamation, — he was never forward either to begin, by obtruding it upon his friends for his own gratification, nor slow to leave off when he had wearied himself for others. As his ear was nice, and his taste pure in this respect, he was proportionately offended by indifferent, vulgar, or boisterous recitation. The story is told of him, that one day, passing a potter's shop, he heard the unlettered artisan singing, in harsh and ill-accented numbers, a stave of the "Orlando." According to sir John Harrington, it was the thirty-second in the first canto*, — and this will do as well as any other in a questionable tale, — in which Rinaldo tries to catch his horse, with as little success as many a groom and gentleman has done before and since. The poet, as little able to keep his temper as his hero on the

* "Non molto va Rinaldo, che si vede
Saltar innanzi il suo destrier feroce :
'Ferma, Bajardo mio, deh! ferme il piede;
Che l'esser senza te troppo mi noce.'
Per questo il destrier sordo a lui non riede,
Anzi più se ne va sempre veloce;
Segue Rinaldo, e d'ira si distrugge:
— Ma sequitiamo Angelica, che fugge."

"Not far hath gone Rinaldo, ere he spies
His fiery steed before him, bounding free:
'Stay, my Bayardo! prythee stay,' he cries;
'For much am I annoy'd for lack of thee.'
Yet the deaf horse returns not, nor replies,
Save with his heels that swift and swifter flee.
Rinaldo follows, fuming in the race,
— But we must give the flying lady chase."

occasion, rushed among the crockery, smashing now one piece, then another, on the right hand and on the left, with his walking-stick. The potter, half paralised and half frantic, hastily, yet hesitatingly, enquired why the gentleman should thus injure a poor fellow who had done him no harm? "No harm, man?" replied the enraged author, "I am scarcely even with thee yet: I have cracked three or four wretched jugs of thine, not worth a groat, and thou hast been mangling and murdering a stanza of mine worth a mark of gold!" Unluckily for the credit of this sally of professional petulance, the same anecdote has been told of Camoens, the Portuguese, who lived half a century later; and something like it of Philoxenus, who lived nearly 2000 years earlier. Yet the tradition concerning Ariosto may be true; who, remembering the classic precedent, might choose to follow it in a case where no redress could be looked for, except from taking the law into his own hands. At the worst, such an outrage must have been a piece of caustic pleasantry; and it may be taken for granted, that the sufferer was well compensated for having afforded the poet no very disagreeable opportunity of indulging his humour; since, however the learned may pretend to despise the opinions of the multitude, there is scarcely any proof of fame more flattering to the proudest aspirant, than a cross-wind of popular applause. Cervantes, who well understood the secrets of a poet's breast, goes farther, and, with consummate propriety, makes the student, whose verses had been commended to the skies by Don Quixote, say within himself, — "How sweet is praise, even from the lips of a madman!"

Of Ariosto's personal habits, some whimsical peculiarities have been mentioned, not worth repeating, except to gratify the very natural curiosity — call it impertinent who will — which most readers feel to learn all that they can about a favourite author. He himself confesses that he could scarcely distinguish the different

kinds of food; and it has been already seen that he was in the practice of eating voraciously.—A friend, who had invited him to an entertainment for the diversion of the company, ordered a roasted *kite* to be palmed upon him for a *partridge*. By the blunder of a servant, the carrion was set before a nicer guest, who smelled the joke, if he did not relish it, and the poet escaped the savoury snare.—A stranger, calling upon him once when he had just sat down to dinner, Ariosto eagerly ate up all the "short commons" which had been provided, while the other was entertaining him with most excellent discourse. Being afterwards reproved by his brother for lack of hospitality, he coolly replied,—"The loss was the gentleman's own; he should have taken care of himself." His rudeness and hurry at table were attributed principally to fits of rumination or absence of mind; and if he sometimes over-satisfied his appetite, he did not usually indulge it with more than one meal a day.

Quite in consonance with the poet's reveries were his raptures of execution. After wandering in a day-dream of thought, he would suddenly sit down and disburthen his overcharged brain with effusions of song, that seemed as spontaneous as spring showers that fall in gusts through broad sunshine, though they have been long collecting in the zenith; or, he would start from "a brown study" at midnight, and call upon his servant Gianni to bring pen, ink, and paper immediately, that he might fix, before they vanished for ever, the imaginations which had charmed him in his trance. The "Orlando" thus appeared to come to him, canto by canto, as the Koran to Mahomet; and no doubt the one was as truly inspired as the other. His early reading had so filled and fertilised his mind, that he subsisted in thought almost exclusively on the inexhaustible harvests perpetually produced from the remembrances of that; and in his latter years was so indolent, or so indifferent a searcher of the writings of others, that he frequently passed weeks without turning over the pages of any

except his own, — in which, like the spider, he seemed to have a personal existence; so diffusing himself through them, that it might be said of him, that, not with a touch only, "exquisitely fine," he could "feel the whole thread," but also "live along the line."

In his last hours, he is represented as maintaining his philosophical tranquillity, — neither affecting stoical sternness, nor the hideous jocularity of some, who, to hide their misgivings, die "as a fool dieth." He professed to leave the world without much regret — having never, indeed, been very well satisfied with his portion in it; and, believing that in a future state men would know each other, he observed, that he should be happy to meet many whom he loved, and who had gone before him. How content to die in the dark are men of the highest faculties, and otherwise of the most inquisitive minds, who have never known, or who have rejected, the truth of that Gospel by which life and immortality were brought to light!

As might be expected on the demise of one so celebrated for genius, sonnets, elegies, and epitaphs in abundance were composed and published to his honour. His body was buried in the church of the Benedictines at Ferrara, when the monks of that order, contrary to their usual reserve, accompanied the funeral procession: a plain slab of marble being laid over the grave, was presently over-run with Greek, Latin, and Italian verses, as the natural products of so poetical a spot. His son Virginio afterwards prepared a chapel and sepulchre for his parent, in the garden of the house which he had himself built, and where he had spent many of his last and happiest days. But the good fathers had such reverence for the relics of a poet, who certainly was any thing rather than a saint, and whom no pope would canonise, that they would not allow their removal. In process of time, Agostino Mosti, a man of letters, who in early life was a disciple of the deceased, seeing no memorial worthy of his master's fame erected, at his own

expense caused a tablet (worthy at least of himself) to be placed in the aforesaid church of the Benedictines, with a bust upon the tomb beneath, and a Latin inscription by Lorenzo Fiesoli. A monument more superb was erected, nearly a century later, by Ludovico his grand-nephew, bearing also a Latin inscription. Neither of these, nor even that which the poet composed in the same language for himself, need be inserted here; the two former being in the common-place style of posthumous panegyric, and the latter quaint and puerile, though of sufficient significance to have been imitated by Pope, with reckless profaneness, in the ribald lines which he wrote for himself.

"Under this stone, or under this sill," &c.

The house which he built (as formerly mentioned), with its humble inscription, is yet shown as a monument more interesting to the eye of the enthusiastic admirer of the poet, than any marble effigies, however gorgeously or exquisitely wrought, could be: it brings the spectator into personal contact with himself, by local and domestic association. But in this respect, the chair in which he was wont to meditate; and the inkstand from which he filled his pen to disburthen his thoughts, when they flowed, as they did at times, like the juice of full ripe grapes from their own pressure,—if these relics are genuine,—must be incomparably the most touching and inspiring memorials of his life and his labours.

Of Ariosto's grand performance, it would be vain to sketch the outline, or enter into formal criticism here: sufficient indications of the present biographer's estimate of the author's powers and style of composition have been already given. It would be idle and hopeless to censure or carp at particulars, where little can be commended beyond the talent with which a web of wonders and horrors (the easiest and cheapest products of invention) has been so skilfully woven into poetical tapestry, as not only to invest the most preposterous fictions with the vividness of reality, but to charm or conciliate

readers of all classes, from those of the severest taste to those most akin to mere animal appetite; disarming the indignation of the former by exquisite playfulness, and transporting the latter by that marvellous intrepidity of fibbing to which many a minstrel and romancer was formerly indebted for his popularity. The fact is, that though, with inimitable gravity, Ariosto tells story after story (or rather story *within* story), deserving no better appellation than that which his patron Hippolito bestowed upon his fictions when he asked, "*Messer Ludovico, dove avete cogliate tante coglionere?*" "Where, master Ludovico, have you picked up so many fooleries?" yet Cervantes himself had not a keener sense of ridicule, nor in his happiest sallies was he more expert in humour or irony, than this "prince of liars," as the curate in "Don Quixote" designates a certain traveller. He describes, indeed, every scene, event, and character throughout his world of nonentities, as they might have been described, had they been actual and not imaginary: yet it is frequently manifest, that, while he appears to be writing romance, he is composing satire; and though he delights in prodigies for their own sake, yet, wherever they exceed the *probable of the marvellous*, he is not only alive to their absurdity, but rejoices to expose it, and turn extravagance itself into pleasantry.

In canto xxvi., Rinaldo, Richiardetto, and Ruggiero, assisted by Marphisa (whom, in her martial accoutrements, they do not perceive to be a woman of war), massacre, without let or hindrance, two bodies of Moors and Maganzes, whom they surprise at market together. This, in plain prose, is the style in which the butchery is described:—"Marphisa, as she fought by their side, often turned her eyes towards her companions in arms; and witnessing with wonder their rival achievements, she extolled them all in turn: but the stupendous prowess of Ruggiero, especially, appeared to her without example in the world; so that she was ready to imagine him Mars, who had descended from the fifth heaven to

that quarter. She beheld his terrible strokes; she beheld them falling never in vain: it seemed as though, against Balisarda (his sword), iron was paper, and not hard metal; for it split helmets and strong cuirasses; it cleft riders down to their saddles, throwing one half of the man on the right hand, the other on the left; and not stopping there, the same blow slew the horse with his lord. Heads from their shoulders it hurled into the air, and often cut sheer the trunk from the loins; five, and even more, with one motion it sometimes despatched; and if I did not fear that truth would not find credit, but be taken for a lie, I could tell greater things: it is, therefore, expedient rather to tell less than I might. The good archbishop Turpin, who knows very well that he speaks the truth, and leaves every one to believe it or not as he pleases, relates such marvellous feats of Ruggiero, that, hearing them repeated, you would say they were falsehoods. Before Marphisa, every warrior seemed to be ice, and she consuming flame: nor did she less attract the eyes of Ruggiero towards herself, than he had won hers to him; and if she deemed him to be Mars, he might have thought her to be Bellona, had he as well known her to be a lady as her appearance indicated the contrary. Perhaps the emulation then begotten between them, was no good thing for those miserable people, on whose flesh, blood, bones, and sinews, proof was made how much each could do."

Now, what sympathy can be felt in such unequal conflicts? No more, verily, than with the fate and fortunes of the elephants and castles, the kings, queens, bishops, knights, and commonalty on a chess-board, in a game between an adept and a novice, which is up in a few moments, neither exalting the winner nor disparaging the loser, nor affecting life, limb, character, or feeling in regard to one of the puppets employed in the play. Of the same class are all the combats between invulnerable heroes, and those who wield weapons of enchantment: the irresistible spear of Bradamante, that unhorsed every antagonist whom it touched; the magic

horn of Astolpho, that routed armies with a blast; Ruggiero's veiled shield, the dazzling splendour of which, when suddenly disclosed, struck with blindness and astonishment all eyes that beheld it. Of the latter, the author himself grows weary or ashamed, and makes his hero so too; though, with remarkable dexterity, he turns into a glorious act of heroic virtue, the voluntary riddance of it by the indignant Ruggiero, who throws it into a hidden well, in a nameless forest in an undiscovered land, after having won too cheap a victory by its accidental exposure. In these two instances (and many others might be quoted), Ariosto laughs at his own extravagances, with as much pleasantry as Cervantes himself at those of others: and it may, perhaps, be affirmed that he does it with more tact and good sense, for it must be acknowledged that few outrages upon nature in the tales of chivalry, which the Spaniard justly ridicules, are felt by the reader to be more improbable than the crazy imitations of them by the knight of La Mancha, whose pranks could only be attempted by one absolutely insane, and therefore were as little a fair mark for satire as for censure. Ariosto has this advantage over Cervantes, — that whatever is great, glorious, or admirable in romance, he can seriously set forth in all the pomp and eloquence of verse of the highest species; while whatever is mean, farcical, or monstrous, he can exhibit in strains of facetiousness, at once as grave and as poignant as those in which the celebrated assault on the windmills, the rout of the sheep, or the gross sensuality of Sancho Panza, are given, without descending into caricature; though no small portion of his whole poem belongs to the grotesque, and happily the plan admits of every variety of style from Homer to Lucian.

Neither the dulness nor the licence of allegory can be pleaded in extenuation of those unnatural circumstances, in which absurdity is at once exemplified and ridiculed, as though the caprice of genius delighted as

much in the offence against taste as in the castigation of it. Allegorical, indeed, some of his fancies notoriously are; but those who have attempted to "moralise" the "fierce wars and faithful loves" of his song, as many have done (and few more egregiously than sir John Harrington, in the quaint essay annexed to his barbarous translation), might have employed their time as profitably in raking moonshine out of water, which flies off into millions of sparkles the moment it is disturbed, but is no sooner let alone than it subsides into the quiet and beautiful image of the orb above, which it showed before. It cannot be said of Ariosto, as Addison, in a miserable couplet, says of Spenser —

> "His long-spun allegories tiresome grow,
> While the dull moral lies too plain below."

The moral may be there, but it would require a diviner's rod to detect its presence, and the skill of him who set himself to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, to draw it thence.

The "Orlando Furioso" of Ariosto is a continuation of the "Orlando Innamorato" of Boiardo, lord of Scandiana, his contemporary, but elder, the latter having died in the year 1494. The relative circumstances of the two poems form one of the most curious chapters in the history of literature. Boiardo's work, in the original, is comparatively little known, and less read, even in Italy; but it has been made famous throughout the world, by having given birth to its more illustrious successor. Whatever were the defects of the one author, or the excellences of the other, Ariosto was undoubtedly indebted to his forerunner, not only for many of the most powerful and captivating fictions of his poem, but for its intelligibility and popularity from the beginning. The latter was an immense advantage: half of the success in a race depends upon a good start; the eagle himself cannot rise from flat ground as from the rock, whence he launches at once into mid-air. By the "Morgante Maggiore" of Pulci, the legends and songs of

the Provençals, and the pretended chronicle of archbishop Turpin, the public mind had been familiarised with the traditions concerning Arthur and his knights of the round table; of Merlin the British enchanter, and the Lady of the Lake; and of Charlemagne and his peers. Yet it was the intense interest and curiosity excited by Boiardo's magnificent but uncompleted plot, which (so far as the principal personages are concerned), like

> "The story of a bear and fiddle,
> Begins, but breaks off in the middle" —

it was these which had prepared the eager and delighted multitude of readers, or rather listeners, for any sequel to his "tales of wonder," which should keep up the spirit of the original, and bring it to a crowning conclusion. These, therefore, with transport proportioned to their surprise, hailed the appearance of Ariosto's production, when, after having been long promised, they found that it not only exceeded their expectations, but eclipsed in splendour, beauty, and variety, the prototype itself. This was so remarkably the case, that one of the wittiest and most ingenious of his contemporaries recomposed the whole of Boiardo's poem; imitating, with farcical extravagance, the fine raillery and unapproachable humour of Ariosto; and falling in the same ratio beneath him in elegance, majesty, and grace, when the themes admitted or required adornment. Thus, by an unexampled fatality, the "Orlando Innamorato" was outshone by a sequel, and superseded by a *rifacimento* (we have no English word to express the renovating process). Authors themselves have almost universally failed in *second parts* to their most successful performances; and as rarely have they re-written such works, so as to take place of the first form in which they obtained public favour*; yet here, on

* Witness the total miscarriage of Tasso, in his "Gerusalemme Conquistata," as an improvement upon the "Gerusalemme Liberata;" and of Akenside, in his philosophic revision of the "Pleasures of Imagination."

the one hand, is a second part, by an imitator, that leaves the original in obscurity, yet covers it with glory — like Butler's description of the moon's veil —

> " Mysterious veil! of brightness made,
> At once her lustre and her shade ; "

while, on the other hand, we have the example of a new gloss of that original, by a meddler becoming the substitute for it, like the new skin of a serpent when the old slough is cast aside.

The mischances of Boiardo's poem ended not here. It was not published during the author's life, except by oral communication among his friends ; what he had composed, had not received the corrections due to its worth and his own talents ; and the work itself being left imperfect at the ninth canto, one Nicolo degli Agostini took up the strain there, and added so much matter as brought the various subjects involved in it to a consistent termination. A fourth experiment was made upon this polypus production, which multiplied its vitality the more, the more it was mangled. Ludovico Dominici recomposed the whole, and printed the metamorphosis at Venice in 1545 : of this, several editions appeared ; but it neither supplanted Berni's, nor even rivalled the original in popularity. Thus the love and madness of Orlando was conceived, and partly executed, by one mind ; continued to a certain point by another ; new-modelled and incorporated with his own inventions by a third ; re-written by a fourth ; but, above all, imitated, completed, and excelled by a fifth.

The felicity of fortune which distinguished Ariosto's poem, was not less rare than the eccentric transmigrations to which Boiardo's was condemned. The " Orlando Furioso" was both an imitation and a sequel of the " Orlando Innamorato ;" yet, contrary to all precedent, and without example in subsequent literature, the imitation surpassed the original, and the sequel the first draught. It was the offspring of one mind ; it was produced entire by the inventor, and never altered

by any hand but his own. Yet, after its first completion, it underwent a process of revisal nearly as long and laborious as that of composition ; like a bird, it arrived not at the perfection of its song, or the full glory of its plumage, in the breeding season, nor till after its first moulting. It is strange, that, with all these advantages, there should still remain several glaring inconsistencies, which one hour's pains would have removed, had the author been aware of what any ordinary reader might detect.

The poem consists of the contemporaneous adventures of many knights, ladies, and other personages, travelling in all lands, known and unknown, of the old continent, the moon, hell, and purgatory ; those of each individual, in fact, forming a distinct story, begun, dropped, renewed, or concluded according to the pleasure of the narrator, who excites and keeps up, by every species of provoking artifice, the tortured yet unwearying curiosity of his hearers. And these materials, anomalous as they may seem, and as they are, he moulds and mixes with inimitable skill, and bodies them forth, as by magic, into such captivating forms, by varying, interweaving, disentangling, and cutting short the numberless threads of his many-coloured web, that he fails not to produce a present effect in every passage, with little recollection on the reader's part of its agreement with the past, as little regard to its connection with any thing but itself, and no care whatever about its future influence on the issue of the whole. The fable is a hydra, of which the Orlando, whose name it bears, is only one of the heads ; and no otherwise entitled to pre-eminence, than as the hero of some of the most stupendous, amusing, and puerile events in a series not less heterogeneous or tragi-comic than the changes and chances of a holiday pantomime. It cannot be denied that the poem has a beginning and an end, with a prodigious quantity of action between, as the succession of pages, and the number of cantos, evince ; but to prove that it has a necessary beginning, a decided progress, and a satisfactory end,

would be a task which the author himself would have laughed to see a critic employed upon.

A hundred rivers springing from one well-head upon a mountain-top above the clouds; descending, as the slope broadens, in as many directions; and varying towards the lowlands with such sinuosities, that whoever traces one stream, will find it suddenly disappearing under ground; another emerging at that very point, traversing the surface in a contrary direction for a while, then dipping in like manner; while a third, a fourth, a fifth, and onward to the hundredth, in succession, do the same; each, in the track of the untiring explorer, showing itself and vanishing again and again, till utterly lost;—such are the vagaries of this romance of imagination, yet conducted in such organised confusion, that the mind is bewildered but for a moment, when a fresh "change comes o'er the spirit of the (poet's) dream," and the reader is absorbed, borne away, and contented to float along the tide of the tale, unfinished before, then newly taken up, and never flagging in interest, nor eventually impaired by all its abrupt discontinuances.

Incoherent, however, as the whole tissue of this and every other romance of chivalry must be, there is a moral interest in such fables, that lies deeper than any affected allegory, or the innocent gratification which marvellous stories will ever supply to human minds, loving and grasping at whatever is beyond their reach; an appetite for the great, the glorious, and the unknown, which intimates their spiritual nature, and their immortal destiny, by desires towards things out of the body, independent of the material universe, and contrary to the results of ordinary experience. These fictions, notwithstanding their unnatural and impossible details, picture real manners, characters, and events, such as were peculiar to the transition-age of modern society, in the most civilised regions of the Old World, when the blood of Goths and Vandals from the north, Greeks and Romans from the south of Europe, Moors

from the west of Africa, and Arabs from the east of Asia, mingled in confluent streams round the shores of the Mediterranean; when, often engaging in war, commerce, or political alliances, they gradually associated their races, and originated new nations according to their respective localities. Hence the superstitions, customs, languages, and habits of life among the most heterogeneous tribes, bordering on the fallen empire of the Cæsars (their common prey), were engrafted upon those of the refined and intellectual people whom luxury had effeminated and prepared for subjugation by more enterprising and energetic, though at best but semi-barbarian, conquerors. Hence we frequently find, in chivalrous records, the most gross and incongruous stories of Oriental, African, or Scandinavian growth, allied to archetypes in classical mythology, or derived from ancient history; and only modified, enriched, distorted, or aggravated in grandeur, complexity, or terrible beauty, by those who adopted them, — the rhymers and romancers, even in the rudest periods, blending all together, or borrowing from each, according to their fancy. There is scarcely an image, a monster, or an incident in all their raving chronicles — wild as the dreams of lunatics, or beautiful as those of infants are supposed to be — which cannot be traced to Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, or Statius; so narrow is the range of human invention; and so inextricably connected with what we have heard, and read, and seen, are all the imaginations or the thoughts of the heart of the most original genius.

But the champions and the damsels, the giants and enchanters, nay, the dragons, the hippogriffs, and the demons themselves, in these legends, are but poetical representations of real classes and characters in society, such as existed, or were formed by the circumstances of the times, when war was the business, and gallantry the pastime of life, among the hybrid populations both of Christian and Mohammedan countries. The actors in the dramas of romance were, indeed, masked and buskined

to raise them to heroic stature ; yet the most disguised of these personages, in principle, passion, taste, and pursuit, were real men and women, magnified into monsters, like flies and spiders when looked upon through the eye-glass of a microscope. Orlando was but an exaggeration of the chevalier Bayard, as was the British Arthur of the English Richard, and Charlemagne himself of Francis I.

Ariosto, in following the fashion of contemporaries, lighted upon a theme to which his wayward and versatile genius was peculiarly adapted, and which gave it an opportunity of displaying all its peculiarities to the utmost advantage. Of these, the most enviable and least imitable is that perfection of art, which he perhaps possessed beyond every other writer, to say things naturally. All his wonders and prodigies are made so easy and probable, that to the most fastidious reader, who does not resolutely resist the spell of the poet, and deprive himself of the pleasure of being beguiled by it, they appear as they would do if they were actual events, from the daylight effect of his truth-telling style ; for whenever his delight in the extravagant carries him beyond the legitimately marvellous, he disarms resentment, and prevents the laugh against himself by a quiet pleasantry,—becoming himself the Cervantes of his own Quixotes. Satirists, however, have done little to improve mankind: they have condemned and promoted vice ; they have ridiculed and recommended folly. Instead of being the most chaste, severe, and instructive, it is notorious that (with few exceptions) they have been the most profligate, pernicious, and corrupting of all writers. Many of the most illustrious deserve to be crowned and decapitated, and their laurelled heads fixed on poles round the heights of Parnassus, as warnings to others, while they affect to expose sin, not to betray virtue ; and while they declaim against lewdness, not to become panders to debauch the young, the innocent, and the unsuspecting. To go no farther than the example before us. If ever

man deserved poetical honours, Ariosto did; and if ever poet deserved the curse of posterity for the prostitution of high talents, Ariosto does. Without presuming to judge him, even for his worst offences, beyond the present world, it had been better for many of his readers, — why should we not say, at once, for all of them? — that he had never been born. Whatever be her beauty, his Muse has a cancerous sore upon her face, which cannot be looked upon without loathing by any eye, not wilfully blind, where it ought to be eagle-sighted.

MACHIAVELLI.

1469—1522.

There is no more delightful literary task than the justifying a hero or writer, who has been misrepresented and reviled; but such is human nature, or such is the small progress that we have made in the knowledge of it, that in most instances we excuse, rather than exculpate, and display doubts instead of bringing forward certainties. Machiavelli has been the object of much argument, founded on the motives that impelled him to write his celebrated treatise of the "Prince," which he declares to be a manual for sovereigns, and Rousseau has named the manual of republicans. The question of whether he sat down in cold blood, and as approving them, or whether he wrote in irony, the detestable maxims he boldly and explicitly urges, has been disputed by many. Voltaire has joined in the cry against him, begun by our countryman cardinal Pole. It is a curious question, to be determined only by the author himself. We must seek in the actions of his life, and in his letters, for a solution of the mystery. Ample materials are afforded, and if we are unable to throw a clear light on the subject, at least we shall adduce all the evidence, and, after summing it up impartially, leave the jury of readers to decide.

The family of Machiavelli carried back its origin to the ancient marquesses of Tuscany, and especially to a marquis Ugo, who flourished about the year 850, who was the root whence sprung various nobles, who possessed power over territories, which the growing state of Florence speedily encroached upon. The Machiavelli were lords of Montespertoli; but preferring the rank of citizens of a prosperous city, to the unprofitable preservation of an illustrious ancestry, they submitted

to the laws of Florence, for the sake of enjoying the honours which the republic had to bestow. The Machiavelli belonged to that portion of the Guelph party which abandoned their native town in 1260, after the defeat of Monteaperti. Being afterwards re-established in their country, they enjoyed thirteen times the rank of gonfaloniere of justice, an office corresponding to the better known one of doge, except that it was an annual magistrature; and fifty-three different members of the family were elected priors, another of the highest offices of government.

1469. Niccolò Machiavelli was born in Florence on the 3d of May, 1469; his father was jurisconsult and treasurer of the march, and by aid of these offices, maintained in some degree the lustre of his family, which was obscured by the poverty into which it had fallen. His mother Bartolomea, daughter of Stefano Nelli, was equally well descended. Her family derived itself from the ancient counts of Borgonuovo of Fucecchio, who flourished in the tenth century, and her ancestors had been elected to the highest offices in the Florentine state. She had been previously married to Niccolò Benizzi, and was distinguished for her cultivated understanding and talent for poetry.

Nothing is known of the childhood and education of Machiavelli. Paul Jovius wishes to prove that he scarcely understood Latin, but this opinion finds no credit: Paul Jovius is a writer, whose celebrity is founded on his unblushing falsehoods and baseless calumnies *: he was sold to the Medici, and attacked without scruple, and with a total disregard for truth, those persons who were inimical to them. At the age of five and twenty, Machiavelli was placed as secretary under Marcello di Virgilio de' Adriani, or, as he is commonly called, Marcellus Virgil, whose pupil he had formerly been. Marcellus Virgil had been at one time

1494. Ætat. 25.

* Baldelli.

professor of Latin and Greek, and was now one of the chief officers of the Florentine court of chancery. Paul Jovius gives Machiavelli the name of his clerk and copyist, and adds, that, from this master, he obtained those flowers of ancient learning which are interspersed in his works. Nothing is at once more base and futile than these attempts to degrade celebrated men, by impeaching their station in society, or adventitious acquirements. It only serves to display the detractor's malice, and to render more conspicuous the merit which could triumph over every disadvantage.

There is no trace of Machiavelli's taking any part in the political disturbances of Florence at this time. The city was then agitated by the pretensions and turbulence of the prophet Salvanorola. There is a letter extant of his, which gives some account of the preaching and denunciations of the ambitious friar, which shows that, if he did not belong to the party opposed to him, he was, at least, not duped by his impostures*: — "In my opinion," he says, "he temporises and gives to his falsehoods the colour of the occasion." The disposition of Machiavelli was observing and industrious; his ambition was under the rule of judgment, and his hopes fixed on the favour he might secure from the heads of government. For five of the best years of his life he was content to exercise the unostentatious functions of secretary to an officer of chancery, nor were any of his writings composed at this period: they were the fruits of thought and experience, and there is nothing to tell us, that, as a young man, he was warmed by that self-confidence and restless aspiration, which he displayed in maturer life. It may be supposed, however, that his employer, Marcellus Virgil, distinguished his talents and recommended them to observation, as they were both promoted at the same time, Marcellus being elected high chancellor, and Machiavelli preferred over four other candidates, to the post of chancellor of the second

Mar. 8. 1497. Ætat. 28.

* Let. Fam. ii.

court. A month afterwards he was named secretary to the council of ten (the chief council of the state), which situation he retained till the revolution, which, fourteen years afterwards, overthrew the government he served.

1498. Ætat. 29.

During this period, Machiavelli pursued an active career: he was continually employed on missions to various sovereigns and states. His letters to his government on these occasions are published, and he wrote besides brief surveys of the countries to which he was sent. His active and enquiring mind was continually on the alert, and he stored up with care the observations and opinions that resulted from the personages and scenes with which he was brought into contact.

Italy was at this time in a state of convulsion, torn by foreign armies and domestic quarrels: the peace of the peninsula had died with Lorenzo de' Medici. That sagacious statesman saw the safety of his country in the preservation of the balance of power among its several rulers. It was his endeavour to check the encroachments of the king of Naples and the pope, who ruled southern Italy, by the influence of the duke of Milan, and of the Venetian republic; while these again were prevented from attempting war with Florence, or trespassing on the smaller states of Romagna, by the jealousy of the sovereigns of the south. For many years no foreign army had crossed the Alps, and the battles of the condottieri became more and more innoxious.

1492.

This fine system of policy fell to the ground on the death of Lorenzo. His son Piero, who succeeded him, was a rash, impolitic, and feeble statesman, defying dangers till they were close at hand, and then yielding weakly to them. He had not feared to make an enemy of Ludovico Sforza, who reigned over Milan in the name of his nephew Giovan Galeazzo, the rightful duke. Ludovico wished to play the old part of his wicked uncle, and to supplant the youthful prince; but he feared to be prevented by the king of Naples. To occupy and

weaken him, he invited Charles VIII. of France into Italy, instigating him to assert his right to the Neapolitan crown, which he claimed through René, who inherited it, together with the counties of Anjou and Provence. This was the origin of all the evils which overwhelmed Italy, crushed its spirit of liberty, destroyed its republics, and after making it a field of battle for many years, caused it in the end to become a mere appanage to the crowns of Germany, Spain, or France, according as these kingdoms enjoyed alternately the supreme power in Europe.

1493. The entrance of the French into Italy caused great commotion in the city of Florence. It was considered by Lorenzo to be the policy of the Florentines to keep allies of the king of France: but Piero acted a thoughtless and unstable part; he at first opposed the French, and then threw himself into their hands. The Florentines were enraged at the sacrifices he made to pacify an enemy which he had brought upon himself, and the result was his expulsion from the city, and the overthrow and exile of the Medicean family.

Charles VIII. overran Italy, and possessed himself of the kingdom of Naples without drawing a sword, except to massacre the defenceless people. The Italians were accustomed to a mild system of warfare; they carried on their military enterprises by condottieri, or captains of independent bands of soldiers, who hired themselves to the best bidder. These condottieri consisted of foreign adventurers, who came into Italy on the speculation of turning their military talents to profit, or of the minor native princes, or lords of single towns, who augmented their consequence and revenue by raising troops, commanded by themselves, but paid by others. These mercenaries were inspired by no spirit of patriotism or party; they fought for pay and booty; they changed sides at the beck of their captain, who was influenced by the highest offer. They fought to-day side by side with men whom the next they might attack as enemies: they fought, therefore, in a placid spirit of

friendly enmity; often not a single soldier fell upon the field of battle. Add to this, they were very indifferently provided with fire-arms. The ferocity of the French, their artillery, discipline, and massacres, filled the unwarlike population with alarm and horror. They fled, or submitted without a blow. But Charles lost his conquest almost as soon as he gained it; he returned to France, and the crown of Naples fell from his head at the same moment.

His death followed soon after; and his successor, Louis XII., on turning his eyes to Italy, rather fixed them on the duchy of Milan, to which he had pretensions by right of inheritance. His conquest of this dukedom was speedy and complete, and he then proceeded to possess himself of Naples. The king then reigning, Frederic of the house of Arragon, called in the Spaniards to his aid, and he was crushed in the collision of the two warlike nations. He was banished Naples and confined in France, while Louis and Ferdinand at first amicably divided, and then hostilely fought for, the possession of his kingdom.

1498.

Meanwhile the first entrance of Charles VIII. into Italy had left the seeds of discord and disaster in Tuscany. Pisa was at that time under the rule of Florence, but repining at its servitude. When Charles entered Pisa, its citizens implored him to restore to them their independence: he promised to comply; and though afterwards he made treaties to a contrary effect with Florence, the Pisans profited by his secret inclination in their favour, and the sympathy afforded them by the officers and men that composed his army, to shut their gates against their Florentine governors, and to assert their liberty. From this time it became the ardent desire of Florence to subdue the rebel city; they exhausted all their resources in prosecution of this favourite object. Each year they attacked the walls, and destroyed the crops, of the unfortunate but resolute Pisans; and, in each treaty they made with France, the chief article was a promise of aid in this desired con-

1501. Ætat. 32.

1500. Ætat. 31. quest. At one time they formed the siege of Pisa, and solicited Louis XII. to supply them with troops and artillery. That politic sovereign, who wished to strengthen himself in Italy, sent them double the force they required. These auxiliaries, composed of Swiss and Gascons, pillaged both friends and foes, quarrelled with the Florentine commissaries, came to a secret understanding with Pisa, and, finally, on a pretence of a delay of pay, raised the siege. The king of France accused Florence of being the cause of this affront sustained by his arms; and, to appease him, and to obtain, if possible, further assistance, the republic deputed Francesco della Caza, and Machiavelli, as envoys to the French court.

A year before Machiavelli had been employed on a mission to Caterina Sforza, countess of Forli, with regard to the terms of engagement offered to her son, for serving Florence as condottiere; but the legation to France was of greater importance. The commissions, or instructions of the government to Machiavelli, and his letters to the state during this and all his other missions, are published. They are long and minute, but far less tedious than such correspondences usually are; and the reading them is indispensable to the forming a just notion of his character, and a view of the actions of his life. There is something curiously interesting in the style of his instructions on the present occasion; they display a civic simplicity of manners and language, and a sagacity in viewing the personages and events in question, combined with true Italian astute policy. Guicciardini observes, that when the French first entered Italy, they were astonished and disgusted by the want of faith and falsehood which prevailed in their negotiations with the native princes and states. In this commission the Florentine government gave instructions to their envoys savouring of the prevalent vice of their country. The commander of the French forces before Pisa, Beaumont, had been appointed at their own request: he failed without any fault of his

own, through the insubordination of the troops under him. The state of Florence instructed its envoys: — "According to circumstances you may accuse him violently, and cast on him the imputation of cowardice and corruption; or free him from all blame, and, speaking honourably of him, throw all the fault upon others. And take care how you criminate him, as we do not wish to lose his favour, without gaining any thing elsewhere by such a proceeding."

Machiavelli and his fellow envoy remained in France three months, following the king and his court to Montargis, Melun, Plessis, and Tours. They were faithful and industrious in fulfilling their duties, especially Machiavelli; Francesco della Caza being taken ill, and spending the greater part of his time at Paris. They failed in their object: the king wishing Florence to engage troops from him on the same terms, of paying all the expenses, and the Florentines wishing to induce him to form the siege at his own risk, reimbursing him only in case of success. Machiavelli meanwhile was very desirous to return home; "because," he writes, "my father died only a month before my departure, and since then I have lost a sister, and all my affairs are in disorder, so that I am injured in many ways." Towards the end of October, Florence sent an ambassador with greater powers to the French court, and the envoys returned to Italy.

His next legation was to Cæsar Borgia. It is necessary to enlarge upon this mission. The great doubt that clouds Machiavelli's character regards the spirit in which he wrote the "Prince," — whether he sincerely recommended the detestable principles of government which he appears to advocate, or used the weapons of irony and sarcasm to denounce a system of tyranny which then oppressed his native country. The example he brings forward most frequently in his treatise, is that of Cæsar Borgia: his mode of governing his states, and the artifice and resolution with which he destroyed his enemies, are adduced as worthy of applause

and imitation. We must, therefore, not only enquire what the deeds of this man were, but endeavour to discover the real sentiments of Machiavelli, the opinion that he formed upon his conduct, and the conclusions which he drew from his success. We may also mention that the secretary has been accused of being Borgia's confidant in his plots. Mr. Roscoe has lightly adopted this idea; but the course of the present narration will easily disprove it.

Soon after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici, died Innocent VIII.; and Roderigo Borgia, a native of Valentia in Spain, and one of the most ancient of the cardinals, was chosen pope in his room. His election was carried by force of bribery and intrigue, to the horror and amazement of the whole Christian world; since not only the methods by which he rose were known, but also the character and actions of the man thus exalted.* The new pontiff assumed the name of Alexander VI. "He was a man," to use the words of Guicciardini, "of singular prudence and sagacity; endued with great penetration, and marvellous powers of persuasion, and always acting with extreme forethought and policy. But these good qualities were darkly clouded by the worst vices. His depraved life, his total want of shame, his contempt for good faith, religion, and truth, his matchless deceit, insatiable avarice, barbarous cruelty, and unbounded desire to exalt his numerous offspring, who were not less dissolute and unprincipled than himself, stained his character, and marked his reign with inexpressible infamy."

Cæsar Borgia, his younger son, had been educated for the church; and, despite his illegitimate birth, was raised to the rank of cardinal. But Cæsar disliked the sacerdotal profession, and was jealous of his elder brother, the duke of Candia, whom his father was desirous of raising to the highest temporal rank, both because of his success in arms, and also on account of the preference shown him by their sister Lucretia. In-

* Guicciardini.

cited by these criminal passions, he one night caused the duke to be waylaid, murdered, and thrown into the Tiber. The pope was at first overwhelmed with grief on his son's death, and made great show of repentance and reformation; but soon after he cast aside all thoughts of this kind, and returned with renewed eagerness to his former pursuits and projects. Cæsar gained the point at which he aimed. He was permitted to abdicate the cardinal's hat; and, in reward for the dispensation which the pope granted Louis XII. to divorce his first wife, and to marry Anne of Britany, he obtained the duchy of Valence in France, and henceforth was commonly called by the name of the duca Valentino, or Valentian duke.

It was the chief ambition of this new temporal noble to form a principality in Italy. The territories of the marquisate of Savoy, of the duchy of Milan, and of the Venetian republic, embraced the greater portion of the peninsula north of the Apennines. To the south, the kingdom of Naples, Rome, and the republic of Florence, were the principal states; but other territories remained, a sovereignty over which was claimed by the popes, but which obeyed a variety of petty lords, whose families had for centuries enjoyed the rule. The various cities of Romagna to the east, Bologna to the north, Piombino to the west, and Perugia to the south, formed the chief: of these Cæsar Borgia resolved to possess himself, extending a prophetic eye to the future conquest of Tuscany. Already he had acquired dominion over Romagna: he dispossessed the duke of Urbino and the prince of Piombino of their states, and now he turned his eyes towards Bologna. Giovanni Bentivoglio had long been lord of this wealthy city; good fortune, rather than talents or a spirit of enterprise, had raised him, and he spared no blood in confirming his power. Cæsar Borgia was supported in his encroachments by an alliance with Louis XII. In vain was it represented to this monarch*, "that it ill became the splendour of the French

* Guicciardini.

crown, and the title of most Christian king, to show favour to an infamous tyrant, the destroyer of many states; a man who thirsted for human blood, and was an example to the whole world of perfidy and inhumanity; who, like a public robber, had broken faith with and murdered so many princes and nobles; one stained with the blood of his nearest kindred, and whose crimes of poisoning and stabbing were unequalled in a Christian country." Louis favoured him, not so much from his own inclination, as at the instigation of the cardinal d'Amboise, who was desirous of currying favour with the pope; and who, by protecting his son, obtained the high office of legate to France.

At the moment of the commencement of his attack on Bologna, while running a full career of success, Cæsar Borgia received a check from the revolt of his chief condottieri. Like all the other princes of Italy, the army of the duke of Valence consisted of various bands, independent of each other, and obeying several distinct captains. The chief among these were Vitellozzo Vitelli, lord of Città Castello, Oliverotto da Fermo, in the March, and Paolo Orsino, who was master of a large portion of the patrimony of St. Peter, and the duke of Gravina, also of the Orsini family. These men assembled at Magione, near Perugia; they were joined in their consultations by cardinal Orsini, chief of the family, and then at enmity with the pope; Giovanpaolo Baglioni, lord of Perugia, Hermes Bentivoglio, who represented his father, lord of Bologna, and Antonio da Venafro, minister of Pandolfo Petrucci, lord of Siena. These last-named nobles feared the encroachments of Borgia, and gladly availed themselves of an opportunity to seduce away his captains, and to check his enterprises. It is to be remembered that the individuals thus conspiring were men stained with the crimes of treachery and assassination, then so rife in Italy — men whose aim was power, and who thought every method that led to it justifiable. For Cæsar ran no new career of crime: he travelled in the same path with many of his con-

temporaries, while he excelled them all in resolution, intrepidity, and remorseless cruelty: his abilities were greater, his conscience more seared. Inhuman, stern, and treacherous, he was yet sagacious, eloquent, courteous, and plausible. It was a common saying at Rome, that the pope never did what he said, and that his son never said what he did.* Prudence and success meanwhile gained for him the respect even of those by whom he was abhorred.

The conspirators at Magione were at once aware of the character of the man with whom they had to deal, and the small faith they could repose in each other; but they saw their destruction in the fulfilment of Borgia's ambitious schemes; and this served as a common bond between them. They took care to gather together their troops, and, occupying the country between Romagna and Rome, they hoped to prevent Cæsar from receiving aid from his father. The duke of Urbino, whose duchy Borgia had lately seized, joined the league, and suddenly appearing at the head of some forces, repossessed himself of his territories, in which he was greatly beloved. Borgia was at Imola with but few troops when he heard of the loss of Urbino, and the revolt of his captains. These men invited the Florentines to join them. The republic feared Borgia, but they hated yet more the conspirators, as there existed between them various and urgent motives of enmity: they feared also to displease the king of France by taking part against his ally. They discountenanced, therefore, the advances of the captains, and sent Machiavelli to the duke at Imola, to inform him of this circumstance, and to assure him in general terms of their continued amity; and, moreover, to watch the progress of the conspiracy, and to learn what hope Borgia entertained of repelling the menaced injury.

Machiavelli approached without any feeling of abhorrence, a man honoured and protected by the king of France. He had no sympathy with the conspirators,

1502. Ætat. 33.

* Guicciardini.

but rather hated them, as the enemies of his country, and as traitors. Borgia commanded more respect. He was a man of greater powers of mind; a high and commanding spirit, running a prosperous career, who had hitherto overcome every obstacle to his advancement.* It was a curious study to observe the methods he would use to crush the nest of traitors in league against him.

Machiavelli arrived at Imola on the 7th of October, and was instantly admitted to an audience with the duke. Borgia received him with every show of courtesy and kindness. He was in high spirits, declaring that the stars that year were inimical to rebels, and that the revolt was a piece of good fortune, since it enabled him to distinguish his friends from his foes, at a critical moment. He declared that his clemency had been the cause of this disaster, and frankly entered into details concerning the progress made by the confederates.

From day to day Machiavelli continued to see and converse with Borgia, who exerted the grace of manner for which he was renowned, and a show of cordiality, to win the suffrage of the yet inexperienced secretary. "I cannot express to you," Machiavelli writes to his government, "the earnest demonstrations he makes of affection towards the republic, and how eagerly he justifies himself with regard to his threatened attack last year, throwing the blame upon Vitellozzo Vitelli." Borgia's chief endeavour at this moment was to influence the secretary to persuade his government to give some public testimonial of its attachment to him. He spoke with the utmost confidence of his ultimate success; assuring Machiavelli, that among the many fortunate events that had befallen him, this conspiracy was most lucky of all, as it had caused his more powerful friends to declare for him.

Meanwhile, though he thus "vaunted aloud," he was acting with consummate prudence and caution. His object was to gain time. He wished to remain inactive till he had gathered together a sufficient number of troops

* Lettere di Machiavelli, Legazione al Duca Valentino.

to insure success. He was at one time thwarted in this purpose by two Spanish captains in his pay, whom he had summoned to Imola; who, fancying that a good opportunity presented itself of attacking the enemy, had themselves been vanquished and put to flight. Borgia kept this disaster as secret as possible; he expected troops from France and Switzerland, and gathered together all the *broken-off lances* in the country. A lance was a term used to signify a mounted cavalier with five or six followers; and the condottiere formed a greater or less number of lances into a troop. But often single cavaliers with their followers broke off from the band to which they belonged, and were thence called *Lancie Spezzate*.

Besides these more evident methods of defending himself, Borgia hoped that dissention might be introduced among the confederates; that he should be able to entice away a portion, and then, by policy and artifice, bring them to terms. His hopes were not deceived. About the middle of October, Paolo Orsino sent to say, that if the duke would send a hostage in pledge for his safety, he would repair to Imola. Cæsar eagerly seized on this opening for negotiation; cardinal Borgia was put into the hands of the confederates, and Paolo Orsino arrived at Imola on the 25th of October. Machiavelli watched with intense interest the progress of this visit, and the subsequent proceedings. "No military movement is made on either side," he writes to the signoria of Florence, "and these treaties for reconciliation benefit the duke, who readily entertains them; but I cannot judge with what intentions." He goes on to state the difficulties that must stand in the way of the renewing of amity; "so that," he continues, "I do not find any one who can guess how the reconciliation can be effected. Some people think that the duke will entice away a part of the confederates; and when they no longer hold together, he will cease to fear them. I in cline to this opinion, having heard him let fall words that have this tendency to his ministers. Yet it is

difficult to believe that so recent a confederacy can be broken up."

Borgia took great pains to preserve Machiavelli's prepossession in favour of his good fortune and success. He pressed him to bring his government to decisive measures in his favour. He caused his ministers to urge those topics which would come more gracefully through a third person. These men besieged the secretary's ear with confidential advice. They assured him that Florence was losing an admirable opportunity for securing the duke's friendship; they represented what a fortunate, high-spirited man he was, accustomed to success, and despising his present dangers. Machiavelli sent minute details of these conversations to his government, adding, "Your lordships hear the words which the duke uses, and, knowing who it is that speaks, you will draw conclusions with your accustomed prudence." On another occasion he recounts a long conversation he held with Borgia, who showed him letters received from France, which assured him of the friendship of its powerful monarch. "I have often told you," Cæsar continued, "and again I say, that I shall not be without assistance. The French cavalry and the Swiss infantry will soon arrive, and the pope will supply me with money. I do not wish to boast, nor to say more than that it is probable that my enemies will repent their perfidy. As to your masters, I cannot be more satisfied with them than I am; so that you may offer them on my part all that it is in my power to do. When you first came, I spoke in general terms, because my affairs were in so bad a condition that I did not know on what ground I stood, and I did not wish your government to think that danger made me a large promiser. But now that I fear less, I promise more; and when my fears are quite at an end, deeds shall be added to my words, when there is call for them."

"Your lordships," continues Machiavelli, "hear the duke's words, of which I do not put down one half; and, knowing the manner of man, can judge accordingly.

Since I have been here, nothing but good has happened to him; which has been caused by the certainty that every one feels that the king of France will help him with troops, and the pope with money."

Machiavelli was evidently filled with high admiration of Borgia's talents, and won by his persuasive manners. There is abundant proof, however, that he did not possess his confidence. He was perpetually soliciting to be recalled:—"For the time is past," he writes, "for temporising, and a man of more authority than I is needed to conclude this treaty. My own affairs are also in the greatest disorder, nor can I remain here without money." The Florentine government thought otherwise; they determined to await the developement of events before they concluded any treaty.

These were hastening onwards to a catastrophe. Borgia by this time had collected a considerable force together of French, Swiss, and Italians; but he was willing to overcome his adversaries by other arts than those of war. The confederates, from weakness or fear, or by force of Borgia's persuasive eloquence, were won to agree to a treaty of reconciliation. After some parley, it was signed early in the month of November: the terms consisted principally of renewed professions of perpetual peace, concord, and union; with a remission and forgetfulness of injuries; the duke promising a sincere renewal of friendship, and the confederates pledging themselves to defend the duke. He was to continue to them their engagements as condottieri, and they were to assist him to recover the duchy of Urbino. It was agreed that one only of the confederates at a time should be called on to remain in the duke's camp, and in his power; but they promised to deliver to him their children and near relatives as hostages, whenever they should be demanded. Such is a sketch of a treaty which dissolved a confederacy so formidable to Borgia, and placed him, without drawing a sword, in a position as favourable as when his enemies first assembled at Magione.

Machiavelli could not be deceived by this apparent reconciliation; and he was eager to discover Borgia's secret views. Far from being consulted concerning his plans, he now found it very difficult to obtain an audience:—"For," he writes, "they live here only for their own good, and for that which appears to them to contribute to it. Paolo Orsini arrived yesterday, bringing the articles ratified and subscribed by Vitellozzo and all the other confederates; and he endeavours, as well as he can, to persuade the duke, that they all mean to be faithful, and to undertake any enterprise for him. The duke appears satisfied. Vitellozzo also writes grateful and submissive letters, excusing himself and making offers; and saying, that if he had an opportunity to speak to him, he could fully justify himself, and show that what he had done was without any intention of injuring him. The duke listens to all; and what he means to do no one knows, for it is very difficult to penetrate him. Judging by his words and those of his chief ministers, it is impossible not to expect evil for others, for the injury done him has been great; and his conversation, and that of those around him, is full of indignation against Vitellozzo.* One spoke to me yesterday, who is the man nearest the duke, saying, 'This traitor has stabbed us, and now thinks to heal the wound with words, but children might laugh at the articles of this treaty.'"

The treaty being ratified, it was debated what action the duke should put the captains upon. After a good deal of discussion, it was agreed that they should go against Sinigaglia, a town belonging to the duke of

* It must be mentioned, that a great enmity subsisted between the Florentines and Vitellozzo Vitelli. His brother, Paolo Vitelli, had commanded the troops of the republic at one time before Pisa, and was suspected by them of treachery. They sent for him one night to come to Florence, and he obeyed without hesitation. On his arrival he was seized, cast into prison, tortured, and, though no confession could be extorted from him, he was put to death the same night. It was the intention of the Florentine government to seize on Vitellozzo also, but he escaped and took refuge in Pisa. Borgia had at one time taken up the cause of the Medici, and threatened Florence: he now threw the blame of this action upon the counsels of Vitellozzo.

Urbino. While this enterprise was under consideration, Borgia left Imola. Machiavelli writes, on the 10th of December, "The duke left this place this morning, and is gone to Forli with his whole army. To-morrow evening he will be at Cesena; but it is not known what he will do after that; nor is there any one here who fancies that he can guess. I shall set out to-morrow, and follow the court—unwillingly, because I am not well; and, in addition to my indisposition, I have received from your lordships fifty ducats, and I have spent seventy-two, having only seven left in my purse. But I must obey necessity."

On the 14th of December, Machiavelli writes, from Cesena, "As I before wrote, every one is in suspense with regard to the duke's intentions, who is here with all his forces. After many conjectures, they conclude that he means to get possession of the persons of those who have so deeply injured, and nearly deprived him of his dominions: and although the treaty he has made contradicts this notion, yet his past actions render it probable; and I am of this opinion from what I have heard and reported in my letters. We shall see what will happen; and I will do my duty in acquainting you with all that passes while I remain here: which cannot be long; for, in the first place, I have only four ducats left in my purse; and in the second, my further stay is of no utility. To speak to your lordships with the truth which I have always practised, it would be better if you sent a person of more reputation to treat of your affairs: I am not fit, as they need a more eloquent man — one more known, and who knows the world better than I." It would seem as if Machiavelli tremblingly foresaw the tragedy at hand, and wished to withdraw; in fear, perhaps, of being used as an instrument by Borgia, or suspected of any participation in his crimes.

On the 23d of December, he reports that the duke had suddenly dismissed all his French troops. He had requested an audience, to discover the cause of this

movement; but received only an evasive answer, — that the duke would send for him when he wanted him. It soon became evident that the ease with which the confederates fell into Borgia's snares, rendered useless the armed force he had gathered together for their destruction; and he dismissed an army, the maintaining of which might excite suspicion.

Again Machiavelli writes, from Cesena, on the 26th of December, "I have not been able to obtain an audience of the duke, his excellency being engaged in reviewing his infantry, and in his pleasures, preparatory to Christmas. As I have before repeated, this prince is most secret; nor do I believe that any one except himself is aware of what he is going to do. His principal secretaries have assured me that he never communicates any thing till the moment of execution; and he executes on the instant: so I hope you will not accuse me of negligence, in not being able to tell any thing; as I know nothing myself."

The catastrophe was now at hand. The captains sent Borgia word that they had taken Sinigaglia, but that the fortress still held out; nor would the castellan deliver the keys to any but the duke in person; and they advised him, therefore, to come to receive them. Thus invited by the captains themselves, Borgia thought it an excellent opportunity to approach them without exciting suspicion. With great art he persuaded Vitelli and Paolo Orsino to wait for him at Sinigaglia, saying that their suspicion and timidity would render their reconciliation unstable and short-lived. Vitellozzo felt how unsafe it was, first to injure a prince, and then to put trust in him: but he was over-persuaded to remain by Orsino, whom the duke had corrupted by promises and gifts. Borgia left Fano on the 30th of December, and on the following day repaired to Sinigaglia; and on the evening of the last day of that month, Machiavelli wrote a short note to his government from that town, containing these words only: — "I wrote, the day before yesterday, from Pesaro, all I had heard con-

cerning Sinigaglia.* I removed yesterday to Fano. Early this morning, the duke departed with all his troops, and came here to Sinigaglia, where were assembled all the Orsini and Vitellozzo, who had taken the town for him. He invited them to come around him; and, the moment he entered the town, he turned to his guard, and caused them to be taken prisoners. Thus he has secured them all, and the town is being pillaged. It is now twenty-three o'clock.† I am in the greatest anxiety, not knowing how to forward this letter, as there is no one to take it. I will write at length in another. In my opinion, they will not be alive to-morrow. All their people are also taken; and the official notice distributed about, says that the traitors are arrested."

In another place, Machiavelli gives the details of the mode in which these men were deluded into trusting themselves in the hands of one so notorious for perfidy and sanguinary revenge.‡ "On the 30th of December," he says, "on setting out from Fano, the duke communicated his design to eight of his most faithful followers. He committed to their care, that, when Vitellozzo, Paolo Orsino, the duke of Gravina, and Oliverotto da Fermo should advance to meet him, two of his friends should take one of them between them; and that they should thus continue to guard them till they reached the house where the duke was to lodge. He then stationed his troops so as to be near enough to support him, without exciting suspicion. The confederates, meanwhile, to afford room for the soldiery which Borgia brought with him, had caused their own to retire to various castles six miles distant, Oli-

* This letter is lost; and we are thus deprived of a most interesting link in the correspondence, and an insight into Machiavelli's feelings. In it he detailed the half confidence that Borgia at last reposed in him — when, at the moment of execution, there was no longer any necessity for concealing his intentions.

† Half an hour before sunset: in December, about half after three o'clock.

‡ "Account of the Mode in which the Valentian Duke destroyed Vitellozzo Vitelli, Paolo Orsino, &c. &c."

verotto alone retaining his band of 1000 foot and 150 horse. Every thing being thus arranged, Borgia proceeded to Sinigaglia. Vitellozzo, Paolo Orsino, and the duke of Gravina came out to meet him, mounted on mules, and accompanied by a few followers on horseback. Vitellozzo was unarmed; and his desponding countenance seemed prophetic of his approaching death. It was said that he took, as it were, a last leave of his friends when he left the town; recommending the fortunes of his family to the chief among them, and bidding his nephews bear in mind the virtues of their race. These three were received cordially by the duke, and immediately taken in charge, as had been arranged. Perceiving that Oliverotto da Fermo was not among them — he having remained with his troop to receive Borgia in the market-place — he signed to one of his followers to devise some means to prevent his escape. This man went instantly to Oliverotto, and advised him to order his men to repair to quarters immediately, otherwise their lodgings would be occupied by the band accompanying the duke. Oliverotto listened to the sinister counsel, and, unaccompanied, joined Borgia and the rest on their entrance into the town. As soon as they arrived at the duke's palace, the signal was given, and they were made prisoners." Machiavelli's anticipations were fulfilled nearly to the letter. Vitellozzo and Oliverotto were strangled in prison the same night. Paolo Orsino and the duke of Gravina were kept alive till Borgia heard that the pope had seized on the persons of the other chiefs of the Orsini family; when, on the 18th of the January following, they were also strangled in prison.

On the very day of the execution of this treacherous and cruel act of revenge, Machiavelli had an audience with its perpetrator. He writes, "The duke sent for me at the second hour of night*, and with a most

* Two hours and a half after sunset. The Italian day of twenty-four hours ends at dark, *i. e.* half an hour after sunset; and then they begin one, two; but as they often say, one o'clock after noon, two o'clock after noon, so

cheerful countenance congratulated himself and me on his success, saying that he had alluded to it to me the day before, but not fully explained himself: which is true. He added many prudent and very affectionate expressions concerning our city; alleging all those reasons which made him desire your friendship, if you entertain the same feelings towards him; all of which filled me with exceeding surprise. He concluded by bidding me write three things to you. First, that I should congratulate you on his having put to death the enemies alike of the king of France, you, and himself, and destroyed every seed of dissention which had threatened to ruin Italy; for which you ought to be obliged to him. Secondly, he begged me to entreat you to make manifest to the world that you were his friends, and to send forward some troops to assist his attack on Castello or Perugia."

On the 8th of January, Machiavelli uses expressions in his letter most characteristic of Italian policy and morals at that period. "It excites surprise here," he writes, "that you should not have written nor sent to congratulate the duke on the deed which he has lately executed, which redounds to your advantage, and on account of which our city ought to feel grateful; they say that it would have cost the republic 200,000 ducats to get rid of Vitellozzo and the Orsini, and even then it would not have been so completely done as by the duke. It is doubtful what his success will be at Perugia: as, on one side, we find a prince gifted with unparalleled good fortune, and a sanguine spirit, more than human, to accomplish all his desires; and, on the other hand, a man of extreme prudence, governing a state

they designate these evening hours as hours of night. This method of counting time is still practised by the common people in Italy, south of the Apennines; and, indeed, by every one of all ranks at Naples and Rome. Our mode of counting time is called by the Italians, French time, as it was first introduced after the conquests of Napoleon. It is often puzzling to hear of fourteen or fifteen o'clock, — it is necessary to remember the season of the year, and the hour of sunset, and how far that is off. On this occasion, the 31st of December, the second hour of night was about half after six o'clock P. M.; the sun setting at about four in December, in Italy.

with great reputation." The secretary adds, with praiseworthy diffidence, and considerable self-knowledge, "If I form a false judgment, it arises not only from my inexperience, but also from my views being confined to what is going on here, on which I am led to form the opinions I have expressed above."

The republic now thought it time to replace Machiavelli by an ambassador of more authority; and the secretary returned to Florence at the end of the month of January.

1503. It is evident from this detail, taken from Machiavelli's own letters, that he was not intrusted with the secret of a prince, who, he says, never revealed his purposes to any one before the moment of execution. Yet it is also plain that, at last, he began to suspect the tragedy in preparation; and that neither the anticipation nor the fulfilment inspired him with abhorrence for the murderer; while his contempt of the confederates, and admiration of the talents and success of their destroyer, is every where apparent: nor was this a short-lived feeling. Without mentioning the "Prince," in which this act of Borgia is alluded to with praise, he is mentioned with approbation in several of his private letters. He wrote "A Description of the Method used by the Valencian Duke in putting to death Vitellozzo Vitelli, &c." This is purely narrative, and contains no word of comment or censure. There is besides a poem of his, entitled "The Decenal," in which he proposes to relate the sufferings of Italy during ten years: in this he mentions the crime of Borgia. "After the duke of Valence," he says, "had exculpated himself to the king of France, he returned to Romagna, with the intention of going against Bologna. It appears that Vitellozzo Vitelli and Paolo Orsino resolved not to assist him; and these serpents, full of venom, began to conspire together, and to tear him with their talons and teeth. Borgia, ill able to defend himself, was obliged to take refuge behind the shield of France; and to take his enemies by a snare, the basilisk whistled softly, to allure them to his den. In a short time, the traitor

of Fermo, and Vitellozzo, and that Orsino who had been so much his friend, fell readily into his toils; in which the Orsino (*bear*) lost more than a paw; and Vitelli was shorn of the other horn (*alluding to his brother's death at Florence as one horn*). Perugia and Siena heard the boast of the hydra, and each tyrant fled before his fury: nor could the cardinal Orsino escape the ruin of his unhappy house, but died the victim of a thousand arts."

It must be mentioned that, notwithstanding individual acts of ferocity of which Cæsar Borgia was guilty, he was an equitable sovereign — favouring the common people, and restraining the nobles in their sanguinary quarrels and extortionate oppression. His subjects were, therefore, much attached to him. There is an anecdote relating to his system of government, narrated in the "Prince," which may be quoted as exceedingly characteristic. It is one of the examples brought forward by Machiavelli in his treatise, to show how a prince can prudently consolidate his power in a newly acquired state. "When the duke had taken Romagna, he found it governed by feeble lords, who had rather robbed than corrupted their subjects, and sown discord rather than preserved peace—so that this province was the prey of extortion, lawlessness, and all other kind of oppression. He judged it necessary to govern it strictly, and to reduce it to obedience and tranquillity. For this purpose he set over it Ramiro d'Orco, a cruel and resolute man, to whom he confided absolute power. He soon established order in the province. The duke then judged that so despotic an authority might become odious; and he set up a civil court in the middle of the province, with an excellent president, at which each city had its advocate. And because he knew that the former rigor had generated hatred, to conciliate and win this people, he wished to prove that the cruelties that had been practised did not emanate from him, but from the severity of his minister; and seizing Ramiro, he caused him one morning to be placed on a scaffold in the

market-place of Cesena, divided in two, with a wooden block and bloody knife at his side. The horror of which spectacle caused the people to remain for some time satisfied and stupid."

This act took place under the very eyes of Machiavelli, when he was at Cesena with Borgia. He thus mentions it in his public correspondence:—"Messer Ramiro was found this morning divided in two in the market-place, where he yet is, and all the people can behold him. The cause of his death is not well known, except that it seemed good to the prince, who shows that he knows how to make and unmake men at will, according to their merits."

To us, who cannot sympathise with the high spirit and good fortune of Borgia, it is consolatory to know that his triumph was short-lived, and his ruin complete. It fell to Machiavelli to witness the last scene of his expiring power, being sent on a legation to Rome at the time of his downfall.

1503. The duke of Valence was still enjoying the complete success of his enterprises: courage and duplicity, united, rendered him victorious over all his enemies. He was at Rome, carrying on a negotiation with the king of France, which was to extend and secure his power, when suddenly, one afternoon, the pope was brought back dead from a vineyard, whither he had gone to recreate himself after the heats of the day; and Cæsar was also brought back soon after, to all appearance dying. The story went that they were both poisoned, having drunk by mistake some wine prepared by themselves for the destruction of one of their guests.* The pope's body was exposed in St. Peter's on the following day, according to custom; it was swollen, discoloured, and frightfully disfigured. Cæsar's youth, and the speedy use he had made of an antidote, saved his life; but he remained for a long time in a state of great suffering and illness. He told Machiavelli, about this time, that he had foreseen and provided against every reverse of fortune that could possibly befall him, except his father dying at a time when

Aug. 28.

* Guicciardini.

he should himself be disabled by disease. He could now enter but ineffectually into the intrigues necessary to ensure the election of a pope favourable to himself. Indeed, the death of Alexander was so sudden, that none of the persons interested found time to exert their resources; and a cardinal was raised to the pontifical throne, whose sole merit consisted in his great age and decrepitude. Francesco Picolomini, nephew of Pius II., was proclaimed pope on the 22d of September, under the name of Pius III.

He did not deceive the hopes of the cardinals;—he reigned twenty-eight days only; and his death, which occurred on the 18th of October, left the throne again vacant. The cardinals, during this interval, had prepared their measures, and looked forward to a greater struggle and more important choice. The government of Florence thought it right to send an envoy, on this occasion, to watch over its interests, and to influence consultations which would be held concerning the future destination of Borgia. He had already lost the greater part of his conquests: Piombino and Urbino revolted to their former lords; and nothing remained to him but Romagna, whose inhabitants he had attached by the firm system of government before mentioned. The nobles, however, who had formerly governed its various towns, were trying to regain possession of them; and Venice eyed it as an easy prey. The popes believed, that by right, it belonged to them; and Borgia had reigned over it as vassal to the church: this clash of interests led him to believe that he could induce any future pope to side with him. The neighbourhood of the cities in question to Tuscany, rendered it imperative to Florence to watch over their fate.

1503. Ætat. 34.

Machiavelli was sent by them just before the cardinals entered into conclave—where, without hesitation or a dissentient voice, they elected Julian da Rovera, cardinal of San Pietro in Vincola, who assumed the name of Julius II. This prelate had been all his life at open enmity with Alexander VI.: his disposition was am-

bitious, restless, fiery, and obstinate; and during the struggles against the papal power in which he had been engaged all his life, he had offended many, and excited the hatred of a number of powerful persons. Above all, it was to be supposed that Cæsar Borgia would oppose him; and he exercised great influence over the Spanish cardinals. But the duke had to contend with much adversity, so that he had but a choice of evils before him. During this interval, even Romagna had fallen from him, with the exception of its fortresses, of which he possessed the keys. Julian da Rovera made him large promises; and in an age when duplicity floulished far and wide, he had been celebrated for his veracity and good faith; even his old enemy, Alexander VI., declared that the cardinal di San Pietro in Vincola was sincere and trusty.

As soon as the new pope was elected, it was projected to send Borgia with an army to Romagna, to conquer it in the name of the holy see. Machiavelli had frequent interviews with the fallen prince at this time, and appears to have thrown off that admiration which his success and spirit had formerly inspired; and he testifies no sympathy or regret in his misfortunes. Borgia complained of the little friendship shown him by Florence; and declared that he would relinquish every other hope, for the sake of attacking and ruining the republic. The secretary reports his angry expressions to his government, and adds the words of cardinal d'Amboise, who exclaimed that "God, who never left any crime unpunished, would not let this man escape with impunity!"

The career of this bad hero was now drawing to a close. In the month of November, he set out in the middle of the night for Ostia, to the great satisfaction of all Rome, for the purpose of embarking for Spezia, with a troop of five hundred men, and then of proceeding to Romagna. But the pope, who had hitherto given no mark of an intention to break his promises, suddenly determined to viola.e that good faith which had

formerly adorned his character, and sent the Tuscan cardinal of Volterra (who was of course Borgia's bitter enemy) after him, to demand an order to the officers who held the castles in Romagna, that they should be given into the pope's hands. Borgia refused to comply with a requisition which deprived him of the last remnant of his power; on which he was arrested and placed on board a French galley. "It is not yet known," Machiavelli writes to his government on the 26th of November, "whether the duke is still on board the vessel, or brought here. Various things are reported. One person told me that, being yesterday evening in the pope's chamber, two men arrived from Ostia, when he was immediately dismissed; but, while in the next room, he overheard these men say that the duke had been thrown into the Tiber, as the pope had commanded.* I do not quite believe in this story, but I do not deny it; and, I dare say, if it has not already happened, it will happen. The pope, it is evident, is beginning to pay his debts honourably, and cancels them with a stroke of his pen. Every one, however, blesses this deed; and the more he does of the like, the more popular will he be. Since the duke is taken, whether he be alive or dead, no account need be made of him. Nevertheless, when I hear any thing certain, you shall have intelligence."

The pope, however, had not yet learnt wholly to despise the force of promises and oaths. Borgia was brought back to the Vatican, and treated honourably. It was supposed at one time that he would be proceeded against legally: and Machiavelli several times pressed his government to send him the papers necessary to institute any accusation on their part. At length, the duke gave the order to his castellans to surrender the fortresses in question to the pope, and was set at liberty. He instantly repaired to Naples, possessed of nothing more than a sum of money which he had deposited

* There is something in the entrance of these "two murderers," and their secret conference with the pope, that reminds one of scenes in Shakspeare, which appear improbable in our days of ceremony and exclusion.

with the Genoese bankers, but happy in having recovered his personal freedom. His ambitious mind quickly conceived new schemes; and he tried to persuade the Spanish general at Naples, Consalvo, to assist him in his project of throwing himself into Pisa, and of defending it against Florence. Consalvo listened and temporised, till he received the directions of his sovereign, which he immediately obeyed. In conformity with these, Borgia was arrested and sent on board a galley, which conveyed him to Spain. On his arrival, he was confined in the fortress of Medina del Campo, there to remain during his life. He continued a prisoner, however, for two years only. In 1506, with great audacity and labour, he let himself down from the castle by a rope, and fled to the court of John king of Navarre, who was his wife's brother; where he lived for some years in a humble state, the king of France having confiscated his duchy of Valence, and forbidding him to enter France. Finally, having gone out with the forces of the king of Navarre to attack Viana, an insignificant castle of that kingdom, he was surprised by an ambush, and killed.

We have anticipated a little, to conclude the history of this man, who figures so prominently in Machiavelli's writings, and now return to the secretary himself. We have not space to dilate with the same minuteness on his succeeding embassies; and there is nothing in them of peculiar interest. His letters are always full of keen observation; and show him to have been sagacious, faithful, and diligent. The republic kept him actively employed; and the end of one legation was the beginning of another. He left Rome, after Borgia's arrest, in December; and, in the January following, went to France, to ask the protection of Louis against the dangers which Florence imagined to threaten them from the Spanish army at Naples. A peace, concluded between France and Spain, dissipated these fears; and the secretary, after a month's residence at Lyons, returned to his own country. After this, he was sent on four insigni-

1504. Ætat. 35.

ficant missions to Piombino, Perugia, Mantua, and Siena. His next employment was to raise troops in the Florentine territories.

1505. Ætat. 36.

Machiavelli was too clear-sighted and well-judging, not to perceive the various and great evils that resulted from the republic engaging condottieri to fight its battles. He endeavoured to impress upon the signoria the advantages that would arise from the formation of a native militia; and, at length, succeeded. A law was passed for the enrolling the peasantry, and he was charged with the execution. His proceedings were conducted with patience and industry: his letters contain accounts of the obstacles he met from the prejudices of the people with whom he had to deal, the pains he took to obviate them, and the care he was at to select recruits who might be depended on.

1506. Ætat. 37.

Pope Julius, at this time, had conceived the project of reducing to obedience to the holy see all those towns which he considered as rightfully belonging to it. He obtained promises of aid from France; demanded it from Florence; and then set out on an expedition against Giovanni Bentivoglio, lord of Bologna. The Florentines were anxious, from economical motives, to defer sending their quota as long as they could; and they delegated their secretary to the court militant of Rome, to make excuses, and to watch over the progress of its arms. Machiavelli joined the court at Cività Castellana, and proceeded with it to Viterbo, Perugia, Urbino, and Imola. His letters during this legation are highly interesting; presenting a lively picture of the violence and impetuosity of Julius II., whose resolute and intelligent countenance Raphael has depicted on canvas in so masterly a manner. When Bentivoglio sent ambassadors to him, he actually scolded them — addressing them in public, and using, as the secretary says, the most angry and venomous expressions. Machiavelli adds: "Every one believes that, if he succeeds with regard to Bologna, he will lose no time in attempting greater things; and it is hoped that Italy will be preserved from him

1506.

who attempted to devour it (meaning the king of France). — Now, or never." Bentivoglio made some preparations to fortify Bologna; but, on the arrival of troops from France in aid of his enemy, his heart failed him, and he entered into a treaty, by which he preserved his private property; and then, with his wife and children, he abandoned the city he had so long reigned over, and took refuge in the duchy of Milan.

It was apprehended, at this time, that the emperor Maximilian would enter Italy with an army; and its various states sent ambassadors to him, to make favourable terms. The emperor had applied to Florence for money; and the republic sent Francesco Vettori to treat concerning the sum. They afterwards sent Machiavelli with their ultimatum. Both ambassador and secretary remained some time at Trent, waiting on the imperial court. Machiavelli employed himself in making observations on the state of the country, which he reduced to writing, in a brief "Account of Germany," on his return. He had before drawn up a similar account of the state of France.

1507. Ætat. 38.

1508. Ætat. 39.

The favourite object of Florence continued to be the reduction of Pisa. They purchased permission to attack it, from the kings of France and Spain, for a large sum of money. They besieged the town, dividing their army into three divisions, which blockaded it on three sides. The camps were each commanded by commissaries; and Machiavelli was sent thither to advise with and assist them. He passed from one camp to the other, to watch over the execution of the measures concerted for the siege; and, at one time, went to Piombino, to meet some deputies from Pisa, to arrange a treaty; but it came to nothing, and he returned to the army. He was much trusted by his government; and one of the commissaries, in writing to the signoria, observes, "Niccolò Machiavelli left us to-day, to review the troops of the other camp. I have directed him to return here, as you order; and I wish for nothing so much as to have him with me."

1509. Ætat. 40.

After a blockade of three months, Pisa surrendered. The Florentine republic behaved with the greatest generosity and humanity, and kept terms faithfully with a people who had injured them deeply, and were now wholly at their mercy.

Late in the same year, Machiavelli was employed to convey to Mantua the money composing a part of the subsidy of Florence to the emperor. After having discharged this office, he was ordered to repair to Verona, "or," as his instructions say, "wherever it seems best, to learn and communicate intelligence of the actual state of affairs. You will diligently write us word of every thing that happens worthy of notice, changing the place of your abode each day." That part of Italy was, at that time, the seat of a cruel and destructive war carried on between the emperor and the republic of Venice.

There existed a great spirit of enmity between Louis XII. and the pope. Julius II. was a violent and implacable man: his former suspicions against the French monarch were changed into excessive hatred. He was animated, also, by the desire of acquiring the glory of liberating Italy from the barbarians.* He sent troops against Genoa, which belonged to the king; Florence had been unable to refuse a safe passage for them through their territory: at the same time, fearing that this concession had offended Louis, they despatched Machiavelli to make their excuses. His letters, during this mission, disclose a curious system of bribery with regard to the ministers of the king. Cardinal d'Amboise had always shown himself friendly towards the republic; but this friendship had been purchased by gold. He died a month before the arrival of the secretary, who writes thus to the signoria:—"I had a long conversation with Alessandro Nasi concerning the donations, that I might understand how I ought to regulate myself with regard to them. He promised the chancellor Robertet and the marshal Chaumont d'Amboise to pay what is due to them, during the ensuing month of August. He told me, that he did not think that the

June, 1510. Ætat. 41.

* Guicciardini.

10,000 ducats, which were sent here for the cardinal d'Amboise, and which were not paid, on account of his death, could be saved for the city, except in one way; which was, by distributing them between the chancellor and marshal, as a portion of what is due to them."

He had an audience with the king at Blois. There was no Florentine ambassador at this time at the French court; Machiavelli was merely an envoy, with his title of secretary: the king, therefore, treated him with little ceremony; but he received him kindly, declaring his belief in the friendship of Florence, but desiring some further proof of it. "Secretary," he said, "I am not at enmity with the pope, nor any one else; but as new friendships and enmities arise each day, I wish your government to declare at once what they will do in my favour: and do you write word to them, that I offer all the forces of this kingdom, and to come in person, to save their state, if necessary."*

It was a difficult part for Florence, between France their ancient ally, and the stern vindictive pope. Some time before, during their difficulties, the republic had in some degree changed their form of government, and elected a gonfaloniere or doge for life, instead of changing every year; their choice had fallen on Pietro Soderini, a man of integrity, but feeble and timid. The king of France, pushed to the utmost by the pope, determined to call together a council, to dethrone him. Florence offered him the city of Pisa, for it to be held; and then, terrified by the menaces of Julius II., sent Machiavelli to Louis, to endeavour to recall this offer, but in vain. The council met, and the secretary was sent to attend upon it; it came to nothing, however. Only four cardinals met, they were ill treated by the people, discountenanced by the Italian clergy, and dissatisfied with themselves: after holding two sessions at Pisa, they transferred themselves to Milan.

1511. Ætat. 42.

* One of Louis's expressions is curious:—"If the pope will make any demonstration of friendship to me, though no bigger than the black of my nail, I will respond by a yard." The black of the nail of the king of France!

The result of this open attack of Louis upon the power of the pope animated the latter to renewed endeavours to expel the king from Italy: he formed a league with Spain and Venice against the French power, and a disastrous war was the consequence. At one time the French obtained a victory at Ravenna, which was detrimental to them, since Gaston de Foix and 10,000 of their bravest soldiers were left on the field of battle. Florence remained neuter during this struggle, but the republic was accused of a secret partiality for France, and its punishment was resolved upon at the diet of Mantua.

1512. Ætat. 43.

The Medici family still hovered round Florence, desirous of reinstating themselves in their ancient seats, and of reassuming the power enjoyed by their forefathers. Piero de' Medici had fallen in the battle of the Gariglano, some years before; he left a son named Lorenzo, and a daughter, Clarice. His brother the cardinal Giovanni had, while he perceived his cause hopeless, quitted Italy, and visited many parts of France and Germany, nor returned to Rome till the elevation of Julius II.: from that time he took an important part in the public affairs of Italy, and was appointed legate during the war. His influence was exerted during the diet of Mantua, and the punishment of Florence was decreed to consist in the overthrow of the existing government, and the restoration of the Medici. The details of the expedition of the allies against the republic are related by Machiavelli in a private letter, which, though highly interesting, is too long to extract.* The gonfaloniere Soderini exerted some energy at the commencement of the struggle, but was unable to hold out long. The army, under the command of the viceroy of Naples, entered Tuscany, and taking Prato by assault, massacred its inhabitants without respect for age or sex. The Florentines were alarmed by this cruelty, and resolved to submit. Soderini and his partisans quitted the city and repaired to Siena, and the Medici entered Florence. The cardinal was at their head, accompanied by his

* Lettere Familiari, VIII.

younger brother Giuliano, his nephew Lorenzo, son of Piero, and his cousin Julius de' Medici, descended from the brother of Cosmo.

Thus fell a government which Machiavelli had served faithfully for fourteen years. His labours had been great during this period, the honours he enjoyed of no conspicuous nature, and his emoluments were very slender. When on his various missions, he was allowed only a trifling addition to his salary as secretary, which frequently was not commensurate to his increased expenditure, and afforded no room for luxury or display. "It is true," he writes to the signoria from Verona, "that I spend more than the ducat a day that you allow me for my expenses; nevertheless, now, as heretofore, I shall be satisfied with whatever you please to give." There was nothing mercenary in Machiavelli's disposition, and he seems perfectly content with continuing in the office he enjoyed, without rising higher. He went on his legations always in the character of envoy, at such times when the republic thought it best to treat by means of a delegate less costly and of less authority than an ambassador. Thus his letters often ask to be replaced by a minister entrusted with more extensive powers. Evidently, throughout his active career, he had the good of his country only at heart. He was steady, faithful, and industrious: he recommended himself to the powers to whom he was sent by his intelligence and his want of pretension. Up to the moment of Soderini's exile, he acted for the Gonfaloniere and his council. His last office was to gather the militia together, for the purpose of checking the advance of the viceroy through the passages of the Apennines. He was too late, and his forces were too scanty; for Pietro Soderini, timid and temporising, did not give credit to the extent of danger that menaced him till the last moment. His fear of appearing ambitious, and making himself obnoxious to his fellow citizens, prevented him from taking those resolute measures necessary for his safety: but Machiavelli continued faithful to him, till

the moment he quitted the city. Then he turned his eyes to the new government and the Medici, who, though introduced under bad auspices, showed no disposition to tyrannise over their fellow-citizens. He was poor, and had a large family; and, though a lover of liberty, was not personally attached to the fallen Gonfaloniere. The forms of government continued the same, and he was still secretary to the Council of Ten. He desired and expected to continue in office, and to exercise functions, which could not be otherwise than beneficial to his country.

His hopes were deceived: he was considered by the Medici as too firm an adherent of the adverse party. He was deprived of his place, and sentenced not to quit for one year the territory of the republic, nor to enter the palace of government. But this was not the end, it was only the beginning, of his disasters. Shortly after, the enemies of the Medici conspired against them: the conspiracy was discovered, and two of the chief among them were beheaded. Machiavelli was supposed to be implicated in the plot: he was thrown into prison, and put to the torture. No confession could be extorted from him, and it is possible that he was entirely innocent of the alleged crime. He was soon after comprised in the act of amnesty published by the new pope. On the death of Julius II., cardinal de' Medici was elevated to the pontifical throne; he assumed the name of Leo X., and signalised his exaltation by this act of clemency. On his liberation Machiavelli wrote to his friend Francesco Vettori, the Florentine ambassador at the papal court, who had exerted himself in his favour, in these terms:—"You have heard from Paolo Vettori that I am come out of prison, to the universal joy of this city. I will not relate the long story of my misfortunes; and will only say, that fate has done her utmost to bring them about; but, thank God, they are at an end. I hope to be safe for the future, partly because I intend to be more cautious, and partly because the times are more liberal and less suspicious."

1513. Ætat. 44.

Francesco Vettori, on hearing of his liberation, had already written, and their letters crossed on the road. "Honoured friend," he wrote, "I have suffered greater grief during these last eight months than I ever endured during the course of my whole life before: but the worst was when I knew that you were arrested, as I feared that, without cause or fault of yours, you would be put to the torture, as was really the case. I am sorry that I could not assist you, as you had a right to expect; but as soon as the pope was created, I asked him no favour except your liberation, which I am glad to find had already taken place. And now, dear friend, I have to entreat you to take heart during this persecution, as you have done on other occasions: and I hope, as things are now tranquil, and their (*the Medici*) good fortune transcends all imagination, that you will soon be permitted to quit Tuscany. If I remain here, I wish you would come to me, for as long a time as you like."

"Rome, 15th of March, 1513.

Machiavelli replies: —

"Your very kind letter has made me forget my past disasters; and although I was convinced of the affection you bore me, yet your letter delighted me. I thank you heartily, and pray God that I may be able to show my gratitude to your advantage. You may derive this pleasure from my misfortunes, that I think well of myself for the courage with which I bore them, so that I feel myself of more value than I before gave myself credit for: and if my masters, the magnificent Giuliano and your Paolo, to whom I owe my life, will raise me from the earth, I think they will hereafter have cause to congratulate themselves. If they will not, I shall live as I have done before; for I was born poor, and I learnt to suffer before I learnt to enjoy. If you remain at Rome, I will spend some time with you, as you advise. All our friends salute you. Every day we assemble at some lady's house, so to recover our strength.

Yesterday we went to see the procession in the house of Sandra di Pero, and thus we pass our time during this universal rejoicing, enjoying the remnant of life, which appears to me like a dream. Valete.

"Florence, 18th of March, 1513.

From this time till the end of his life we possess a series of Machiavelli's private correspondence, of the most valuable kind. His chief friend was Vettori, who continued to reside as ambassador at Rome. Some of their letters are long political discussions, which Vettori drew Machiavelli in to write, that he might show them to pope Leo X., and excite him to admire and employ his talents. His endeavours were without success. Machiavelli continued for many years to live in obscurity, sometimes at Florence, sometimes at his country-house at San Casciano, a bathing town among the hills, south of Pisa. His letters from Florence contain the gossip of their acquaintance,—amusing anecdotes that paint the manners, while they give us no exalted idea of the morals, of the Italians of those days. Machiavelli himself had no poetry nor delicacy of imagination: his feelings were impetuous, and his active mind required some passion or pursuit to fill it. He bitterly laments the inaction of his life, and expresses an ardent desire to be employed. Meanwhile, he created occupation for himself; and it is one of the lessons that we may derive from becoming acquainted with the feelings and actions of celebrated men, to learn that this very period, during which Machiavelli repined at the neglect of his contemporaries, and the tranquillity of his life, was that during which his fame took root, and which brought his name down to us. He occupied his leisure in writing those works which have occasioned his immortality. No one would have searched the Florentine archives for his public correspondence, acute and instructive as it is, nor would his private letters now lie before us, if he had not established a name through his other writings. He wrote them to bring himself into

present notice, and to show the Medici the worth of that man whom they dishonoured and neglected.

One of his letters from the country to Vettori, is so interesting, and so necessary to the appreciation of his character, that we give it at length: —

"*Tarde non furon mai grazie divine.* Divine favours never come too late. I say this, because it seemed to me that I had, not lost, but mislaid your kindness, you having remained so long without writing to me, that I wondered what might be the cause. Your last of the 23d dissipated my doubts, and I am delighted to find how quietly and regularly you fulfil your office. I advise you to go on thus; for whosoever neglects his own affairs for those of others, injures himself and gets no thanks. As fortune chooses to dispose of our lives, let her alone. Do not exert yourself, but wait till she urges other men to do something, when it will be time for you to come forward, and for me to say, Here I am. I cannot thank you in any way except by giving you an account of my life here; and you may see whether it is worth exchanging for yours.

"I remain at my country house; and since the last events I have not spent in all twenty days in Florence. I have hitherto been killing thrushes. Rising before day-light I prepared my snares, and set off with a bundle of cages at my back, so that I resembled Geta, when he returns from the harbour with Amphytrion's books. I took two or at most seven thrushes each day.* Thus passed September, since when, to my great annoyance, this diversion has failed me; and my life has been such as I will now detail. I rise with the sun, and go to a wood of mine, which I am cutting; where I remain a couple of hours, reviewing the work of the past day, and talking with the woodcutters, who are always in trouble either for themselves or their neighbours. I have a thousand entertaining things to tell you, which have happened with re-

* Machiavelli's bird-catching need not excite surprise. It is the common pastime of Italian nobles of the present day, to go out with an owl for a decoy, to shoot larks, thrushes, &c.

gard to this wood*, between me and Frosino da Panzaro and others, who wanted to buy some of the wood. Frosino sent for several loads without saying a word to me; and on payment wanted to keep back ten livres, which he says he ought to have had from me four years ago, having won it at play, at the house of Antonio Guicciardini. I began to play the devil, and to accuse the carrier of cheating, on which G. Machiavelli interfered, and brought us to agree. When the north wind blew, Battista Guicciardini, Filippo Ginori, Tommaso del Bene, and several other citizens took a load. I promised some to all, and sent one to Tommaso, half of which went to Florence, because he and his wife and children were there to receive it. So, seeing I gained nothing by it, I told the others that I had no more wood, which made them all very angry, especially Battista, who numbers this among other state troubles. When I leave the wood I go to a fountain, where I watch my bird nets with a book in hand; either Dante or Petrarch, or one of the minor Latin poets — Tibullus, Ovid, or one similar. I read the accounts of their loves; I think of my own, and for a while enjoy these thoughts. Then I go to the inn on the road side; I talk with the passers by; ask the news of their villages; I hear many things, and remark on the various tastes and fancies of men. Meanwhile the hour of dinner arrives, and I dine with my family on such food as my poor house and slight patrimony afford. When I have dined, I return to the inn; where I usually find the host, a butcher, a miller, and two kiln men: with these I associate for the rest of the day, playing at cricca and tric-trac. We have a thousand squabbles; angry words are used, often

* Critics have given themselves the trouble to imagine and explain a mysterious meaning here, and to suppose that Machiavelli's wood is an allegory of the political labyrinth: but there is no foundation for this idea. Machiavelli never recurred to allegory to express his political opinions; and we have twenty letters of his to Vettori, discussing the intentions and enterprises of the various European princes, without any attempt at mystery or covert allusion. At the same time we have also twenty letters full of anecdotes as insignificant as those of the wood. He was fond of minute details, and lively, though trifling, stories concerning himself and his friends.

about a farthing, and we wrangle so loudly, that you might hear us at San Casciano. Immersed in this vulgarity, I exhaust my spirits, and give free course to my evil fortune; letting her tread me thus under foot, with the hope that she will at last become ashamed of herself.

"When evening comes I return home, and shut myself up in my study. Before I make my appearance in it, I take off my rustic garb, soiled with mud and dirt, and put on a dress adapted for courts or cities. Thus fitly habited I enter the antique resorts of the ancients; where, being kindly received, I feed on that food which alone is mine, and for which I was born. For an interval of four hours I feel no annoyance; I forget every grief, I neither fear poverty nor death, but am totally immersed. As Dante says, 'No one learns a science unless he remembers what he is taught;' so have I noted down that store of knowledge which I have collected from this conversation; and have composed a little work on princely governments, in which I analyse the subject as deeply as I can, discussing what a principality is; how many kinds there are; in what way they are acquired; how kept; how lost: and if any devise of mine ever pleased you, this will not be displeasing. It ought to be acceptable to princes, and chiefly to a new prince, wherefore I address it to Giuliano de' Medici. Filippo Casavecchia has seen it, and can describe the thing to you, and recount the discussions we have had together about it. I am still adding to and polishing it.

"Your excellency desires that I should leave this place to go and enjoy myself with you. I will do so assuredly; but am detained by some affairs, which will keep me here about seven weeks. The only thing that causes me to hesitate is, that the Soderini are in your town; and I should be obliged to see and visit them; and I should be afraid on my return that, instead of alighting at my own door, I should alight at the gates of the prison; because, although our person here (*Giuliano de' Medici*) has secure foundation, and is fixed, yet

he is new and suspicious; and there are not wanting meddling fellows, like Paolo Bertini, who would draw upon others and leave me all the trouble. Preserve me from this fear, and I will certainly come to you.

"I have talked with Philip concerning my little work, whether I shall dedicate it or not; and if I do, whether I shall present it myself, or send it to you. If I do not dedicate it, I fear that Giuliano will not even read it, but that Ardinghelli will get the honour of it. Necessity drives me to present it, for I pine away, and cannot remain long thus without becoming despicable through poverty. I wish these signori Medici would begin to make use of me, even if I commenced by rolling a stone, for if I did not afterwards gain their favour I should despise myself. And, therefore, if this book were read, they would see that, for the fifteen years during which I studied the arts of government, I neither slept nor played; and every one ought to be glad to make use of one who has learned experience at the expense of others. Nor need they doubt my fidelity; for having proved myself trustworthy hitherto, I would not alter now: he who has been faithful for forty-three years, as I have, cannot change his nature; and my poverty is a witness of my honour and disinterestedness.

"I wish you would tell me what you think on these matters, and so farewell. — *Si felix.*

"NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI.

"10th of December, 1513."

The expressions in this letter appear sufficiently clear, that he wrote "The Prince," for the purpose of recommending himself to the Medici, and of being employed by them. His sons afterwards declared to our countryman, cardinal Pole, that he alleged his intention to be, to induce the Medici to render themselves so hateful to Florence, by acting on the maxims he laid down, as to cause them to be exiled anew. There is no trace of this idea in his private correspondence. Giuliano de' Medici was an amiable prince,

and he often praises him highly. It is true that his work is dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici; but this change was occasioned by the death of Giuliano. And even of Lorenzo, who was unpopular, Machiavelli writes thus to Vettori: — "I must give you some account of the proceedings of the Magnifico Lorenzo, which have hitherto been such as to fill the city with hope; so that every one begins to see his grandfather revived in him. He is diligent and affable, and causes himself to be loved and respected, rather than feared." Nor can it be believed that Machiavelli was so devoid of understanding, as to fancy that he could dupe men as intelligent as Leo X. and cardinal Julius, who were the heads of the family, by so barefaced an artifice. Besides that, the authority of the Medici was maintained by foreign arms, and the citizens were already very willing to get rid of them, as was proved a very few years after. Yet his real intentions form a question, perhaps, never to be decided. On one hand, the treatise is so broad and unplausible in its recommendations, that it is difficult to suppose him in earnest; and, on the other, it is so dry, and has in so small a degree the air of irony, that it can scarcely be regarded as a satire. If it is, it is ill done, since men have not yet agreed whether it is one or not.

Let us turn to the work itself, however, and present some analysis of a treatise which has been the subject of so much disquisition. Machiavelli, in the letter given above, professes to have written his book for the instruction of new princes, — *principi nuovi*, — sovereigns lately raised to power. Italy was then divided into small states, governed by a variety of lords. Sometimes one among them endeavoured, like Cæsar Borgia, to conquer a number of these, and to unite them into one state. Machiavelli taught how a prince thus situated might acquire and confirm his power. He adduces the example of the Duke of Valence, saying, "He does not know how to give better precepts to a new sovereign

than those afforded by a view of Borgia's conduct." * He describes the course of his policy, applauds the perfidy with which he destroyed the confederates of Magione, and holds up the death of Ramiro d' Orco as a laudable proceeding. He allows, that perseverance in cruelty on the part of a prince becomes unendurable. "And, therefore," he says, "a prince should determine to execute all his acts of blood at once, so that he may not be obliged each day to renew them; but give security to his subjects, and gain them by benefits. Injuries ought to be done at once, because thus they are less felt, and offend less; but benefits ought to be bestowed gradually, that they may produce a profounder impression."

The reader may judge whether this maxim is sagacious, and seriously enjoined; or mischievous, and therefore brought forward with sinister and sarcastic motives.

The first fourteen chapters are taken up by considering the various modes by which a prince acquires power — either by force of arms, or the favour of the citizens; being imposed on them by the aristocracy, or raised by the affection of the people. In the course of these considerations he remarks (chap. v.), that "he who becomes master of a city habituated to freedom, and does not destroy it, must expect to be destroyed by it; because it will, in every rebellion, take refuge in the name of liberty and its ancient rights, the memory of which can never be extinguished by time or benefits." The fifteenth chapter is headed, — "Concerning those things for which men, and principally sovereigns are praised or blamed." He begins by saying, — "It now remains to be seen what government and treatment a prince ought to observe with his subjects and friends. I know many people have written on this topic; and I expect, therefore, to be accused of presumption, in differ-

* When Leo X. formed a duchy, of which he made his nephew Lorenzo duke, Machiavelli, in a private letter to Vettori, discusses the government that he ought to adopt. In this letter he again adduces the example of Cæsar Borgia, saying, that were he a new prince, he would imitate all his proceedings. This of course only alludes to the civil government of Romagna, which was equitable and popular.

ing from the opinions of others in my view of the subject. But, it being my intention to write what is useful to those who rule, it appears to me better to follow up the truth of things, than to bring forward imaginary ideas." He adds, "A man who, instead of acting for the best, acts as he ought, seeks rather his ruin than his preservation. For he who resolves on all occasions to adhere to what is virtuous, must be destroyed by the many who are not virtuous. Hence it is necessary that a prince, who would maintain his power, should learn not to be virtuous, but to adapt the morality of his actions to the dictates of necessity." He then enumerates the good and bad qualities for which sovereigns are distinguished, and adds: — "I know that every one will confess that it would be laudable for a prince to possess all the above-mentioned qualities, which are considered virtuous; but human nature does not allow of this. It is necessary, however, that he should be prudent, and avoid the infamy of those vices which would deprive him of power; and it would be well if he avoided the others also, if it were possible; but if it be not possible, he may yield to them with less danger. And also he must not hesitate to incur the reputation of those vices, through which his government may be preserved; for, on deep consideration, it will be found that there is a line of conduct which appears right, but which leads to ruin: and there is another which appears vicious, but from which security and prosperity flow."

And this is what is called Machiavelian policy.

He goes on to show, that generosity, which is supported by extortion, must injure a prince more than parsimony, which makes no demands on the subject; he therefore advises a prince to gain a character for liberality, rather by being prodigal of the wealth of others than his own. "For," he says, "nothing consumes itself so much as liberality; for while you use it, you lose your power of so doing, and you become poor and despicable; or, to escape from poverty, grow rapa-

cious and odious. A prince ought carefully to guard against becoming odious and contemptible: and liberality is one of the good qualities most likely to lead to this result, and therefore to be avoided."

He then treats of "Cruelty and clemency, and whether it is better to be feared or loved." He says;—"Every sovereign ought to desire to be esteemed merciful, and not cruel. Nevertheless, he ought to take care to what use he puts his mercy. Cæsar Borgia was considered cruel; nevertheless his cruelty subdued Romagna, and united it, and reduced it to peace and obedience. A prince, therefore, ought not to fear the reputation of cruelty, if by it he preserves his subjects tranquil and faithful. A few examples will be more merciful than tolerating disorders, through a compassion, which gives rise to assassinations and disturbances; for these injure the community, while the execution of offenders is injurious to individuals only." He then enters on a discussion of whether it is better for a prince to be loved or feared. He decides for the latter; for, he says, "Love is a duty, which, as men are wicked, is continually transgressed; but fear arises from the dread of punishment, which is never lost sight of." Nothing can be more false than this. Men like to be benefited even more than they dislike being injured; and love is a more universal passion than terror. He continues, "Still a prince, while he seeks to be feared, must avoid being hated— for fear is very distinct from hatred. And he ought always to avoid seizing on the goods of his subjects. He may, as far as is justified by the cause given, proceed against the life of an individual; but let him not touch the possessions. For men more easily forget the death of a father than the loss of patrimony." After stating this diabolical and false maxim in all its native deformity, he proceeds to consider the propriety of a sovereign's preserving his good faith: remarking, that though good faith and integrity are praiseworthy in a prince, experience in his own time shows those statesmen to have achieved the greatest things, who held truth in small

esteem: — "For there are two ways of acting,—one by law and the other by force; the one for men, the other for animals; but when the first does not succeed, it is necessary to have recourse to the second; and a sovereign ought to know how to put the animal man to good use. A prudent prince cannot and ought not to observe faith, when such observance would injure him, or the occasions for which he pledged himself are at an end. A sovereign, therefore, need not possess all the virtues I have mentioned; but it is necessary that he should appear so to do. A prince cannot always practise the qualities which are esteemed good, being often obliged to maintain his power by acting against the dictates of humanity and religion. He must act conscientiously when he can; but when obliged, he ought to be capable of doing ill. A prince ought to take great care not to say a word that is not animated by good feeling, and he ought to appear full of pity, integrity, humanity, and religion; and there is nothing so necessary as that he should appear to attend to the last. Every one sees what you seem; few know what you are." Very false, notwithstanding its plausibility: children even have an instinct for detecting false appearances.

He tells princes to cherish the affections of the people; as, he says, if loved by his subjects, he need fear no conspiracy; but, hated by them, he has every thing to dread. He avers, also, that it is easier for a newly raised prince to make friends of those who opposed him, than to preserve the good will of his own partisans. He goes on to give much advice concerning the choice of ministers and courtiers, and concerning the influence of fortune over states; and shows how concord and constancy are the only modes by which a government can preserve itself during the variations of fortune; and that, above all, it is necessary not to submit timidly, but to command her by audacity and resolution.

He concludes by an exhortation to the Italians to drive the barbarians, French, Spaniards, and Germans, from their country. "It appears to me," he says,

" considering all things, that there is an admirable opening for a new prince to introduce another state of things into Italy. Does not the whole land pray God to send her some one to free her from the barbarians? And is she not ready to follow any banner, if some one prince would display it? Nor do we see any house from which she can hope so much as yours (*that of Lorenzo de' Medici*) favoured as it is by God and the church; being at the head of which, it may lead us to this redemption. The justice of your cause is great, and the war will be just, and necessary, and pious. God, also, has opened the way for you. The Italians, however, must accustom themselves to the exercise of arms, if they would defend their country from foreign invaders. The infantry of other kingdoms have their defects: the Spaniards cannot stand the impetus of cavalry; the Swiss would fear any infantry which should show itself as strong as themselves. Let the Italians, therefore, form an army of foot that shall possess none of these defects, and which shall be able to resist the shock of both horse and foot; and this must be done by a novel style of command, by introducing which, a new ruler will acquire reputation and power. You ought not, therefore, to lose this opportunity of appearing as the deliverer of Italy. I cannot express with what affection such a one would be received in those provinces which have suffered from the inundation of foreign troops; with what thirst of vengeance, what resolute fidelity; with what piety, and what grateful tears he would be followed. What gates would be shut against him? what people would refuse to render him obedience? what Italian would hesitate to submit to his rule? Every one abhors the authority of the barbarians. Let, therefore, your illustrious house assume this enterprise, animated by that hope which a just cause inspires, so that your country may rise triumphant under your auspices."

There is nothing that is not patriotic and praiseworthy in these exhortations; and they were such, more-

over, as were likely to gain the hearts of the Italians. If, therefore, he is previously sarcastic, he is serious here; and the mixture renders still more enigmatic the question of the aim he had in view in this work.

Besides "The Prince," Machiavelli wrote, at this time, his "Essays on the first Decade of Livy." These are considered by their author as his best work; an opinion confirmed by the learned Italians of the present day. They breathe a purely republican spirit, and have for their scope to demonstrate how the greatness of Rome resulted from the equal laws of the commonwealth, and the martial character of its citizens. He dedicated them to his friends Zanobi Buondelmonte, and Cosimo Rucellai, who were the patrons of the academy of the Rucellai gardens, a society set on foot by the father of Cosimo, for the support of the Platonic philosophy, and whose youthful followers were all devoted to liberty.

"The Art of War" was also written at this time, as well as his two comedies, his "Belfegor," and "Life of Castruccio Castracani." The "Belfegor" has laid him open to the supposition that he was not happy in his married life: but there is no foundation for this notion. He was, early in life, married to Marietta Corsini, and had five children. He always mentions his wife with affection and respect in his letters, and gives tokens, in his will, of the perfect confidence he reposed in her. "Belfegor" has always been a popular tale: it is written with great spirit, and possesses the merit of novelty and wit. His comedies are thought highly of by the Italians. The "Mandragola," licentious as it is, was a great favourite. Leo X. caused the actors and scenic decorations to be brought from Florence to Rome, that he might see it represented; and Guicciardini invited the author to come to get it up at Modena, and tells him to bring with him a favourite singer and actress, named La Barbara, to give it more effect: so early in Italian history do we find mention of prime donne, and of the court paid to them.

But all this diligent authorship did not satisfy the active mind of Machiavelli: he tried to school himself to content, and says, in one of his letters to Vettori, "I am arrived at not desiring any thing again with passion." But this was a deceit which he practised on himself. "If I saw you," he writes again to his friend, "I should fill your head with castles in the air; because fortune has so arranged, that, not being able to discourse concerning the silk trade, nor the woollen trade, nor of gains nor losses, I must talk of the art of government." — "While I read and re-read your disquisitions on politics, I forget my adversity, and appear to have entered again on those public affairs, in prosecuting which I vainly endured so much fatigue, and spent so much time."

The endeavours of Vettori, who was attached to the Medici, to gain favour for his friend with Leo X., were long ineffectual; and Machiavelli showed symptoms of despair. "It seems," he writes, "that I am to continue in my hole, without finding a man who will remember my services, or believe that I can be good for any thing. It is impossible that I can remain long thus. I pine away; and see that, if God will not be more favourable to me, I shall be obliged to leave my home, and become secretary to some petty officer, if I can do nothing else; or exile myself into some desert to teach children to read. I shall feign that I am dead; and my family will get on much better without me; as I am the cause of expense— being accustomed to spend, and unable to do otherwise. I do not write this to induce you to take trouble for my sake; but to ease my mind, so as not to recur again to so odious a subject."

1514. Ætat. 45.

Yet all his letters are not complaining. The spirit of "Belfegor" and "La Mandragola" animates many of them. "We are now grave," he writes, "and now frivolous; but we ought not to be blamed for this variety, as in it we imitate nature, which is full of change."

The first use to which the Medici put him, was when Leo X. had placed the cardinal Julius over Florence, and wished to remodel the government. He addressed

1519. Ætat. 50.

himself to Machiavelli for his advice; and the latter wrote, in reply, his "Essay on the Reform of the Government of Florence, Written at the request of Leo X." Soon after Leo died, and the cardinal Julius expected to have been elected pope. He was disappointed, and returned to Florence to confirm his authority. The death of Leo awakened the hopes of the opposite party; and a conspiracy was at this juncture entered into by the nephew of the gonfaloniere Soderini and the young philosophers of the Rucellai, to expel the Medici. It was discovered; two ringleaders were put to death, and the rest fled.

Sismondi hastily assumes the fact, that Machiavelli was implicated in this plot; but, on the contrary, there seems every proof that he took no part in it whatever; and at this very time he was again employed by the reigning powers. The Minor Friars were assembled in chapter at Carpi, in the duchy of Modena. The government of Florence wished to obtain from them, that their republic should be formed by their order, into a distinct province, separated from the rest of Tuscany. At the instance of cardinal Julius, Machiavelli was charged with this negotiation. A few days after his arrival at Carpi, the council of the company of the woollen trade commissioned him to procure a good preacher for the metropolitan church at Florence, during the ensuing Lent. His letters to his employers, on these occasions, are as serious and methodical as during any other legation; but in his heart he disdained the petty occupation. His friend Francesco Guicciardini, the celebrated historian, was then governor of Modena; and several amusing letters passed between them while Machiavelli was at Carpi. Guicciardini writes: "When I read your titles of ambassador to republics and friars, and consider the number of kings and princes with whom you have formerly negotiated, I am reminded of Lysander, who, after so many victories, had the office of distributing provisions to the army he had formerly commanded; and I say that, though the aspects of men,

1521. Ætat. 52.

and the exterior appearances of things, are changed, the same circumstances perpetually return, and we witness no event that did not take place in times gone by."

Machiavelli replies with greater gaiety:—"I can tell you that, on the arrival of your messenger, with a bow to the ground, and a declaration that he was sent express and in haste, every one arose with so many bows and so much clamour, that all things seemed turned topsy-turvy. Many persons asked me the news; and I, to increase my importance, said that the emperor was expected at Trent, that the Swiss were assembling a new diet, and that the king of France was going to have an interview with the king of England; so that all stood open-mouthed and cap in hand to hear me. I am surrounded by a circle now, while writing, who, seeing me occupied upon so long a letter, wonder and regard me as one possessed; and I, to excite their surprise, pause now and then, and look very wise; and they are deceived. If they knew what I was writing, their wonder would increase. Pray send one of your men again; and let him hurry, and arrive in a heat, so that these people may be more and more astonished; for thus you will do me honour, and the exercise will be good for the horse at this season of the year. I would now write you a longer letter, if I were willing to tire out my imagination; but I wish to preserve it fresh for to-morrow. Remember me, and farewell.

"Your servant,

"NICCOLÒ MACCHIAVELLI,

"Ambassador to the Minor Friars.

"Carpi, 17th of May, 1521."

This letter, as well as well as one of Guicciardini's on this occasion, has been mutilated by a person, whose scrupulous good taste was offended by the tone of some of the pleasantries. That was not the age of decorum either in speech or action.

The cardinal Julius had commissioned Machiavelli to write the history of Florence, and he proceeded in it

1524. Ætat. 55.

as far as the death of Lorenzo de' Medici. He writes to Guicciardini, on the 30th of August, 1524, "I am staying in the country, occupied in writing my history; and I would give fivepence—I will not say more—to have you here, that I might show you where I am, as in certain particulars I wish to know whether you would be offended most by my elevated or humble manner of treating them. I try, nevertheless, to write so as, by telling the truth, to displease no one."

1526. Ætat. 57.

Cardinal Julius had now become pope, under the title of Clement VII. He paid Machiavelli a regular but very limited salary as historiographer. Having brought it down to the time of the death of Lorenzo de' Medici, he made a volume of it, and dedicated it to the pope. On this occasion he writes to Guicciardini, "I have received a gratification of 100 ducats for my history. I am beginning again; and relieve myself by blaming the princes who have done every thing they can to bring us to this pass." He signs himself to this letter, Niccolò Machiavelli, historian, comic and tragic author,—*istorico, comico, et tragico.*

The condition of Italy was at this period most deplorable. The French had been driven from Italy after the battle of Pavia; but no sooner was that power humbled, than the various states began to regard with alarm the ascendency of the emperor Charles V. A confederacy was formed by the chief among them, for the purpose of holding this powerful monarch in check; and he sent the constable Bourbon to Milan to preserve that duchy. Thus there were two armies in the heart of the peninsula, both unpaid, both lawless, and destructive to friends as well as to enemies. The emperor sent no supplies to Bourbon; and the pope, who was at the head of the Italian league, showed himself so timid and vacillating, and, above all, so penurious, as to bring down ruin on his cause.

Bourbon was unable to keep his troops together, except by promises of plunder; and he led them southward by slow advances, with the intention of enriching

them by the sack of Florence or Rome. The danger was nearest to the former city; and Clement VII. considered it requisite to put it in a state of defence. Machiavelli was employed to inspect the progress of the fortifications. He executed his task diligently, and, as was his wont, put his whole heart and soul into his occupation. "My head is so full of bulwarks," he says, "that nothing else will enter it."

The imperial army continued to advance; and the Florentine government, in great alarm, sent Machiavelli to Guicciardini, governor of Modena, and lieutenant-general of the papal forces, to take measures with regard to the best method of securing the republic; and it was agreed that, if the imperialists advanced, the forces of the church should be sent in aid of Florence. The winter season and other circumstances delayed the operations of the imperialists, but early in the following spring the danger grew imminent. Bourbon had arrived with his army to the vicinity of Bologna; and there was every likelihood that his army would traverse Tuscany, and attack Florence itself. Machiavelli again went to Parma, to advise with Guicciardini, to watch over the movements of the hostile army, and to send frequent intelligence to Florence of their proceedings. The republic wished that the troops of the Italian league should assemble at Bologna, and be on the spot to guard the frontiers of Tuscany.

1527. Ætat. 58.

The imperialists continued to advance: the pope, alarmed by their progress, entered into a treaty for peace with the emperor; but it was uncertain whether the army under Bourbon would agree to it. Machiavelli continued for some weeks at Parma, and then accompanied Guicciardini to Bologna, watching their movements. It was doubtful what road they would take on proceeding to Rome; but the chances still were, that they would pass through Tuscany. The army now removed to Castel San Giovanni, ten miles from Bologna, where they remained some days, detained by the bad weather, and overflowing of the low lands,

caused by the melting of the snow, which had fallen heavily around Bologna: they were in danger, while thus forced to delay, of being reduced to great straits for want of provisions. "If this weather lasts two days longer," Machiavelli wrote to his government, "the duke of Ferrara may, sleeping and sitting, put an end to the war."

A truce was concluded between Clement VII. and the ministers of Charles V.; but it was not acceded to by Bourbon and his army. The pope, however, unaware of this circumstance, dismissed his troops, and remained wholly unguarded. The imperialists, rendered unanimous through the effects of hunger and poverty, continued to advance. They entered Tuscany; but, without staying to attack Florence, they hurried on by forced marches and falling unexpectedly on Rome, took it by assault; and that dreadful sack took place, which filled the city with death and misery, and spread alarm throughout Italy. Machiavelli followed the Italian army, as it advanced to deliver the pope, who was besieged in the Castel Sant' Angelo. From the environs of Rome he repaired to Cività Vecchia, where Andrea Doria commanded a fleet; and from him he obtained the means of repairing by sea to Leghorn. Before embarking, he received intelligence of the revolution of Florence. On hearing of the taking of Rome, on the 6th of May, the republicans rose against the Medici; and they were forced to quit the city. The government was changed on the 16th of May, and things were restored to the state they were in 1512.

Machiavelli returned to Florence full of hope. He considered that the power was now in the hands of his friends, and that he should again enter on public life under prosperous auspices. His hopes were disappointed —public feeling was against him: his previous services, his imprisonment and torture, were forgotten; while it was remembered that, since 1513, he had been continually aiming at getting employed by the Medici, against whom the popular feeling was violently excited. He had succeeded at last; and was actually in their service,

when they were driven from the city. These circumstances rendered him displeasing to men who considered themselves the deliverers of their country. Machiavelli was disappointed by their neglect, and deeply wounded by their distrust. He fell ill; and taking some pills, to which he was in the habit of having recourse when indisposed, he grew worse, and died two days after—on the 22d of June, 1527—in the 59th year of his age.

Paul Jovius, his old enemy, insinuates that he took the medicine for the sake of destroying himself,—a most clumsy sort of suicide,—but there is no foundation whatever for this report.* His wife Marietta, the daughter of Ludovico Corsini, survived him; and he left five children,—four sons and one daughter. He had made a will in 1511, when secretary of the republic; and in 1522 he made another, which only differs in details—the spirit is the same. He leaves his "beloved wife" an addition to her dower, and divides the rest of his slight fortune between his children. Marietta is left guardian and trustee of the younger children—to continue till they were nineteen—with a clause forbidding them to demand any account of money spent; and mentions that he reposes entire confidence in her.

Machiavelli was of middle stature, rather thin, and of olive complexion. He was gay in conversation, obliging with his friends, and fond of the arts. He had readiness of wit; and it is related of him, that, being reproved for the maxims of his "Prince," he replied—"If I taught princes how to tyrannise, I also taught the people how to destroy them." He probably developes in these words, the secret of his writings. He was willing

* He had before recommended these pills to Guicciardini, saying that he himself never took more than two at a time. They are chiefly composed of aloes. There is a letter from his son Pietro to Francesco Nelli, professor at Pisa, which relates concisely the manner of his death:—

"Dearest Francesco,—I cannot refrain from tears on being obliged to inform you of the death of our father Niccolò, which took place on the 22d of this month, of colic, produced by a medicine which he took on the 20th. He allowed himself to be confessed by Frate Matteo, who remained with him till his death. Our father has left us in the greatest poverty, as you know. When you return here, I will tell you many things by word of mouth. I am in haste, and will say no more than farewell.

"Your relation,

"PIETRO MACHIAVELLI."

to *teach* both parties, but his heart was with the republicans. He was buried at the church of Santa Croce at Florence; and soon after his death a violent sensation was created against his works — principally through an attack on the "Prince," by our own countryman, cardinal Pole. They were interdicted by successive popes, and considered to contain principles subversive of religion and humanity.

It was not till the lapse of more than two centuries that a re-action of feeling took place — and the theory was brought forward, that he wrote for the sake of inducing the Medici to render themselves odious to their countrymen, so as to bring ruin and exile again on their house. In 1782, the Florentines were induced by the representations of an English nobleman, lord Cowper, to pay honour to their countryman, and set on foot a complete edition of his works; which Leopold, grand duke of Tuscany, permitted to be printed; and which was preceded by an eulogium written by Baldelli. In 1787, a monument was erected over his remains, on which was carved the following inscription: —

Tanto Nomini nullum par Elogium
Nicolaus Machiavelli.
Obiit Anno A. P. V. MDXXVII.

There remains no descendant of Machiavelli. His grandson, by his only daughter, Giuliano Ricci, left several writings relative to his illustrious ancestor, which are preserved in the archives of the Ricci family. The branch of the Machiavelli, descending from the secretary, terminated in Ippolita Machiavelli, married to Francesco de' Ricci in 1608. The other branch terminated in Francesco Maria, Marchese di Quinto in the Vicentino, who died in Florence, 1726.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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