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by Mrs. Jameson**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROMANCE OF BIOGRAPHY (VOL 1 OF 2) ***



T. Wright. sc.
**ARIOSTO READING HIS VERSES TO ALESSANDRA
STROZZI.**

London, Published by H. Colburn, 1829.

THE LOVES OF THE POETS.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

THE ROMANCE OF BIOGRAPHY;
OR
MEMOIRS OF WOMEN LOVED AND CELEBRATED BY
POETS,
FROM
THE DAYS OF THE TROUBADOURS TO THE PRESENT AGE;

A SERIES OF ANECDOTES INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE THE INFLUENCE WHICH FEMALE BEAUTY AND VIRTUE HAVE EXERCISED OVER THE CHARACTERS AND WRITINGS OF MEN OF GENIUS.

BY MRS. JAMESON,

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

THIRD EDITION,
IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

LONDON:
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY.

MDCCCXXXVII.

Enfin, relevons-nous sous le poids de l'existence; ne donnons pas à nos injustes ennemis, à nos amis ingrats, le triomphe d'avoir abattu nos facultés intellectuelles. Ils réduisent à chercher la célébrité ceux qui se seraient contentés des affections: eh bien! il faut l'atteindre. Ces essais ambitieux ne porteront point remède aux peines de l'âme; mais ils honoreront la vie. La consacrer à l'espoir toujours trompé du bonheur, c'est la rendre encore plus infortunée. Il vaut mieux réunir tous ses efforts pour descendre avec quelque noblesse, avec quelque réputation, la route qui conduit de la jeunesse à la mort.

MADAME DE STAËL.

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THE AUTHOR TO THE READER.

These little sketches (they can pretend to no higher title,) are submitted to the public with a feeling of timidity almost painful.

They are absolutely without any other pretension than that of exhibiting, in a small compass and under one point of view, many anecdotes of biography and criticism, and many beautiful poetical portraits, scattered through a variety of works, and all tending to illustrate a subject in itself full of interest,—the influence which the beauty and virtue of women have exercised over the characters and writings of men of genius. But little praise or reputation attends the mere compiler, but the pleasure of the task has compensated its difficulty;—"song, beauty, youth, love, virtue, joy," these "flowers of Paradise," whose growth is not of earth, were all around me; I had but to gather them from the intermingling weeds and briars, and to bind them into one sparkling wreath, consecrated to the glory of women and the gallantry of men.

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The design which unfolded itself before me, as these little sketches extended gradually from a few memoranda into volumes, is not completed; much has been omitted, much suppressed. If I have paused midway in my task, it is not for want of materials, which offer themselves in almost exhaustless profusion—nor from want of interest in the subject—the most delightful in which the imagination ever revelled! but because I desponded over my own power to do it justice. I know, I feel that it required more extensive knowledge of languages, more matured judgment, more critical power, more eloquence;—only Madame de Staël could have fulfilled my conception of the style in which it ought to have been treated. It was enthusiasm, not presumption, which induced me to attempt it. I have touched on matters, on which there are a variety of tastes and opinions, and lightly passed over questions on which there are volumes of grave "historic doubts;" but I

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have ventured on no discussion, still less on any decision. I have been satisfied merely to quote my authorities; and where these exhibited many opposing facts and opinions, it seemed to me that there was far more propriety and much less egotism in simply expressing, in the first person, what I thought and felt, than in asserting absolutely that a thing *is so*, or *is said to be so*. Every one has a right to have an opinion, and deliver it with modesty; but no one has a right to clothe such opinions in general assertions, and in terms which seem to insinuate that they are or ought to be universal. I know I am open to criticism and contradiction on a thousand points; but I have adhered strictly to what appeared to me the truth, and examined conscientiously all the sources of information that were open to me.

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The history of this little book, were it worth revealing, would be the history, in miniature, of most human undertakings: it was begun with enthusiasm; it has been interrupted by intervals of illness, idleness, or more serious cares; it has been pursued through difficulties so great, that they would perhaps excuse its many deficiencies; and now I see its conclusion with a languor almost approaching to despair;—at least with a feeling which, while it renders me doubly sensitive to criticism, and apprehensive of failure, has rendered me almost indifferent to success, and careless of praise.

I owe four beautiful translations from the Italian (which are noticed in their proper places,) to the kindness of a living poet, whose justly celebrated name, were I allowed to mention it, would be subject of pride to myself, and double the value of this little book. I have no other assistance of any kind to acknowledge.

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Will it be thought unfeminine or obtrusive, if I add yet a few words?

I think it due to truth and to myself to seize this opportunity of saying, that a little book published three years ago, and now perhaps forgotten, was not written for publication, nor would ever have been printed but for accidental circumstances.

That the title under which it appeared was not given by the writer, but the publisher, who at the time knew nothing of the author.

And that several false dates, and unimportant circumstances and characters were interpolated, to conceal, if possible, the real purport and origin of the work. Thus the intention was not to create an illusion, by giving to fiction the appearance of truth, but, in fact, to give to truth the air of fiction. I was not *then* prepared for all that a woman must meet and endure, who once suffers herself to be betrayed into authorship. She may repent at leisure, like a condemned spirit; but she has passed that barrier from which there is no return.

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C'est assez,—I will not add a word more, lest it should be said that I have only disclaimed the title of the *Ennuyée*, to assume that of the *Ennuyeuse*.

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THE LOVES OF THE POETS.

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CHAPTER I.

A POET'S LOVE.

Io ti cinsi de gloria, e fatta ho dea!—GUIDI.

Of all the heaven-bestowed privileges of the poet, the highest, the dearest, the most enviable, is the power of immortalising the object of his love; of dividing with her his amaranthine wreath of glory, and repaying the inspiration caught from her eyes with a crown of everlasting fame. It is not enough that in his imagination he has deified her—that he has consecrated his faculties to [Pg 2]

her honour—that he has burned his heart in incense upon the altar of her perfections: the divinity thus decked out in richest and loveliest hues, he places on high, and calls upon all ages and all nations to bow down before her, and all ages and all nations obey! worshipping the beauty thus enshrined in imperishable verse, when others, perhaps as fair, and not less worthy, have gone down, unsung, "to dust and an endless darkness." How many women who would otherwise have stolen through the shades of domestic life, their charms, virtues, and affections buried with them, have become objects of eternal interest and admiration, because their memory is linked with the brightest monuments of human genius? While many a high-born dame, who once moved, goddess-like, upon the earth, and bestowed kingdoms with her hand, lives a mere name in some musty chronicle. Though her love was sought by princes, though with her dower she might have enriched an emperor,—what availed it?

"She had no poet—and she died!"

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And how have women repaid this gift of immortality? O believe it, when the garland was such as woman is proud to wear, she amply and deeply rewarded him who placed it on her brow. If in return for being made illustrious, she made her lover happy,—if for glory she gave a heart, was it not a rich equivalent? and if not—if the lover was unsuccessful, still the poet had his reward. Whence came the generous feelings, the high imaginations, the glorious fancies, the heavenward inspirations, which raised him above the herd of vulgar men—but from the ennobling influence of her he loved? Through *her*, the world opened upon him with a diviner beauty, and all nature became in his sight but a transcript of the charms of his mistress. He saw her eyes in the stars of heaven, her lips in the half-blown rose. The perfume of the opening flowers was but her breath, that "wafted sweetness round about the world:" the lily was "a sweet thief" that had stolen its purity from her breast. The violet was dipped in the azure of her veins; the aureorean dews, "dropt from the opening eyelids of the morn," were not so pure as her tears; the last rose-tint of the dying day was not so bright or so delicate as her cheek. Her's was the freshness and the bloom of the Spring; she consumed him to languor as the Summer sun; she was kind as the bounteous Autumn, or she froze him with her wintry disdain. There was nothing in the wonders, the splendours, or the treasures of the created universe,—in heaven or in earth,—in the seasons or their change, that did not borrow from her some charm, some glory beyond its own. Was it not just that the beauty she dispensed should be consecrated to her adornment, and that the inspiration she bestowed should be repaid to her in fame?

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For what of thee thy poet doth invent,
He robs thee of, and pays it thee again.
He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word
From thy behaviour; beauty doth he give,
But found it in thy cheek; he can afford
No praise to thee but what in thee doth live.

*Then thank him not for that which he doth say,
Since what he owes thee, thou thyself dost pay!*

SHAKSPEARE'S SONNETS.

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The theory, then, which I wish to illustrate, as far as my limited powers permit, is this: that where a woman has been exalted above the rest of her sex by the talents of a lover, and consigned to enduring fame and perpetuity of praise, the passion was real, and was merited; that no deep or lasting interest was ever founded in fancy or in fiction; that truth, in short, is the basis of all excellence in amatory poetry, as in every thing else; for where truth is, there is good of some sort, and where there is truth and good, there must be beauty, there must be durability of fame. Truth is the golden chain which links the terrestrial with the celestial, which sets the seal of heaven on the things of this earth, and stamps them to immortality. Poets have risen up and been the mere fashion of a day, and have set up idols which have been the idols of a day: if the worship be out of date and the idols cast down, it is because these adorers wanted sincerity of purpose and feeling; their raptures were feigned; their incense was bought or adulterate. In the brain or in the fancy, one beauty may eclipse another—one coquette may drive out another, and tricked off in airy verse, they float away unregarded like morning vapours, which the beam of genius has tinged with a transient brightness: but let the heart once be touched, and it is not only wakened but inspired; the lover kindled into the poet, presents to her he loves, his cup of ambrosial praise: she tastes—and the woman is transmuted into a divinity. When the Grecian sculptor carved out his deities in marble, and left us wondrous and god-like shapes, impersonations of ideal grace unapproachable by modern skill, was it through mere mechanical superiority? No;—it was the spirit of faith within which shadowed to his imagination what he would represent. In the same manner, no woman has ever been truly, lastingly deified in poetry, but in the spirit of truth and of love!

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CHAPTER II.

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LOVES OF THE CLASSIC POETS.

I am not sufficiently an antiquarian or scholar, to trace the muses "upward to their spring," neither is there occasion to seek our first examples of poetical loves in the days of fables and of demi-gods; or in those pastoral ages when shepherds were kings and poets: the loves of Orpheus and Eurydice are a little too shadowy, and those of the royal Solomon rather too mixed and too mystical for our purpose.—To descend then at once to the *classical* ages of antiquity.

It must be allowed, that as far as women are concerned, we have not much reason to regard them with reverence. The fragments of the amatory poetry of the Greeks, which have been preserved to our times, show too plainly in what light we were then regarded; and graceful and exquisite as many of them are, they bear about them the taint of degraded morals and manners, and are utterly destitute of that exalted sentiment of respect and tenderness for woman, either individually or as a sex, which alone can give them value in our eyes.

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I must leave it then to learned commentators to explore and elucidate the loves of Sappho and Anacreon. To us unlearned women, they shine out through the long lapse of ages, bright *names*, and little else; a kind of half-real,—half-ideal impersonations of love and song; the one enveloped in "a fair luminous cloud," the other "veiled in shadowing roses;" and thus veiled and thus shadowed, by all accounts, they had better remain.

The same remark, with the same reservation, applies to the Latin poets. They wrote beautiful verses, admirable for their harmony, elegance and perspicuity of expression; and are studied as models of style in a language, the knowledge of which, as far as these poets are concerned, were best confined to the other sex. They lived in a corrupted age, and their pages are deeply stained with its licentiousness; they inspire no sympathy for their love, no interest, no respect for the objects of it. How, indeed, should that be possible, when their mistresses, even according to the lover's painting, were all either perfectly insipid, or utterly abandoned and odious?^[1] Ovid, he who has revealed to mortal ears "all the soft scandal of the laughing sky," and whose gallantry has become proverbial, represents himself as so incensed by the public and shameless infidelities of his Corinna, that he treats her with the unmanly brutality of some street ruffian;—in plain language, he beats her. They are then reconciled, and again there are quarrels, coarse reproaches, and mutual blows. At length the lady, as might be expected from such tuition, becoming more and more abandoned, this delicate and poetical lover requests, as a last favour, that she will, for the future, take some trouble to deceive him more effectually; and the fair one, can she do less? kindly consents!

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Cynthia, the mistress of Propertius, gets tipsey, overturns the supper-table, and throws the cups at her lover's head; he is delighted with her *playfulness*: she leaves him to follow the camp with a soldier; he weeps and laments: she returns to him again, and he is enchanted with her amiable condescension. Her excesses are such, that he is reduced to blush for her and for himself; and he confesses that he is become, for her sake, the laughing-stock of all Rome. Cynthia is the only one of these classical loves who seems to have possessed any mental accomplishments. The poet praises, incidentally, her talents for music and poetry; but not as if they added to her charms or enhanced her value in his estimation. The Lesbia^[2] of Catullus, whose eyes were red with weeping the loss of her favourite sparrow, crowned a life of the most flagitious excesses by poisoning her husband. Of the various ladies celebrated by Horace and Tibullus, it would really be difficult to discover which was most worthless, venal, and profligate. These were the refined loves of the classic poets!

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The passion they celebrated never seems to have inspired one ennobling or generous sentiment, nor to have lifted them for one moment above the grossest selfishness. They had no scruple in exhibiting their mistresses to our eyes, as doubtless they appeared in their own, degraded by every vice, and in every sense contemptible; beings, not only beyond the pale of our sympathy, but of our toleration. Throughout their works, virtue appears a mere jest: Love stript of his divinity, even by those who first deified him, is what we disdain to call by that name; *sentiment*, as we now understand the word,—that is, the union of fervent love with reverence and delicacy towards its object,—a thing unknown and unheard of,—and all is "of the earth, earthy."

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It is for women I write; the fair, pure-hearted, delicate-minded, and unclassical reader will recollect that I do not presume to speak of these poets critically, being neither critic nor scholar; but merely with a reference to my subject, and with a reference to my sex. As monuments of the language and literature of a great and polished people, rich with a thousand beauties of thought and style, doubtless they have their value and their merit: but as monuments also of a state of morals inconceivably gross and corrupt; of the condition of women degraded by their own vices, the vices and tyranny of the other sex, and the prevalence of the Epicurean philosophy, the tendency of which, (however disguised by rhetoric,) was ever to lower the tone of the mind; considered in this point of view, they might as well have all burned together in that vast bonfire of love-poetry which the Doctors of the Church raised at Constantinople:—what a flame it must have made!^[3]

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FOOTNOTES:

- [1] I need scarcely observe, that the following sketch of the lyrical poets of Rome is abridged from the analysis of their works, in Ginguené's *Histoire Littéraire*, vol. 3.
- [2] Clodia, the wife of Quintus Metellus Celer.
- [3] "J'ai oui dire dans mon enfance à Demetrius Chalcondyle, homme très instruit de tout ce qui regarde la Grèce, qui les Prêtres avaient eu assez d'influence sur les Empereurs de Constantinople, pour les engager à brûler les ouvrages de plusieurs anciens poètes Grecs, et en particulier de ceux qui parlaient des amours, &c. * * * Ces prêtres, sans doute, montrèrent une malveillance honteuse envers les anciens poètes; mais ils donnèrent une grande preuve d'intégrité, de probité, et de religion."—ALCYONIUS.

This sentiment is put into the mouth of Leo X. at a time when the mania of classical learning was at its height.—See Roscoe, (Leo X.) and Ginguené.

CHAPTER III.

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THE LOVES OF THE TROUBADOURS.

Gente, che d'amor givan ragionando.—PETRARCA.

The irruptions of the northern nations, among whom our sex was far better appreciated than among the polished Greeks and Romans; the rise of Christianity, and the institution of chivalry, by changing the moral condition of women, gave also a totally different character to the homage addressed to them. It was in the ages called gothic and barbarous,—in that era of high feelings and fierce passions,—of love, war, and wild adventure, that the sex began to take their true station in society. From the midst of ignorance, superstition, and ferocity, sprung up that enthusiasm, that exaggeration of sentiment, that serious, passionate, and imaginative adoration of women, which has since, indeed, degenerated into mere gallantry, but was the very fountain of all that is most elevated and elegant in modern poetry, and most graceful and refined in modern manners.

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The amatory poetry of Provence had the same source with the national poetry of Spain; both were derived from the Arabians. To them we trace not only the use of rhyme, and the various forms of stanzas, employed by the early lyric poets, but by a strange revolution, it was from the East, where women are now held in seclusion, as mere soulless slaves of the passions and caprices of their masters, that the sentimental devotion paid to our sex in the chivalrous ages was derived.^[4] The poetry of the Troubadours kept alive and enhanced the tone of feeling on which it was founded; it was cause and effect re-acting on each other; and though their songs exist only in the collections of the antiquarian, and the very language in which they wrote has passed away, and may be accounted *dead*,—so is not the spirit they left behind: as the founders of a new school of amatory poetry, we are under obligations to their memory, which throw a strong interest around their personal adventures, and the women they celebrated.

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The tenderness of feeling and delicacy of expression in some of these old Provençal poets, are the more touching, when we recollect that the writers were sometimes kings and princes, and often knights and warriors, famed for their hardihood and exploits. William, Count of Poitou, our Richard the First, two Kings of Arragon, a King of Sicily, the Dauphin of Auvergne, the Count de Foix, and a Prince of Orange, were professors of the "gaye science." Thibault,^[5] Count of Provence and King of Navarre, was another of these royal and chivalrous Troubadours, and his *lais* and his *virelais* were generally devoted to the praises of Blanche of Castile, the mother of Louis the Ninth—the same Blanche whom Shakspeare has introduced into King John, and decked out in panegyric far transcending all that her favoured poet and lover could have offered at her feet.^[6]

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Thibault did, however, surpass all his contemporaries in refinement of style: he usually concludes his *chansons* with an *envoi*, or address, to the Virgin, worded with such equivocal ingenuity, that it is equally applicable to the Queen of Heaven, or the queen of his earthly thoughts,—"*La Blanche couronnée*." There is much simplicity and elegance in the following little song, in which the French has been modernised.

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"Las! si j'avais pouvoir d'oublier
Sa beauté,—son bien dire,
Et son très doux regarder
Finirait mon martyre!

Mais las! mon cœur je n'en puis ôter;
Et grand affolage
M'est d'espérer;
Mais tel servage
Donne courage
A tout endurer.

Et puis comment oublier

Sa beauté, son bien dire,
Et son très doux regarder?
Mieux aime mon martyre!"

Princesses and ladies of rank entered the lists of poesy, and vanquished, on almost every occasion, the Troubadours of the other sex. For instance, that Countess of Champagne, who presided with such éclat in one of the courts of love; Beatrice, Countess of Provence, the mother of four queens, among whom was Berengaria of England; Clara d'Anduse, one of whose songs is translated by Sismondi; a certain Dame Castellosa, who in a pathetic remonstrance to some ungrateful lover, assures him that if he forsakes her for another, and leaves her to die, he will commit a heinous sin before the face of God and man; that charming Comtesse de Die, of whom more presently, and others innumerable, "tout hommes que femmes, la pluspart gentilshommes et Seigneurs de Places, amoureux des Roynes, Imperatrices, Duchesses, Marquises, Comtesses, et gentils-femmes; desquelles les maris s'estimaient grandement heureux quand nos poètes leurs adressaient quelque chant nouveau en notre langue Provençal." The said poets being rewarded by these debonnaire husbands with rich dresses, horses, armour, and gold;^[7] and by the ladies with praise, thanks, courteous words, and sweet smiles, and very often, "altra cosa più cara." The biography of these Troubadours generally commences with the same phrase—Such a one was "gentilhomme et chevalier," and was "pris d'amour" for such a lady, always named, who was the wife of such a lord, and in whose honour and praise he composed "maintes belles et doctes chansons." In these "chansons,"—for all the amatory poetry of those times was sung to music,—we have love and romantic adventure oddly enough mixed up with piety and devotion, such as were the mode in an age when religion ruled the imagination and opinions of men, without in any degree restraining the passions, or influencing the conduct. One Troubadour tells us, that when he beholds the face of his mistress, he crosses himself with delight and gratitude; another pathetically entreats a priest to dispense him from his vows of love to a certain lady, whom he loved no longer; the lady being the wife of another, one would imagine that the dispensation should rather have been required in the first instance. Arnaldo de Daniel, unable to soften the obdurate heart of his mistress, performs penance, and celebrates six (or as some say, a thousand) masses a day, "en priant Dieu de pouvoir acquerir la grace de sa dame," and burns lamps before the Virgin, and consecrates tapers for the same purpose: the lady with whom he is thus piously in love, was Cyberna, the wife of Guillaume de Bouille. This was something like the incantations and sacrifices of the classic poets, who familiarly mixed up their mythology with their amours; but in a spirit as different as the allegorical cupid of these chivalrous poets is from the winged and wanton deity of the Greeks and Romans. Pierre Vidal sees a vision of Love, whom he describes as a young knight, fair and fresh as the day, crowned with a wreath of flowers instead of a helmet; and mounted on a palfrey as white as snow, with a saddle of jasper, and spurs of chalcedony; his squires and attendants are "*Mercy, Pudeur, and Loyauté.*" *Sir Cupid* on horseback, with his saddle and his spurs, attended by Gentleness, Modesty, and Good Faith, is a novel divinity.—Thus, among the Greeks, Love was attended by the Graces, and among the Troubadours by the Virtues. In the same spirit of allegory, but touched with a more classic elegance, we have Petrarch's Cupid, driving his fiery car in triumph, followed by a shadowy host of captives to his power,—the heroes who had confessed and the poets who had sung his might.

Vidi un vittorioso e sommo duce,
Pur com' un di color ch' in Campidoglio
Trionfal carro a gran gloria conduce.

....*....*....*....*

Quattro destrier via più che neve bianchi:
Sopr' un carro di foco un garzon crudo
Con arco in mano, e con sàette a' fianchi.

And yet more finished is Spenser's "Masque of Cupid," in the third book of the Fairy Queen, where Love, as in the antique gem, is mounted on a lion, preceded by minstrels carolling

A lay of love's delight with sweet concert,

attended by Fancy, Desire, Hope, Fear, and Doubt; and followed by Care, Repentance, Shame, Strife, Sorrow, &c.—The vivid colours in which these imaginary personages are depicted, the image of the God "uprearing himself," and looking round with disdain on the troop of victims and slaves who surround him, the rattling of his darts, as he shakes them in defiance and in triumph, and "claps on high his coloured wings twain," forms altogether a most finished and gorgeous picture; such as Rubens should have painted, as far as his pencil, rainbow-dipt, could have reflected the animated pageant to the eye.

The extravagance of passion and boundless devotion to the fair sex, which the Troubadours sang in their lays, they not unfrequently illustrated by their actions; and while the knowledge of the first is confined to a few antiquarians, the latter still survive in the history and the traditions of their province. One of these (Guillaume de la Tour) having lost the object of his love, underwent, during a whole year, the most cruel and unheard-of penances, in the hope that heaven might be won to perform a miracle in his favour, and restore her to his arms; at length he died broken-hearted on her tomb.^[8] Another,^[9] beloved by a certain princess, in some unfortunate moment breaks his vow of fidelity, and unable to appease the indignation of his mistress, he retires to a forest, builds himself a cabin of boughs, and turns hermit, having first made a solemn vow that he

will never leave his solitude till he is received into favour by his offended love. Being one of the most celebrated and popular Troubadours of his province, all the knights and the ladies sympathise with his misfortunes: they find themselves terribly *ennuyés* in the absence of the poet who was accustomed to vaunt their charms and their deeds of prowess; and at the end of two years they send a deputation, entreating him to return,—but in vain: they then address themselves to the lady, and humbly solicit the pardon of the offender, whose disgrace in her sight, has thrown a whole province into mourning. The princess at length relents, but upon conditions which appear in these unromantic times equally extraordinary and difficult to fulfil. She requires that a hundred brave knights, and a hundred fair dames, pledged in love to each other, (*s'aimant d'amour*) should appear before her on their knees, and with joined hands supplicate for mercy: the conditions are fulfilled: the fifty pair of lovers are found to go through the ceremony, and the Troubadour receives his pardon.^[10]

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The story of Peyre de Ruer, "gentilhomme et Troubadour," might be termed a satirical romance, did we not know that it is a plain fact, related with perfect simplicity. He devotes himself to a lady of the noble Italian family of Carraccioli, and in her praise he composes, as usual, "maintes belles et doctes chansons:"—but the lady seems to have had a taste for magnificence and pleasure; and the poet, in order to find favour in her eyes, expends his patrimony in rich apparel, banquets, and *joustes* in her honour. The lady, however, continues inexorable; and Peyre de Ruer takes the habit of a pilgrim and wanders about the country. He arrives in the holy week at a certain church, and desires of the curé permission to preach to his congregation of penitents:—he ascends the pulpit, and recites with infinite fervour and grace one of his own chansons d'amour, —for, says the chronicle, "*autre chose ne sçavait*," "he knew nothing better." The people mistaking it for an invocation to the Virgin Mary or the Saints, are deeply affected and edified; eyes are seen to weep that never wept before; the most impenitent hearts are suddenly softened: he concludes with an exhortation in the same strain—and then descending from the pulpit, places himself at the door, and holding out his hat for the customary alms, his delighted congregation fill it to overflowing with pieces of silver. Peyre de Ruer forthwith casts off his pilgrim's gown, and in a new and splendid dress, and with a new song in his hand, he presents himself before the lady of his love, who charmed by his gay attire not less than by his return, receives him most graciously, and bestows on him "maintes caresses."

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I must observe that the biographer of this Peyre de Ruer, himself a churchman, does not appear in the least scandalised or surprised at this very novel mode of recruiting his finances and obtaining the favour of the lady; but gives us fairly to understand, that after such a proof of *loyauté* he should have thought it quite contrary to all rule if she had still rejected the addresses of this *gentil Troubadour*.

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Jauffred (or Geoffrey) de Rudel is yet more famous, and his story will strikingly illustrate the manners of those times. Rudel was the favourite minstrel of Geoffrey Plantagenet de Bretagne, the elder brother of our Richard Cœur de Lion, and like the royal Richard, a patron of music and poetry. During the residence of Rudel at the court of England, where he resided in great honour and splendour, caressed for his talents and loved for the gentleness of his manners, he heard continually the praises of a certain Countess of Tripoli; famed throughout Europe for her munificent hospitality to the poor Crusaders. The pilgrims and soldiers of the Cross, who were returning wayworn, sick and disabled, from the burning plains of Asia, were relieved and entertained by this devout and benevolent Countess; and they repaid her generosity, with all the enthusiasm of gratitude, by spreading her fame throughout Christendom.

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These reports of her beauty and her beneficence, constantly repeated, fired the susceptible fancy of Rudel: without having seen her, he fell passionately in love with her, and unable to bear any longer the torments of absence, he undertook a pilgrimage to visit this unknown lady of his love, in company with Bertrand d'Allamanon, another celebrated Troubadour of those days. He quitted the English court in spite of the entreaties and expostulations of Prince Geoffrey Plantagenet, and sailed for the Levant. But so it chanced, that falling grievously sick on the voyage, he lived only till his vessel reached the shores of Tripoli. The Countess being told that a celebrated poet had just arrived in her harbour, who was dying for her love, immediately hastened on board, and taking his hand, entreated him to live for her sake. Rudel, already speechless, and almost in the agonies of death, revived for a moment at this unexpected grace; he was just able to express, by a last effort, the excess of his gratitude and love, and expired in her arms: thereupon the Countess wept bitterly, and vowed herself to a life of penance for the loss she had caused to the world.^[11] She commanded that the last song which Rudel had composed in her honour, should be transcribed in letters of gold, and carried it always in her bosom; and his remains were inclosed in a magnificent mausoleum of porphyry, with an Arabic inscription, commemorating his genius and his love for her.

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It is in allusion to this well-known story, that Petrarch has introduced Rudel into the *Trionfo d'Amore*.

Gianfré Rudel ch' uso la vela e 'l remo,
A cercar la suo morte.

The song which the minstrel composed when he fell sick on this romantic expedition, and found his strength begin to fail, and which the Countess wore, folded within her vest, to the end of her life, is extant, and has been translated into most of the languages of Europe; of these translations, Sismondi's is the best, preserving the original and curious arrangement of the

rhymes, as well as the piety, naïveté, and tenderness of the sentiment.

Irrité, dolent partirai
Si ne vois cet amour de loin,
Et ne sais quand je le verrai
Car sont par trop nos terres loin.
Dieu, qui toutes choses as fait
Et formas cet amour si loin,
Donne force à mon cœur, car ai
L'espoir de voir m'amour au loin.
Ah, Seigneur, tenez pour bien vrai
L'amour qu'ai pour elle de loin.
Car pour un bien que j'en aurai
J'ai mille maux, tant je suis loin.
Ja d'autr'amour ne jouirai
Sinon de cet amour de loin—
Qu'une plus belle je n'en sçais
En lieu qui soit ni près ni loin!

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Mrs. Piozzi and others have paraphrased this little song, but in a spirit so different from the antique simplicity of the original, that I shall venture to give a version, which has at least the merit of being as faithful as the different idioms of the two languages will allow; I am afraid, however, that it will not appear worthy of the honour which the Countess conferred on it.

"Grieved and troubled shall I die,
If I meet not my love afar;
Alas! I know not that I e'er
Shall see her—for she dwells afar.
O God! that didst all things create,
And formed my sweet love now afar;
Strengthen my heart, that I may hope
To behold her face, who is afar.
O Lord! believe how very true
Is my love for her, alas! afar,
Tho' for each joy a thousand pains
I bear, because I am so far.
Another love I'll never have,
Save only she who is afar,
For fairer one I never knew
In places near, nor yet afar."

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Bertrand d'Allamanon, whom I have mentioned as the companion of Rudel on his romantic expedition, has left us a little ballad, remarkable for the extreme refinement of the sentiment, which is quite à la Petrarque: he gives it the fantastic title of a *demi chanson*, for a very fantastic reason: it is thus translated in Millot. (vol. i. 390).

"On veut savoir pourquoi je fais une *demi chanson*? c'est parceque je n'ai qu'un demi sujet de chanter. Il n'y a d'amour que de ma part; la dame que j'aime ne veut pas m'aimer! mais au défaut des *oui* qu'elle me refuse, je prendrai les *non* qu'elle me prodigue:—*espérer auprès d'elle vaut mieux que jouir avec tout autre!*"

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This is exactly the sentiment of Petrarch:

Pur mi consola, che morir per lei
Meglio è che gioir d'altra—

But it is one of those thoughts which spring in the heart, and might often be repeated without once being borrowed.

FOOTNOTES:

[4] Sismondi—Littérature du Midi.

[5] Thibault fût Roi galant et vaoureux,
Ses hâuts faits et son rang n'ont rien fait pour sa gloire;
Mais il fût chansonnier—et ses couplets heureux,
Nous ont conservé sa mémoire.

ANTHOLOGIE DE MONET.

[6] If lusty Love should go in quest of beauty,
Where should he find it fairer than in Blanche?
If zealous Love should go in search of virtue,
Where should he find it purer than in Blanche?
If Love, ambitious, sought a match of birth,
Whose veins bound richer blood than Lady Blanche?

[7] La plus honorable recompence qu'on pouvait faire aux dits poètes, était qu'on leur

fournissait de draps, chevaux, armure, et argent.

[8] Millot, vol. ii. p. 148.

[9] Richard de Barbesieu.

[10] Millot, vol. iii. p. 86.—Ginguené, vol. i. p. 280.

[11] "Depuis ne fut jamais veue faire bonne chère," says the old chronicle.—I am tempted to add the description of the first and last interview of the Countess and her lover in the exquisite old French, of which the antique simplicity and naïveté are untranslatable.

"En cet estat fut conduit au port de Trypolly, et là arrivé, son compagnon feist (*fit*) entendre à la Comtesse la venue du Pelerin malade. La Comtesse estant venue en la nef, prit le poète par la main; et lui, sachant que c'était la Comtesse, incontinent après le doult et gracieux accueil, recouvra ses esprits, la remercia de ce qu'elle lui avait recouvré la vie, et lui dict: 'Très illustre et vertueuse princesse, je ne plaindrai point la mort oresque'—et ne pouvant achever son propos, sa maladie s'aigrissant et augmentant, rendit l'esprit entre les mains de la Comtesse."—*Vies des plus célèbres Poètes Provençaux*, p. 24.

CHAPTER IV.

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THE LOVES OF THE TROUBADOURS CONTINUED.

In striking contrast to the tender and gentle Rudel, we have the ferocious Bertrand de Born: he, too, was one of the most celebrated Troubadours of his time. As a petty feudal sovereign, he was, partly by the events of the age, more by his own fierce and headlong passions, plunged in continual wars. Nature however had made him a poet of the first order. In these days he would have been another Lord Byron; but he lived in a terrible and convulsed state of society, and it was only in the intervals snatched from his usual pursuits,—that is, from burning the castles, and ravaging the lands of his neighbours, and stirring up rebellion, discord, and bloodshed all around him,—that he composed a vast number of *lays*, *sirventes*, and *chansons*; some breathing the most martial, and even merciless spirit; others devoted to the praise and honour of his love, or rather loves, as full of submissive tenderness and chivalrous gallantry.

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He first celebrated Elinor Plantagenet, the sister of his friend and brother in arms and song, Richard Cœur de Lion; and we are expressly told that Richard was proud of the poetical homage rendered to the charms of his sister by this knightly Troubadour, and that the Princess was far from being insensible to his admiration. Only one of the many songs addressed to Elinor has been preserved; from which we gather, that it was composed by Bertrand in the field, at a time when his army was threatened with famine, and the poet himself was suffering from the pangs of hunger. Elinor married the Duke of Saxony, and Bertrand chose for his next love the beautiful Maenz de Montagnac, daughter of the Viscount of Turenne, and wife of Talleyrand de Perigord. The lady accepted his service, and acknowledged him as her Knight; but evil tongues having attempted to sow dissension between the lovers, Bertrand addressed to her a song, in which he defends himself from the imputation of inconstancy, in a style altogether characteristic and original. The warrior poet, borrowing from the objects of his daily cares, ambition and pleasures, phrases to illustrate and enhance the expression of his love, wishes "that he may lose his favourite hawk in her first flight; that a falcon may stoop and bear her off, as she sits upon his wrist, and tear her in his sight, if the sound of his lady's voice be not dearer to him than all the gifts of love from another."—"That he may stumble with his shield about his neck; that his helmet may gall his brow; that his bridle may be too long, his stirrups too short; that he may be forced to ride a hard trotting horse, and find his groom drunk when he arrives at his gate, if there be a word of truth in the accusations of his enemies:—that he may not have a *denier* to stake at the gaming-table, and that the dice may never more be favourable to him, if ever he had swerved from his faith:—that he may look on like a dastard, and see his lady wooed and won by another;—that the winds may fail him at sea;—that in the battle he may be the first to fly, if he who has slandered him does not lie in his throat," &c. and so on through seven or eight stanzas.

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Bertrand de Born exercised in his time a fatal influence on the counsels and politics of England. A close and ardent friendship existed between him and young Henry Plantagenet, the eldest son of our Henry the Second; and the family dissensions which distracted the English Court, and the unnatural rebellion of Henry and Richard against their father, were his work. It happened some time after the death of Prince Henry, that the King of England besieged Bertrand de Born in one of his castles: the resistance was long and obstinate, but at length the warlike Troubadour was taken prisoner and brought before the King, so justly incensed against him, and from whom he had certainly no mercy to expect. The heart of Henry was still bleeding with the wounds inflicted by his ungrateful children, and he saw before him, and in his power, the primary cause of their misdeeds and his own bitter sufferings. Bertrand was on the point of being led out to death, when by a single word he reminded the King of his lost son, and the tender friendship which had existed between them.^[12] The chord was struck which never ceased to vibrate in the parental heart of Henry; bursting into tears, he turned aside, and commanded Bertrand and his followers to be immediately set at liberty: he even restored to Bertrand his castle and his lands, "*in the name of his dead son.*" It is such traits as these, occurring at every page, which lend to the

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chronicles of this stormy period an interest overpowering the horror they would otherwise excite: for then all the best, as well as the worst of human passions were called into play. In this tempestuous commingling of all the jarring elements of society, we have those strange approximations of the most opposite sentiments,—implacable revenge and sublime forgiveness;—gross licentiousness and delicate tenderness;—barbarism and refinement;—treachery and fidelity—which remind one of that heterogeneous mass tossed up by a stormy ocean; heaps of pearls, unvalued gems, wedges of gold, mingled with dead men's bones, and all the slimy, loathsome, and monstrous productions of the deep, which during a calm remain together concealed and unknown in its unfathomed abysses.

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To return from this long similitude to Bertrand de Born: he concluded his stormy career in a manner very characteristic of the times; for he turned monk, and died in the odour of sanctity. But neither his late devotion, nor his warlike heroism, nor his poetic fame, could rescue him from the severe justice of Dante, who has visited his crimes and his violence with so terrible a judgment, that we forget, while we thrill with horror, that the crimes were real, the penance only imaginary. Dante, in one of the circles of the Inferno, meets Bertrand de Born carrying his severed head, *lantern wise*, in his hand;—the phantom lifts it up by the hair, and the ghastly lips unclose to confess the cause and the justice of this horrible and unheard-of penance.

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—Or vedi la pena molesta
Tu che spirando vai veggendo i morti;
Vedi s'alcuna è grande come questa.
E perchè tu di me novella porti,
Sappi ch' i' son Bertram dal Bornio, quelli
Che diedi al Re giovane i ma' conforti.
I' feci 'l padre e 'l figlio in se ribelli:

....*....*....*....*

Perch'io partii così giunte persone,
Partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!
Dal suo principio ch'è 'n questo troncone.
Così s'osserva in me lo contrappasso.^[13]

Now behold

This grievous torment, thou, who breathing goest
To spy the dead: behold, if any else
Be terrible as this,—and that on earth
Thou mayst bear tidings of me, know that I
Am Bertrand, he of Born, who gave King John
The counsel mischievous. Father and son
I set at mutual war:—
Spurring them on maliciously to strife.
For parting those so closely knit, my brain
Parted, alas! I carry from its source
That in this trunk inhabits. Thus the law
Of retribution fiercely works in me.^[14]

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Pierre Vidal, whose description of love I have quoted before, was one of the most extraordinary characters of his time, a kind of poetical Don Quixote:—his brain was turned with love, poetry, and vanity: he believed himself the beloved of all the fair, the mirror of knighthood, and the prince of Troubadours. Yet in the midst of all his extravagances, he possessed exquisite skill in his art, and was not surpassed by any of the poets of those days, for the harmony, delicacy, and tenderness of his amatory effusions. He chose for his first love the beautiful wife of the Vicomte de Marseilles: the lady, unlike some of the Princesses of her time, distinguished between the poet and the man, and as he presumed too far on the encouragement bestowed on him in the former capacity, he was banished: he then followed Richard the First to the crusade. The verses he addressed to the lady from the Island of Cyprus are still preserved. The folly of Vidal, or rather the derangement of his imagination, subjected him to some of those mystifications which remind us of Don Quixote and Sancho, in the court of the laughter-loving Duchess. For instance, Richard and his followers amused themselves at Cyprus, by marrying Vidal to a beautiful Greek girl of no immaculate reputation, whom they introduced to him as the niece of the Greek Emperor. Vidal, in right of his wife, immediately took the title of Emperor, assumed the purple, ordered a throne to be carried before him, and played the most fantastic antics of authority. Nor was this the greatest of his extravagances: on his return to Provence, he chose for the second object of his amorous and poetical devotion, a lady whose name happened to be Louve de Penautier: in her honour he assumed the name of *Loup*, and farther to merit the good graces of his "*Dame*," and to do honour to the name he had adopted, he dressed himself in the hide of a wolf, and caused himself to be hunted in good earnest by a pack of dogs: he was brought back exhausted and half dead to the feet of his mistress, who appears to have been more moved to merriment than to love by this new and ridiculous exploit.

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In general, however, the Troubadours had seldom reason to complain of the cruelty of the ladies to whom they devoted their service and their songs. The most virtuous and illustrious women thought themselves justified in repaying, with smiles and favours, the poetical adoration of their lovers; and this lasted until the profession of Troubadour was dishonoured by the indiscretions,

follies, and vices of those who assumed it. Thus Peyrols, a famous Provençal poet, who was distinguished in the court of the Dauphin d'Auvergne, fell passionately in love with the sister of that Prince, (the Baronne de Mercœur) and the Dauphin, (himself a Troubadour) proud of the genius of his minstrel and of the poetical devotion paid to his sister, desired her to bestow on her lover all the encouragement and favour which was consistent with her dignity. The lady, however, either misunderstood her instructions, or found it too difficult to obey them: the seducing talents and tender verses of this *gentil Troubadour* prevailed over her dignity.—Peyrols was beloved; but he was not sufficiently discreet. The sudden change in the tone and style of his songs betrayed him, and he was banished. A great number of his verses, celebrating the Dame de Mercœur, are preserved by St. Palaye, and translated by Millot.

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Bernard de Ventadour was beloved by Elinor de Guienne, afterwards the wife of our Henry the Second, and the mother of Richard the First:—I have before observed the poetical penchants of all Elinor's children, which they seem to have inherited from their mother.

Sordello of Mantua, whose name is familiar to all the readers of Dante, as occurring in one of the finest passages of his great poem,^[15] was an Italian, but like all the best poets of his day, wrote in the Provençal tongue: he is said to have carried off the sister of that modern Phalaris, the tyrant Ezzelino of Padua. There is a very elegant ballad (ballata) by Sordello, translated in Millot's collection; it is properly a kind of rondeau, the first line being repeated at the end of every stanza; "Helas! à quoi me servent mes yeux?"—"Alas! wherefore have I eyes?"—It describes the pleasures of the Spring, which are to him as nothing, in the absence of the only object on which his eyes can dwell with delight. The arrangement of the rhymes in this pastoral song is singularly elegant and musical.

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Lastly, as illustrating the history of the amatory poetry of this age, I extract from Nostradamus^[16] the story of the young Countess de Die; she loved and was beloved by the Chevalier d'Adhèmar: (ancestor I presume to that Chevalier d'Adhèmar who figures in the letters of Madame de Sevigné.) It was not in this case the lover who celebrated the charms of his mistress, but the lady, who, being an illustrious female Troubadour, "docte en poësie," celebrated the exploits and magnanimity of her lover. The Chevalier, proud of such a distinction, caused the verses of his mistress to be beautifully copied, and always carried them in his bosom; and whenever he was in the company of knights and ladies, he enchanted them by singing a couplet in his own praise out of his lady's book. The publicity thus given to their love, was quite in the spirit of the times, and does not appear to have injured the reputation of the Countess for immaculate virtue,^[17] which Adhèmar would probably have defended with lance and spear, against any slanderous tongue which had dared to defame her.

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The conclusion of this romantic story is melancholy. Adhèmar heard a false report, that the Countess, whose purity and constancy he had so proudly maintained, had cast away her smiles on a rival: he fell sick with grief and bitterness of heart: the Countess, being informed of his state, set out, accompanied by her *mother*, and a long train of knights and ladies, to visit and comfort him with assurances of her fidelity; but when she appeared at his bed-side, and drew the curtain, it was already too late: Adhèmar expired in her arms. The Countess took the veil in the convent of St. Honoré, and died the same year *of grief*, says the chronicle;—and to conclude the tragedy characteristically, the mother of the young Countess buried her in the same grave with her lover, and raised a superb monument to the memory of both. The Countess de Die was one of the ten ladies who formed the *Court of Love*, held at Pierrefeu, (about 1194) and in which Estifanie de Baux presided.

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These Courts of Love, and the scenes they gave rise to, were certainly open to ridicule; the "belles et subtiles questions d'amour" which were there solemnly discussed, and decided by ladies of rank, were often absurd, and the decisions something worse: still the fanciful influence they gave to women on these subjects, and the gallantry they introduced into the intercourse between the sexes, had a tendency to soften the manners, to refine the language, and to tinge the sentiments and passions with a kind of philosophical mysticism. But these gay and gallant Courts of Love, the Provençal Troubadours, their lays, which for two centuries had been the delight of all ranks of people, and had spread music, love, and poetry through the land;—their language, which had been the chosen dialect of gallantry in every court of Europe,—were at once swept from the earth.

The glory of the Provençal literature began when Provence was raised to an independent Fief, under Count Berenger I. about the year 1100; it lasted two entire centuries, and ended when that fine and fertile country became the scene of the horrible crusade against the Albigenses; when the Inquisition sent forth its exterminating fiends to scatter horror and devastation through the land, and the wars and rapacity of Charles of Anjou, its new possessor, almost depopulated the country. The language which had once celebrated deeds of love and heroism, now sang only of desolation and despair. The Troubadours, in a strain worthy of their gentle and noble calling, generally advocated the part of the Albigenses, and the oppressed of whatever faith; and in many provinces, in Lombardy especially, their language was interdicted, lest it might introduce heretical or rebellious principles; gradually it fell into disuse, and at length into total oblivion. The Troubadours, no longer welcomed in castle or in hall, where once

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They poured to lords and ladies gay,
The unpremeditated lay,

were degraded to wandering minstrels and itinerant jugglers. An attempt was made, about a century later, (1324) by the institution of the Floral Games at Thoulouse, to keep alive this high strain of poetical gallantry. They were formerly celebrated with great splendour, and a shadow of this institution is, I believe, still kept up, but it has degenerated into a mere school of affectation. The original race of the Troubadours was extinct long before Clemence d'Isaure and her golden violet were thought of.

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I cannot quit the subject of the Troubadours without one or two concluding observations. To these rude bards we owe some new notions of poetical justice, which never seem to have occurred to Horace or Longinus, and are certainly more magnanimous, as well as more true to moral feeling, than those which prevailed among the polished Greeks and Romans. For instance, the generous Hector and the constant Troilus are invariably exalted above the subtle Ulysses and the savage Achilles. Theseus, Jason, and Æneas, instead of being represented as classical heroes and pious favourites of the gods, are denounced as recreant knights and false traitors to love and beauty. In the estimation of these chivalrous bards, a woman's tears outweighed the exploits of demi-gods; all the glory of Theseus is forgotten in sympathy for Ariadne; and Æneas, in the old ballads and romances, is not, after all his perfidy, dismissed to happiness and victory, but is plagued by the fiends, haunted by poor Dido's "grimly ghost," and, finally, doomed to perish miserably.^[18] Nor does Jason fare better at their hands; in all the old poets he is consigned to just execration. In Dante, we have a magnificent and a terrible picture of him, doomed to one of the lowest circles of hell, amid a herd of vile seducers, who betrayed the trusting faith, or bartered the charms of women. Demons scourge him up and down, without mercy or respite, in vengeance for the wrongs of Hypsipyle and Medea.

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Guarda quel grande che viene
E per dolor, non par lagrima spanda;
Quanto aspetto reale ancor ritiene!
Quelli è Giasone—

—Con segni e con parole ornate
Isifile inganno—
Tal colpa a tal martiro lui condanna,
Ed anche di MEDEA si fa vendetta.

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INFERNO, C. 18.

"Behold that lofty shade, who this way tends,
And seems too woe-begone to drop a tear;
How yet the regal aspect he retains!
'Tis Jason—
—He who with tokens and fair witching words
Hypsipyle beguil'd—
Such is the guilt condemns him to this pain;
Here too Medea's injuries are aveng'd!"—

CAREY.

And Chaucer, in relating the same story, begins with a burst of generous indignation:

Thou root^[19] of false lovers, Duke Jason,
Thou slayer, devourer, and confusion
Of gentil women, gentil creatures!

The story of his double perfidy is told and commented on in the same chivalrous feeling; and the old poet concludes with characteristic tenderness and simplicity—

This was the mede of loving, and guerdon
That Medea received of Duke Jason,
Right for her truth and for her kindnesse,
That loved him better than herself I guesse!
And lefte her father and her heritage:
And of Jason this is the vassalage
That in his dayes was never none yfound
So false a lover going on the ground.

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It is in the same beautiful spirit of reverence to the best virtues of our sex, that Alcestis, the wife of Admetus, who sacrificed her life to prolong that of her husband, is honoured above all other heroines of classical story. She has even been elevated into a kind of presiding divinity,—a second Venus, with nobler attributes,—and in her new existence is feigned to be the consort and companion of Love himself.

Another peculiarity of the poetry of the middle ages, was the worship paid to the daisy, (la Marguerite) as symbolical of all that is lovely in women. Why so lowly a flower should take precedence of the queenly lily and the sumptuous rose, is not very clear; but it seems to have originated with one of the old Provençal poets, whose mistress bore the name of Marguerite; and afterwards it became a fashion and a kind of poetical mythology.^[20]

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Thus in the "Flower and the Leaf" of Chaucer, the ladies and knights of the flower approach singing a chorus in honour of the Daisy, of which the burthen is, "si douce est la Marguerite."

FOOTNOTES:

- [12] Le Roi lui demande, "S'il a perdu raison?" il lui répond, "Helas, oui! c'est depuis la mort du Prince Henri, votre fils!"
- [13] Inferno, c. xxviii.
- [14] Carey's translation of Dante. Mr. Carey reads Re Giovanni, instead of Re giovane:—King John, instead of Prince Henry.
- [15] Purgatorio, c. vi.
- [16] Vies des plus célèbres poètes Provençaux.
- [17] Agnes de Navarre, Comtesse de Foix, was beloved by Guillaume de Machaut, a French poet; he became jealous, and she sent her own confessor to him to complain of the injustice of his suspicions, and to swear that she was still faithful to him. She required, also, of her lover, to write and to publish in verse the history of their love; and she preserved, at the same time, in the eyes of her husband and of the world, the character of a virtuous Princess.—See *Foscolo—Essays on Petrarch*.
- [18] Percy's Reliques.
- [19] *Root*, i. e. example or beginner.
- [20] See the notes to Chaucer, the works of Froissart, and Mémoires sur les Troubadours.

CHAPTER V.

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GUIDO CAVALCANTI AND MANDETTA, CINO DA PISTOJA AND SELVAGGIA.

Amatory poetry was transmitted from the Provençals to the Italians and Sicilians, among whom the language of the Troubadours had long been cultivated, and their songs imitated, but in style yet more affected and *recherché*. Few of the Italian poets who preceded Dante, are interesting even in a mere literary point of view: of these only one or two have shed a reflected splendour round the object of their adoration. Guido Cavalcanti, the Florentine, was the early and favourite friend of Dante: being engaged in the factions of his native city, he was forced on some emergency to quit it; and to escape the vengeance of the prevailing party, he undertook a pilgrimage to Sant Jago. Passing through Tolosa, he fell in love with a beautiful Spanish girl, whom he has celebrated under the name of *Mandetta*:

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In un boschetto trovai pastorella
Più che la stella bella al mio parere,
Capegli avea biondetti e ricciutelli.

Some of his songs and ballads have considerable grace and nature; but they were considered by himself as mere trifles. His grand work on which his fame long rested, is a "Canzone sopra l'Amore," in which the subject is so profoundly and so philosophically treated, that seven voluminous commentaries in Latin and Italian have not yet enabled the world to understand it.

The following Sonnet is deservedly celebrated for the consummate beauty of the picture it resents, and will give a fair idea of the platonic extravagance of the time.

Chi è questa che vien ch' ogni uom la mira!
Che fa tremar di caritate l' a're?
E mena seco amor, sì che parlare
Null' uom ne puote; ma ciascun sospira?
Ahi dio! che sembra quando gli occhi gira!
Dicalo Amor, ch'io nol saprei contare;
Cotanto d' umiltà donna mi pare
Che ciascun' altra inver di lei chiam' ira.
Non si porria contar la sua piacenza;
Che a lei s'inchina ogni gentil virtute,
E la beltate per sua Dea la mostra.
Non è sì alta già la mente nostra
E non s'è posta in noi tanta salute
Che propriamente n' abbian conoscenza!

[Pg 57]

LITERAL TRANSLATION.

"Who is this, on whom all men gaze as she approacheth!—who causeth the very air to tremble around her with tenderness?—who leadeth Love by her side—in whose presence men are dumb; and can only sigh? Ah! Heaven! what power in every glance of those eyes! Love alone can tell; for I have neither words nor skill! She alone is the Lady of gentleness—beside her, all others seem ungracious and unkind. Who can describe her sweetness, her loveliness? to her every virtue bows, and beauty points to her as her own divinity. The mind of man cannot soar so high, nor is it sufficiently purified by divine grace to understand and appreciate all her perfections!"

The vagueness of this portrait is a part of its beauty:—it is like a lovely dream—and probably never had any existence, but in the fancy of the Poet.

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Cino da Pistoia enjoyed the double reputation of being the greatest doctor and teacher of the civil law, and most famous poet of his time. He was also remarkable for his personal accomplishments and his love of pleasure. There is a sonnet which Dante addressed to Cino, reproaching him with being inconstant and volatile in love.^[21] Apparently, this was after the death of the beautiful Ricciarda dei Selvaggi; or, as he calls her, his Selvaggia: she was of a noble family of Pistoia, her father having been gonfaliere, and leader of the faction of the Bianchi; and she was also celebrated for her poetical talents. It appears from a little madrigal of hers, which has been preserved, that though she tenderly returned the affection of her lover, it was without the knowledge of her haughty family. It is not distinguished for poetic power, but has at least the charm of perfect frankness and simplicity, and a kind of *abandon* that is quite bewitching.

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A MESSER CINO DA PISTOJA.

Gentil mio sir, lo parlare amoroso
 Di voi sì in allegrezza mi mantene,
 Che dirvel non poria, ben lo sacciate;
 Perchè del mio amor sete giojoso,
 Di ciò grand' allegria e gio' mi vene,
 Ed altro mai non haggio in volontate,
 Fuor del vostro piacere;
 Tutt' hora fate la vostra voglienza:
 Haggiate previdenza
 Voi, di celar la nostra desienza.

"My gentle love and lord! those tender words
 Of thine so fill my conscious heart with joy,
 —I cannot speak it—but thou know'st it well;
 Wherefore do thou rejoice in that deep love
 I bear thee, knowing that I have no thought
 But to fulfil thy will and crown thy wish:
 —Watch thou—and hide our mutual hope from all!"

Meantime the parents of Ricciarda were exiled from Pistoia, by the faction of the Neri. They took refuge from their enemies in a little fortress among the Appenines, whither Cino followed them, and was received as a comforter amid their distresses. Probably the days passed in this dreary abode, among the wild and solitary hills, when he assisted Ricciarda in her household duties, and in aiding and consoling her parents, were among the happiest of his life; but the winter came, and with it many privations and many hardships. Their mountain retreat was ill calculated to defend them against the fury of the elements: Ricciarda drooped under the pressure of misery and want, and her parents and her lover watched the gradual extinction of life—saw the rose-hue fade from her cheek, and the light from her eye, till she melted from their arms into death; then they buried her with tears, in a nook among the mountains.

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Many years afterwards, when Cino had reached the height of his fame, and had been crowned with wealth and honours by his native city, he had occasion to cross the Appenines on an embassy, and causing his suite to travel by another road, he made a pilgrimage alone to the tomb of his lost Selvaggia. This incident gave rise to the most striking of all his compositions, which with great pathos and sweetness describes his feelings, when he flung himself down on her humble grave, to weep over the recollection of their past happiness:

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Io fu' in sull'alto e in sul beato monte,
 Ove adorai baciando il santo sasso,
 E caddi in su quella pietra, oimè lasso!
 Ove l' onestà pose la sua fronte;
 E ch' ella chiuse d' ogni virtù il fonte
 Quel giorno che di morte acerbo passo
 Fece la donna dello mio cor,—lasso!—
 Già piena tutta d' adornezze conte.
 Quivi chiamai a questa guisa Amore:
 "Dolce mio Dio, fa che quinci mi traggia
 La morte a se, che qui giace il mio cor!"
 Ma poi che non m'intese il mio signore,
 Mi disparti, pur chiamando, Selvaggia!

L'alpe passai, con voce di dolore.

The circumstance in the last stanza, "I rose up and went on my way, and passed the mountain summits, crying aloud 'Selvaggia!' in accents of despair," has a strong reality about it, and no doubt *was* real. Her death took place about 1316.

In the history of Italian poetry, Selvaggia is distinguished as the "*bel numer' una*,"—"the fair number one"—of the four celebrated women of that century—The others were Dante's Beatrice, Petrarch's Laura, and Boccaccio's Fiammetta. [Pg 62]

Every one who reads and admires Petrarch, will remember his beautiful Sonnet on the Death of Cino, beginning "Piangete Donne"

Perchè 'l nostro amoroso messer Cino
Novellamente s'è da noi partito.

In the venerable Cathedral at Pistoia, there is an ancient half-effaced bas-relief, representing Cino, surrounded by his disciples, to whom he is explaining the code of civil law: a little behind stands the figure of a female veiled, and in a pensive attitude, which is supposed to represent Ricciarda de' Selvaggi.

All these are alluded to by Petrarch in the Trionfo d'Amore.

Ecco Selvaggia,
Ecco Cin da Pistoja; Guitton d'Arezzo;
Ecco i due Guidi che già furo in prezzo.

The two Guidi are, Guido Guizzinello, and Guido Cavalcanti. Guitone was a famous monk, who is said to have invented the present form of the sonnet: to him also is attributed the discovery of counterpoint, and the present system of musical notation. [Pg 63]

Of Conti's mistress nothing is known, but that she had the most beautiful hand in the world, whence the volume of poems written by her lover in her praise, is entitled, *La Bella Mano*, the fair hand. Conti lived some years later than Petrarch. I mention him merely to fill up the list of those ancient minor poets of Italy, whose names and loves are still celebrated.

FOOTNOTES:

- [21] Chi s' innamora, siccome voi fate
Ed ad ogni piacer si lega e scioglie
Mostra ch'amor leggermente il saetti—SON. 44.

CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 64]

LAURA.

There are some who doubt the reality of Petrarch's love, because it is expressed in numbers; and others, refining on this doubt, profess even to question whether his Laura ever existed, except in the imagination and the poetry of her lover. The first objection could only be made by the most prosaic of commentators—some true "black-letter dog"^[22]—who had dustified and mistified his faculties among old parchments. The most real and most fervent passion that ever fell under my own knowledge, was revealed in verse, and very exquisite verse too, and has inspired many an effusion, full of beauty, fancy, and poetry; but it has not, therefore, been counted less sincere; and Heaven forbid it should prove less lasting than if it had been told in the homeliest prose, and had never inspired one beautiful idea or one rapturous verse! [Pg 65]

To study Petrarch in his own works, and in his own delightful language; to follow him line by line, through all the vicissitudes and contradictions of passion; to listen to his self-reproaches, his terrors, his regrets, his conflicts; to dwell on his exquisite delineations of individual character and peculiar beauty, his simple touches of profound pathos and melancholy tenderness:—and then believe all to be mere invention,—the coinage of the brain,—a tissue of visionary fancies, in which the heart had no share; to confound him with the cold metaphysical rhymesters of a later age,—seems to argue not only a strange want of judgment, but an extraordinary obtuseness of feeling.^[23]

The faults of taste of which Petrarch has been accused over and over again, by those who seem to have studied him as Voltaire studied Shakspeare,—his *concetti*—his fanciful adoration of the laurel, as the emblem of Laura—his playing on the words *Laura*, *L'aura*, and *Lauro*, his *freezing flames* and *burning ice*,—I abandon to critics, and let them make the best of them, as defects in what were else perfection. [Pg 66]

These were the fashion of the day: a great genius may outrun his times, but not without bearing about him some ineffaceable impressions of the manners and character of the age in which he

lived. He is too witty—"Il a trop d'esprit," to be sincere, say the critics,—"he has a conceit left him in his misery,—a miserable conceit;" but we know—at least *I* know—how in the very extremity of passion the soul can mock at itself—how the fancy can with a bitter and exaggerated gaiety sport with the heart!—These are faults of composition in the writer, and admitted to be such; but they prove nothing against the man, the poet, or the lover. The reproach of monotony, I confess I never could understand. It is rather matter of astonishment, how in a collection of nearly four hundred poems, all, with one or two exceptions, turning upon the same subject and sentiment, the poet has poured forth such an endless and redundant variety both of thought and feeling—how from the wide universe, the changeful face of all beautiful nature, the treasures of antique learning, and, above all, from his own overflowing heart, he has drawn those lovely pictures, allusions, situations, sentiments and reflections, which have, indeed, been stolen, borrowed, imitated, worn threadbare by succeeding poets, but in him were the fresh and spontaneous effusions of profound feeling and luxuriant fancy. Schlegel very justly observes, that the impression of monotony may arise from our considering at one view, and bound up in one volume, a long series of poems, which were written in the course of many years, at different times, and on different occasions. Laura herself, he avers, would certainly have been *ennuyée* to death with her own praises, if she had been obliged to read over, at one sitting, all the verses which her lover composed on her charms; and I agree with him.

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It appears to me that the very impression of Petrarch's individual character, and the circumstances of his life, on the whole mass of his poetry, are evidence of the truth of his attachment, and the reality of its object. He was by nature a poet; his love was, therefore, poetical: he loved "in numbers, for the numbers came." He was an accomplished scholar in a pedantic age,—and his love is, therefore, illustrated by such comparisons and turns of thought as were allied to his habitual studies. He had a fertile and playful fancy, and his love is adorned by all the luxuriance of his imagination. He had been educated for the profession of the Civil Law, "per vender parole anzi menzogne,"—to sell words and lies, as he disdainfully expressed it,—and his love is mixed up with subtile reasonings on his own hapless state. He was a philosopher, and it is tinged with the mystic reveries of Platonism, the favourite and fashionable philosophy of the age. He was deeply religious, and the strain of devotional and moral feeling which mingles with that of passion, or of grief,—his fears lest the excess of his earthly affections should interfere with his eternal salvation,—his continual allusions to his faith, to a future existence, and the nothingness and vanity of the world,—are not so many proofs of his profaneness, but of his sincerity. He was suspicious, irritable, and susceptible; subject to quick transitions of feeling; raised by a word to hope—plunged by a glance into despair; just such a finely-toned instrument as a woman loves to play on;—and all this we have set forth in the contradictions, the self-reproaches, the little daily vicissitudes which are events and revolutions in a life of passion; a life, which when exhibited in the rich and softening tints of poetry, has all the power of strong interest, united to the charm of harmony and expression; but in the reality, and in plain prose, cannot be contemplated without a painful compassion. "The day may perhaps come," says Petrarch in one of his familiar letters,^[24] "when I shall have calmness enough to contemplate all the misery of my soul, to examine my passion, not however, that I may continue to love her—but that I may love thee alone, O my God! But at this day, how many obstacles have I yet to surmount, how many efforts have I yet to make! I no longer love as I did love, but still I love; I love in spite of myself—in lamentations and in tears. I will hate her—No!—I must still love her!" Seven years afterwards he writes,—"my love is extreme, but it is exclusive and virtuous—virtuous!—no!—this disquietude, these suspicions, these transports, this watchfulness, this utter weariness of every thing, are not signs of a virtuous love!" What a picture of an impassioned and distracted heart!

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And who was this Laura, the illustrious object of a passion which has filled the wide universe from side to side with her name and fame? What was her station, her birth, her lineage? What were her transcendant qualities of person, heart, and mind, that she should have swayed, with such despotic and distracting power, one of the sovereign spirits of the age? Is it not enough that we acknowledge her to have been Petrarch's love—as chaste as fair?

And whether coldness, pride, or virtue, dignify
A woman, so she is good, what does it signify?

In the present case, it signifies much:—we are not to be put off with a witty or satirical couplet:—the insatiable curiosity which Laura has excited from age to age—the volumes which have been written on the subject—are a proof of the sincerity of her lover; for nothing but truth could ever inspire this lasting and universal interest. But without diving into these dry disputations, let us take Laura's portrait from Petrarch himself, drawn, it will be said, by the partial hand of a poetic lover:—true; but since Laura is interesting to us from the charms she possessed in his eyes, it were unfair to seek her portraiture elsewhere.

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Laura was of high birth and station, though her life was spent in retirement and domestic cares;

In nobil sangue, vita umile e quete.

Her father, Audibert de Noves, was of the *haute noblesse* of Avignon, and died in her infancy, leaving her a dowry of 1000 gold crowns, (about 10,000 pounds)—a magnificent portion for those

times. She was married at the age of eighteen to Hugh de Sade, a man of rank equal to her own, and of corresponding age, but not distinguished by any advantages either of person or mind. The marriage contract is dated in January, 1325, two years before her first meeting with Petrarch: and in it, her mother, the Lady Ermessende, and brother John de Noves, stipulate to pay the dower left by her father; and also to bestow on the bride two magnificent dresses for state occasions; one of green, embroidered with violets; the other of crimson, trimmed with feathers. In all the portraits of Laura now extant, she is represented in one of these two dresses, and they are frequently alluded to by Petrarch. He tells us expressly, that when he first met her at matins in the Church of St. Claire, she was habited in a robe of green, spotted with violets.^[25] Mention is also made of a coronal of silver, with which she wreathed her hair; of her necklaces and ornaments of pearl. Diamonds are not once alluded to, because the art of cutting them had not then been invented. From all which, it appears that Laura was opulent, and moved in the first class of society. It was customary for the women of rank, in those times, to dress with extreme simplicity on ordinary occasions, but with the most gorgeous splendour when they appeared in public. There are some beautiful descriptions of Laura surrounded by her young female companions, divested of all her splendid apparel, in a simple white robe and a few flowers in her hair; but still pre-eminent over all by her superior loveliness. From the frequent allusions to her dress, and Petrarch's angry apostrophes to her mirror, because it assisted to heighten charms already too destructive,^[26] we may infer that Laura was not unmindful of the cares of the toilette.

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She was in person a fair Madonna-like beauty with soft dark eyes, and a profusion of pale golden hair parted on her brow, and falling in rich curls over her neck. He dwells on the celestial grace of her figure and movements, "l' andar celeste."

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Non era l' andar suo cosa mortale
Ma d' angelica forma.

He describes the beauty of her hand in the 166th sonnet,—

O bella man che mi dstringi il core.

And the loveliness of her mouth,—

La bella bocca angelica.

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The general character of her beauty must have been pensive, soft, unobtrusive, and even somewhat languid:

L' angelica sembianza umile e piana—
L' atto mansueto, umile e tardo—

the last line is exquisitely characteristic. This extreme softness and repose must have been far removed from insipidity; for he dwells also on the rare and varying expression of her loveliness, "Leggiadria singolare e pellegrina;"—the lightning of her smile, "Il lampeggiar dell' angelico riso;"—and the tender magic of her voice, which was felt in the inmost heart, "Il cantar che nell' anima si sente." She had a habit of veiling her eyes with her hand, and her looks were generally bent on the earth, "o per umiltade o per orgoglio." In the portrait of Laura, which I saw at the Laurentian Library at Florence, the eyes have this characteristic downcast look. Her lover complains also of a veil, which she was fond of wearing. Wandering in the country, one summer's day, he sees a young peasant-girl washing a veil in the running stream; he recognises the very texture which had so often intervened between him and the heaven of Laura's beauty, and he trembles as if he had been in the presence of Laura herself. This little incident is the subject of the first Madrigal.

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He describes her dignified humility, "l' umiltà superba;"—her beautiful silence, "il bel tacere;"—her frequent sighs, "i sospir soavemente rotti;"—her sweet disdain and gentle repulses, "dolci sdegni, placide repulse;"—the gesture which spoke without the aid of words, "l'atto che parla con silenzio." The picture, it must be confessed, is most finished, most delicate, most beautiful;—supposing only half to be true, it is still beautiful. But far more flattering, and more honourable to Laura, is her lover's confession of the influence which her charming character possessed over him; for it is certain that we owe to Laura's exquisite purity of mind and manners, the polished delicacy of the homage addressed to her. Passing over, of course, the circumstance of her being a married woman, and therefore not a proper object of amorous verse,—there is not in all the poetry she inspired, a line or sentiment which angels might not hear and approve. Petrarch represents her as expressing neither surprise nor admiration at the self-sacrifice of Lucretia, but only wondering that shame and grief had not anticipated the dagger of the Roman matron. He describes her conversation, "pien d'intelletti dolci ed alti," and her mind ever serene, though her countenance was pensive, "in aspetto pensoso, anima lieta." He tells us that she had raised him above all low-thoughted cares, and purified his heart from all base desires. "I bless the place, the time, the hour, when I presumed to lift my eyes upon her,—I say, O my soul, thankful shouldst thou be that hast been deemed worthy of such high honour—for from her spring those gentle thoughts which shall lead thee to aspire to the highest good, and to disdain all that the vulgar mind desires."

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I' benedico il loco e 'l tempo e l'ora
Che si alti miraron gli occhi miei;

E dico: anima, assai ringraziar dei
Che fosti a tanto onor degnata allora.

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....*...*...*...*

Da lei ti vien l' amoroso pensiero
Che, mentre 'l segui all' Sommo ben t'invia
Poco prezzando quel ch' ogni uom desia.

Every generous feeling, every noble and elevated sentiment, every desire for improvement, he refers to her, and to her only:

S' alcun bel frutto
Nasce di me, da voi vien prima il seme.
Io per me son quasi un terreno asciutto
Colto da voi; e 'l pregio è vostro in tutto.

CANZONE 8.

He gives us in a single line the very *beau idéal* of a female character, when he tells us that Laura united the highest intellect with the purest heart, "In alto intelletto un puro core." He dwells with rapture on her angelic modesty, which excited at once his reverence and his despair; but he confesses that he still hopes something from the pitying tenderness of her disposition.—

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Non è sì duro cor, che lagrimando,
Pregando, amando, talor non si smova
Nè sì freddo voler, che non si scalde.

The attachment inspired by such a woman was not likely to be lessened by absence, or removed by death itself; and it is certain that the second part of the Canzoniere of Petrarch, written after the death of Laura, is more beautiful than the first part: in a more impassioned style, a higher tone of feeling, with far fewer faults, both of taste and style.

It will be said perhaps that "the picture of such a mind as Petrarch's, enslaved and distracted by a dreaming passion, employed even in his declining years, in writing and polishing love verses, is a pitiable subject of contemplation; that if he had not left us his Canzoniere, he would probably have performed some other excelling work of genius, which would have crowned him with equal or superior glory; and that if he had never been the lover of Laura, he would have been no less that master-spirit who gave the leading impulse to the age in which he lived, by consecrating his life, his energies, all his splendid talents, to the cultivation of philosophy and the fine arts, the extension of learning and liberty, and the general improvement of mankind."

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I doubt this, and I appeal to Petrarch himself.

I believe there is no version into English of the 48th Canzone. If Lady Dacre had executed it—and in the same spirit as the "Chiare, fresche e dolce acque," and the "Italia mia," the reader had been spared my abortive prose sketch, which will give as just an idea of the original as a hasty penciled outline of one of Titian's or Domenichino's masterpieces would give us of all the magic colouring and effect of their glorious and half-breathing creations.

In this Canzone, Petrarch, in a high strain of poetic imagery, which takes nothing from the truth or pathos of the sentiment, allegorises his own situation and feelings: he represents himself as citing the Lord of Love, "Suo empio e dolce Signore," before the throne of Reason, and accusing him as the cause of all his sufferings, sorrows, errors, and misspent time. "Through *him* (Love) I have endured, even from the moment I was first beguiled into his power, such various and such exquisite pain, that my patience has at length been exhausted, and I have abhorred my existence. I have not only forsaken the path of ambition and useful exertion, but even of pleasure and of happiness: I, who was born, if I do not deceive myself, for far higher purposes than to be a mere amorous slave! Through *him* I have been careless of my duty to Heaven,—negligent of myself:—for the sake of one woman I forgot all else!—me miserable! What have availed me all the high and precious gifts of Heaven, the talents, the genius which raised me above other men? My hairs are changed to grey, but still my heart changeth not. Hath he not sent me wandering over the earth in search of repose? hath he not driven me from city to city, and through forests, and woods, and wild solitudes?^[27] hath he not deprived me of peace, and of that sleep which no herbs nor chaunted spells have power to restore? Through him, I have become a bye-word in the world, which I have filled with my lamentations, till by their repetition I have wearied myself, and perhaps all others."

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To this long tirade, Love with indignation replies: "Hearest thou the falsehood of this ungrateful man? This is he who in his youth devoted himself to the despicable traffic of words and lies, and now he blushes not to reproach me with having raised him from obscurity, to know the delights of an honourable and virtuous life. I gave him power to attain a height of fame and virtue to which of himself he had never dared to aspire. If he has obtained a name among men, to me he owes it. Let him remember the great heroes and poets of antiquity, whose evil stars condemned them to lavish their love upon unworthy objects, whose mistresses were courtezans and slaves;

while for him, I chose from the whole world one lovely woman, so gifted by Heaven with all female excellence, that her likeness is not to be found beneath the moon,—one whose melodious voice and gentle accents had power to banish from his heart every vain, and dark, and vicious thought. These were the wrongs of which he complains: such is my reward for all I have done for him,—ungrateful man! Upon my wings hath he soared upwards, till his name is placed among the greatest of the sons of song, and fair ladies and gentle knights listen with delight to his strains:—had it not been for me, what had he become before now? Perhaps a vain flatterer, seeking preferment in a Court, confounded among the herd of vulgar men! I have so chastened, so purified his heart through the heavenly image impressed upon it, that even in his youth, and in the age of the passions, I preserved him pure in thought and in action; [28] whatever of good or great ever stirred within his breast, he derives from her and from me. From the contemplation of virtue, sweetness, and beauty, in the gracious countenance of her he loved, I led him upwards to the adoration of the first Great Cause, the fountain of all that is beautiful and excellent;—hath he not himself confessed it? And this fair creature, whom I gave him to be the honour, and delight, and prop of his frail life"—

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Here the sense is suddenly broken off in the middle of a line. Petrarch utters a cry of horror, and exclaims—"Yes, you gave her to me, but you have also taken her from me!"

Love replies with sweet austerity—"Not I—but HE—the eternal One—who hath willed it so!"

After this, it will be allowed, I think, that it is to Laura we owe Petrarch; and that if the recompense she bestowed on him was not exactly that which he sought,—yet in fame, in greatness, in virtue, and in happiness, she well and richly repaid the adoration he lavished at her feet, and the glorious wreath of song with which he has circled her brows!

FOOTNOTES:

[22] See Pursuits of Literature.

[23] In a private letter of Petrarch to the Bishop of Lombes, occurs the following passage—(the Bishop, it appears, had rallied him on the subject of his attachment.) "Would to God that my Laura were indeed but an imaginary person, and my passion for her but sport!—Alas! it is rather a madness!—hard would it have been, and painful, to feign so long a time—and what extravagance to play such a farce in the world! No! we may counterfeit the action and voice of a sick man, but not the paleness and wasted looks of the sufferer; and how often have you witnessed both in me!"—SADE, vol. i. p. 281.

[24] Quoted by Foscolo.

[25] Canz. xv. Son. 10.

[26] See Son. 37, 38, &c.

[27] Foscolo remarks the restless spirit which all his life drove Petrarch, like a perturbed spirit, from one residence to another.

[28] Here Petrarch seems to have forgotten himself; he was not *always* immaculate.

CHAPTER VII.

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LAURA AND PETRARCH CONTINUED.

Much power of lively ridicule, much coarse wit,—principally French wit,—has been expended on the subject of Laura's virtue; by those, I presume, who under similar circumstances would have found such virtue "too painful an endeavour." [29] Much depraved ingenuity has been exerted to twist certain lines and passages in the Canzonière into a sense which shall blot with frailty the memory of this beautiful and far-famed being: once believe these interpretations, and all the peculiar and graceful charm which now hangs round her intercourse with Petrarch vanishes,—the reverential delicacy of the poet's homage becomes a mockery, and all his exalted praises of her unequalled virtue, and her invincible chastity, are turned to satire, and insult our moral feeling.

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But the question, I believe, is finally set at rest, and it were idle to war with epigrams. All the evidence that has been collected, external and internal, prose and poetry, critical and traditional, tends to prove, first, that Laura preserved her virtue to the last; and, secondly, that she did not preserve it unassailed; that Petrarch, true to his sex,—a very man, (as Laura has been called a *very woman*;) used at first every art, every effort, every advantage, which his diversified accomplishments of mind and person lent him, to destroy the very virtue he adored. He only *hints* this in his poetry, just sufficiently to enhance the glory which he has thrown round his divinity; but he speaks more plainly in prose.

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"Untouched by my prayers, unvanquished by my arguments, unmoved by my flattery, she remained faithful to her sex's honour; she resisted her own young heart, and mine, and a thousand, thousand, thousand things, which must have conquered any other. She remained

unshaken. A woman taught me the duty of a man! to persuade me to keep the path of virtue, her conduct was at once an example and a reproach; and when she beheld me break through all bounds, and rush blindly to the precipice, she had the courage to abandon me, rather than follow me."^[30]

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But whether, in this long conflict, Laura preserved her heart untouched, as well as her virtue immaculate; whether she shared the love she inspired; or whether she escaped from the captivating assiduities and intoxicating homage of her lover, "*fancy-free*;"—whether coldness, or prudence, or pride, or virtue, or the mere heartless love of admiration, or a mixture of all together, dictated her conduct, is at least as well worth inquiry, as the exact colour of her eyes, or the form of her nose, upon which we have pages of grave discussion. She might have been *coquette par instinct*, if not *par calcul*; she might have felt, with feminine *tacte*, that to preserve her influence over Petrarch, it was necessary to preserve his respect. She was evidently proud of her conquest: she had else been more or less than woman; and at every hazard, but that of self-respect, she was resolved to retain him. If Petrarch absented himself for a few days, he was generally better treated on his return.^[31] If he avoided her, then her eye followed him with a softer expression. When he looked pale from sickness of heart and agitation of spirits, Laura would address him with a few words of pitying tenderness. He thanks her in those exquisite lines, which seem to glow with all the renovation of hope,

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Volgendo gli occhi al mio novo colore
Che fa di morte rimembrar le gente
Pietà vi mosse, onde benignamente
Salutando teneste in vita il core.

La frale vita ch'ancor meco alberga,
Fu de' begli occhi vostri aperto dono,
E della voce angelica soave!^[32]

He presumes upon this benignity, and is again dashed back with frowns. He flies to solitude,—solitude!—Never let the proud and torn heart, wrung with the sense of injury, and sick with unrequited passion, seek that worst resource against pain, for there grief grows by contemplation of itself, and every feeling is sharpened by collision. Petrarch sought to "mitigate the fever of his heart" amid the shades of Vaucluse, a spot so gloomy and so solitary, that his very servants forsook him; and Vaucluse, its fountains, its forests, and its hanging cliffs, reflected only the image of Laura.

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L'acque parlan d'amore, e l'aura, e i rami
E gli augeletti, e i pesci e i fiori e l'erba;
Tutti insieme pregando ch' io sempr'ami!^[33]

He is driven again to her feet by his own insupportable thoughts—and in terror of himself;—

Tal paura ho di ritrovarmi solo!

He endeavours to maintain in her presence that self-constraint she had enjoined. He assumes a cold and calm deportment, and Laura, as she passes him, whispers in a tone of gentle reproach, "Petrarch! are you so soon weary of loving me?" (ten or eleven years of adoration were, in truth, nothing—to *signify*!) At length, he resolved to leave Laura and Avignon for ever; and instead of plunging into solitude, to seek the wiser resource of travel and society. He announced this intention to Laura, and bade her a long farewell; either through surprise, or grief, or the fear of losing her glorious captive, she turned exceedingly pale, a cloud overspread her beautiful countenance, and she fixed her eyes on the ground. This was to her lover an intoxicating moment; in the exultation of sudden delight, he interpreted these symptoms of relenting, this "vago impallidir," too favourably to himself. "She bent those gentle eyes upon the earth, which in their sweet silence said,—to me at least they seemed to say,—'who takes my faithful friend so far from me?'"

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Chinava a terra il bel guardo gentile,
E tacendo dicea, com' a me parve—
"Chi m'allontana il mio fedele amico?"

On his return to Avignon, a few months afterwards, Laura received him with evident pleasure; but he is not, therefore, more *avançé*; all this was probably the refined coquetterie of a woman of calm passions; but not heartless, not really indifferent to the devotion she inspired, nor ungrateful for it.

Petrarch has himself left us a most minute and interesting description of the whole course of Laura's conduct towards him, which by a beautiful figure of poetry he has placed in her own mouth. The passage occurs in the *TRIONFO DI MORTE*, beginning, "La notte che segui l'orribil caso."

The apparition of Laura descending on the morning dew, bright as the opening dawn, and crowned with Oriental gems,

Di gemme orientali incoronata,

appears before her lover, and addresses him with compassionate tenderness. After a short

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dialogue, full of poetic beauty and noble thoughts,^[34] Petrarch conjures her, in the name of heaven and of truth, to tell him whether the pity she sometimes expressed for him was allied to love? for that the sweetness she mingled with her disdain and reserve—the soft looks with which she tempered her anger, had left him for long years in doubt of her real sentiments, still doating, still suspecting, still hoping without end:

Creovvi amor pensier mai nella testa,
D' aver pietà del mio lungo martire
Non lasciando vostr' alta impresa onestà?

Che vostri dolci sdegni e le dolc' ire—
Le dolci paci ne' begli occhi scritte—
Tenner molt' anni in dubbio il mio desire.

She replies evasively, with a smile and a sigh, that her heart was ever with him, but that to preserve her own fair fame, and the virtue of both, it was necessary to assume the guise of severity and disdain. She describes the arts with which she kept alive his passion, now checking his presumption with the most frigid reserve, and when she saw him drooping, as a man ready to die, "all fancy-sick and pale of cheer," gently restoring him with soft looks and kind words:

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"Salvando la tua vita e'l nostro onore."

She confesses the delight she felt in being beloved, and the pride she took in being sung by so great a poet. She reminds him of one particular occasion, when seated by her side, and they were left alone, he sang to his lute a song composed to her praise, beginning, "Dir più non osa il nostro amore;" and she asks him whether he did not perceive that the veil had then nearly fallen from her heart?^[35]

She laments, in some exquisite lines, that she had not the happiness to be born in Italy, the native country of her lover, and yet allows that the land must needs be fair in which she first won his affection.

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Duolmi ancor veramente, ch'io non nacqui
Almen più presso al tuo fiorito nido!—
Ma assai fu bel pàese ov'io ti piacqui.

In another passage we have a sentiment evidently taken from nature, and exquisitely graceful and feminine. "You," says Laura, "proclaimed to all men the passion you felt for me: you called aloud for pity: you kept not the tender secret for me alone, but took a pride and a pleasure in publishing it forth to the world; thus constraining me, by all a woman's fear and modesty, to be silent."—"But not less is the pain because we conceal it in the depths of the heart, nor the greater because we lament aloud: fiction and poetry can add nothing to truth, nor yet take from it."

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Tu eri di mercè chiamar già roco
Quand'io tacea; perchè vergogna e tema
Facean molto desir, parer si poco;
Non è minor il duol perch' altri 'l prema,
Ne maggior per andarsi lamentando:
Per fizion non cresce il ver, nè scema.

Petrarch, then all trembling and in tears, exclaims, "that could he but believe he had been dear to her eyes as to her heart, he were sufficiently recompensed for all his sufferings;" and she replies, "that will I never reveal!" (*quello mi taccio.*) By this coquettish and characteristic answer, we are still left in the dark. Such was the sacred respect in which Petrarch held her he so loved, that though he evidently wishes to believe—perhaps *did* believe, that he had touched her heart, he would not presume to insinuate what Laura had never avowed. The whole scene, though less polished in the versification than some of his sonnets, is written throughout with all the flow and fervour of real feeling. It received the poet's last corrections twenty-six years after Laura's death, and but a few weeks previous to his own.

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When at Milan, I was taken, as a matter of course, to visit the Ambrosian library. At the time I was ill in health, dejected and indifferent; and I only remember being led in passive resignation from room to room, and called upon to admire a vast variety of objects, at the moment when I was pining for rest; when to look, think, speak, or move, was pain,—when to sit motionless and gaze out upon the sunshine, seemed to me the only supreme blessedness. In such moments as these, we can have sympathies with nature, but not with old books and antiquities. I have a most confused recollection both of the locality and the contents of this famous collection; but there were two objects which roused me from this sullen stupor, and indelibly impressed my imagination and my memory; and one of these was the celebrated copy of Virgil, which had been the favourite companion and constant study of Petrarch, containing that memorandum of the death of Laura, in his own handwriting, which, after much expenditure of paper, and argument, and critical abuse, is at length admitted to be genuine. I knew little of the controversy this famous inscription had occasioned in Italy,—though I was aware that its authenticity had been

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disputed: but as a homely proverb saith, *seeing is believing*; to look upon the handwriting with my own eyes, would have made assurance double sure, if in that moment I needed such assurance. I do not remember reasoning or doubting on the subject;—but gushing up like the waters of an intermitting fountain, there was a sudden flow of feeling and memory came over my heart:—I stood for some moments silently contemplating the name of LAURA, in the pale, half-effaced characters traced by the hand of her lover; that name with which his genius and his love have filled the earth: confused thoughts of the mingling of vanity and glory,—of the "poco polvere che nulla sente," and the immortality of deified beauty, were crowded in my mind. When all were gone, I turned back, and gave the guide a small gratuity to be allowed to do homage to the name of Laura, by pressing my lips upon it. The reader smiles at this sentimental enthusiasm; so would I, if time had not taught me to respect, as well as regret, what it has taken from me, and never can restore.

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The memorandum has often been quoted; but this account of the love of Petrarch would not be complete were it omitted here. It runs literally thus:—

"Laura, illustrious by her own virtues, and long celebrated by my verses, I beheld for the first time, in my early youth, on the 6th of April, 1327, about the first hour of the day, in the church of Saint Claire in Avignon: and in the same city, in the same month of April, the same day and hour, in the year 1348, this light of my life was withdrawn from the world while I was at Verona, ignorant, alas! of what had befallen me. The terrible intelligence was conveyed in a letter from Louis, and reached me at Parma the 19th of May, early in the morning.

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"Her chaste and beautiful remains were deposited the same day after vespers, in the Church of the Fratri Minori (Cordeliers). Her spirit, as Seneca said of Scipio Africanus,^[36] has returned, doubtless, to that heaven whence it came.

"To preserve the memory of this afflicting loss, it is with a bitter pleasure I record it here, in this book which is ever before my eyes, that nothing in this world may hereafter delight me: and that the chief tie which bound me to life being broken, I may, by frequently looking on these words, and thinking on this transitory existence, be prepared to quit this earthly Babylon, which, with the help of the divine grace, and the constant and manly recollection of those fruitless desires, and vain hopes, and sad vicissitudes which have so long agitated me, will be an easy task."

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Laura died of the plague, which then desolated Avignon, and terminated the life of the sufferer on the third day. The moment she was seized with the fatal symptoms, she dictated her will; and notwithstanding the pestilential nature of her disorder, she was surrounded to the last by her numerous relations and friends, who braved death rather than forsake her.

Her tomb was discovered and opened in 1533, in the presence of Francis the First, whose celebrated stanzas on the occasion are well known.

Of the fame, which even in her lifetime, the love and poetical adoration of Petrarch had thrown round his Laura, a curious instance is given which will characterise the manners of the age. When Charles of Luxemburgh (afterwards Emperor) was at Avignon, a grand fête was given, in his honour, at which all the noblesse were present. He desired that Petrarch's Laura should be pointed out to him; and when she was introduced, he made a sign with his hand that the other ladies present should fall back; then going up to Laura, and for a moment contemplating her with interest, he kissed her respectfully on the forehead and on the eyelids. Petrarch alludes to this incident in the 201st sonnet, the last line of which shows that this royal salutation was considered singular.

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"M'empia d'invidia l'atto dolce e strano."

Petrarch survived her twenty-six years, dying in 1374. He was found lifeless one morning in his study, his hand resting on a book.

The inferences I draw from this rapid sketch are, first, that Laura was virtuous, but not insensible;—for had she been facile, she would not have preserved her lover's respect; had she been a heartless trifler, she could not have retained his love, nor deserved his undying regrets: and secondly, that if Petrarch had not attached himself fervently to this beautiful and pure-hearted woman, he would have employed his splendid talents like other men of his time. He might then have left us theological treatises and Latin epics, which the worms would have eaten; he might have risen high in the church or state; have become a bold, intriguing priest; a politic archbishop,—a cardinal,—a pope;—most worthless and empty titles all, compared with that by which he has descended to us, as Petrarch, the poet and the lover of Laura!^[37]

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FOOTNOTES:

- [29] Madame Deshoulières speaks "avec connaissance de fait," and even points out the very spot in which Laura, "de l'amoureux Petrarque adoucit le martyre."—Another French lady, who piqued herself on being a descendant of the family of Laura, was extremely affronted and scandalised when the Chevalier Ramsay asserted that Petrarch's passion was purely poetical and platonic, and regarded it heresy to suppose that Laura could

have been "*ungrateful*,"—such was her idea of feminine *gratitude*!—(Spence's Anecdotes.) Then comes another French woman, with the most anti-poetical soul that God ever placed within the form of a woman—"Le fade personnage que votre Petrarque! que sa Laure était sotte et precieuse! que la Cour d'Amour était fastidieuse!" &c. exclaims the acute, amusing, profligate, heartless Madame du Deffand. It must be allowed that Petrarch and Laura would have been extremely *desplacés* in the Court of the Regent,—the only *Court of Love* with which Madame du Deffand was acquainted, and which assuredly was not *fastidieuse*.

[30] From the Dialogues with St. Augustin, as quoted in the "Pieces Justificatives," and by Ginguené (Hist. Litt. vol. iii. notes.) These imaginary dialogues are a series of Confessions not intended for publication by Petrarch, but now printed with his prose works.

[31] Sonnet 39.

[32] Ballata 5.

[33] Petrarch withdrew to Vaucluse in 1337, and spent three years in entire solitude. He commenced his journey to Rome in 1341, about fourteen years after his first interview with Laura.

[34] Petrarch asks her whether it was "pain to die?" she replies in those fine lines which have been quoted a thousand times:

La Morte è fin d' una prigion oscura
Agli animi gentili; agli altri è noia,
Ch' hanno posto nel fango ogni lor cura.

[35] Ma non si ruppe almen ogni vel quando
Sola i tuoi detti, te presente accolsi
"Dir più non osa il nostro amor," cantando.

(The song here alluded to is not preserved in Petrarch's works, and the expression "*il nostro amore*," is very remarkable.)

[36] This sounds at first pedantic; but it must be remembered that at this very time Petrarch was studying Seneca, and writing a Latin poem on the history of Scipio: thus the ideas were fresh in his mind.

[37] The hypothesis I have assumed relative to Laura's character, her married state, and the authenticity of the MS. note in the Virgil, have not been lightly adopted, but from deep conviction and patient examination: but this is not the place to set arguments and authorities in array—Ginguené and Gibbon against Lord Byron and Fraser Tytler. I am surprised at the ground Lord Byron has taken on the question. As for his characteristic sneer on the assertion of M. de Bastie, who had said truly and beautifully—"qu'il n'y a que la vertu seule qui soit capable de faire des impressions que la mort n'efface pas," I disdain, in my feminine character, to reply to it; I will therefore borrow the eloquence of a more powerful pen:—"The love of a man like Petrarch, would have been less in character, if it had been less ideal. For the purposes of inspiration, a single interview was quite sufficient. The smile which sank into his heart the first time he ever beheld Laura, played round her lips ever after: the look with which her eyes first met his, never passed away. The image of his mistress still haunted his mind, and was recalled by every object in nature. Even death could not dissolve the fine illusion; for that which exists in the imagination is alone imperishable. As our feelings become more ideal, the impression of the moment indeed becomes less violent; but the effect is more general and permanent. The blow is felt only by reflection; it is the rebound that is fatal. We are not here standing up for this kind of Platonic attachment, but only endeavouring to explain the way in which the passions very commonly operate in minds accustomed to draw their strongest interests from constant contemplation."—*Edinburgh Review*.

CHAPTER VIII.

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ON THE LOVE OF DANTE FOR BEATRICE PORTINARI.

Had I taken chronology into due consideration, Dante ought to have preceded Petrarch, having been born some forty years before him,—but I forgot it. "Truth," says Wordsworth, "has her pleasure-grounds,

Her haunts of ease
And easy contemplation;—gay parterres
And labyrinthine walks; her sunny glades
And shady groves for recreation framed."

And such a haunted pleasure-ground of beautiful recollections, would I wish my subject to be to myself and to my readers; where we shall be privileged to wander at will; to pause or turn back; to deviate to this side or to that, as memory may prompt, or imagination lead, or illustration require.

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Dante and his Beatrice are best exhibited in contrast to Petrarch and Laura. Petrarch was in his

youth an amiable and accomplished courtier, whose ambition was to cultivate the arts, and please the fair. Dante early plunged into the factions which distracted his native city, was of a stern commanding temper, mingling study with action. Petrarch loved with all the vivacity of his temper; he took a pleasure in publishing, in exaggerating, in embellishing his passion in the eyes of the world. Dante, capable of strong and enthusiastic tenderness, and early concentrating all the affections of his heart on one object, sought no sympathy; and solemnly tells us of himself,—in contradistinction to those poets of his time who wrote of love from fashion or fancy, not from feeling,—that he wrote as love inspired, and as his heart dictated.

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"Io mi son un che, quando
Amore spira, noto, ed in quel modo
Ch'ei detta dentro, vo significando."

PURGATORIO, C. 24.

A coquette would have triumphed in such a captive as Petrarch; and in truth, Laura seems to have "sounded him from the top to the bottom of his compass:"—a tender and impassioned woman would repose on such a heart as Dante's, even as his Beatrice did. Petrarch had a gay and captivating exterior; his complexion was fair, with sparkling blue eyes and a ready smile. He is very amusing on the subject of his own coxcombry, and tells us how cautiously he used to turn the corner of a street, lest the wind should disorder the elaborate curls of his fine hair! Dante, too, was in his youth eminently handsome, but in a style of beauty which was characteristic of his mind: his eyes, were large and intensely black, his nose aquiline, his complexion of a dark olive, his hair and beard very much curled, his step slow and measured, and the habitual expression of his countenance grave, with a tinge of melancholy abstraction. When Petrarch walked along the streets of Avignon, the women smiled, and said, "there goes the lover of Laura!" The impression which Dante left on those who beheld him, was far different. In allusion to his own personal appearance, he used to relate an incident that once occurred to him. When years of persecution and exile had added to the natural sternness of his countenance, the deep lines left by grief, and the brooding spirit of vengeance, he happened to be at Verona, where since the publication of the *Inferno*, he was well known. Passing one day by a portico, where several women were seated, one of them whispered, with a look of awe,— "Do you see that man? that is he who goes down to hell whenever he pleases, and brings us back tidings of the sinners below!" "Ay, indeed!" replied her companion,— "very likely; see how his face is scarred with fire and brimstone, and blackened with smoke, and how his hair and beard have been singed and curled in the flames!"

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Dante had not, however, this forbidding appearance when he won the young heart of Beatrice Portinari. They first met at a banquet given by her father, Folco de' Portinari, when Dante was only nine years old, and Beatrice a year younger. His childish attachment, as he tells us himself, commenced from that hour; it became a passion, which increased with his years, and did not perish even with its object.

Beatrice has not fared better at the hands of commentators than Laura. Laura, with her golden hair scattered to the winds, "i capei d'oro al aura sporsi," her soft smiles, and her angel-like deportment, was to be Repentance; and the more majestic Beatrice, in whose eyes dwelt love,

E spiriti d'amore infiammati,

was sublimated into *Theology*: with how much reason we shall examine.

In one of his canzoni, called *il Ritratto*, (the Portrait) Dante has left us a most minute and finished picture of his Beatrice, "which," says Mr. Carey, "might well supply a painter with a far more exalted idea of female beauty, than he could form to himself from the celebrated Ode of Anacreon, on a similar subject." From this canzone and some lines scattered through his sonnets, I shall sketch the person and character of Beatrice. She was not in form like the slender, fragile-looking Laura, but on a larger scale of loveliness, tall and of a commanding figure;^[38]—graceful in her gait as a peacock, upright as a crane,

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Soava a guisa va di un bel pavone,
Diritta sopra se, come una grua.

Her hair was fair and curling,

"Capegli crespi e biondi,"

but not *golden*,—an epithet I do not find once applied to it: she had an ample forehead, "spaciosa fronte," a mouth that when it smiled surpassed all things in sweetness; so that her Poet would give the universe to hear it pronounce a kind "yes."

Mira che quando ride
Passa ben di dolcezza ogni altra cosa.
Così di quella bocca il pensier mio
Mi sprona, perchè io
Non ho nel mondo cosa che non desse
A tal ch'un sì, con buon voler dicesse.

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Her neck was white and slender, springing gracefully from the bust—

Poi guarda la sua svelta e bianca gola
Commissa ben dalle spalle e dal petto.

A small, round, dimpled chin,

Mento tondo, fesso e piccioletto:

and thereupon the Poet breaks out into a rapture, any thing but theological,

Il bel diletto
Aver quel collo fra le braccia stretto
E far in quella gola un picciol segno!

Her arms were beautiful and round; her hand soft, white, and polished;

La bianca mano morbida e pulita:

her fingers slender, and decorated with jewelled rings as became her birth; fair she was as a pearl;

Con un color angelica di perla:

graceful and lovely to look upon, but disdainful where it was becoming:

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Graziosa a vederla,
E disdegnosa dove si conviene.

And as a corollary to these traits, I will quote the eleventh Sonnet as a more general picture of female loveliness, heightened by some tender touches of mental and moral beauty, such as never seem to have occurred to the debased imaginations of the classic poets:

Negli occhi porta la mia Donna Amore;
Perchè si fa gentil ciocch' ella mira:
Ov' ella passa, ogni uom ver lei si gira;
E cui saluta, fa tremar lo core,
Sicchè bassando 'l viso tutto smuore,
Ed ogni suo difetto allor sospira;
Fugge dinanzi a lei superbia ed ira.
Ajutatemi, donne, a farle onore!
Ogni dolcezza, ogni pensiero umile
Nasce nel core a chi parlar la sente;
Onde è laudato chi prima la vide.
Quel ch' ella par, quando un poco sorride
No si può dicer, nè tenera mente;
Si è nuovo miracolo e gentile.

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TRANSLATION.

"Love is throned in the eyes of my Beatrice! they ennoble every thing she looks upon! As she passes, men turn and gaze; and whomsoever she salutes, his heart trembles within him; he bows his head, the colour forsakes his cheek, and he sighs for his own unworthiness. Pride and anger fly before her! Assist me, ladies, to do her honour! All sweet thoughts of humble love and good-will spring in the hearts of those who hear her speak, so that it is a blessedness first to behold her, and when she faintly and softly smiles—ah! then it passes all fancy, all expression, so wondrous is the miracle, and so gracious!"

The love of Dante for his Beatrice partook of the purity, tenderness, and elevated character of her who inspired it, and was also stamped with that stern and melancholy abstraction, that disposition to mysticism, which were such strong features in the character of her lover. He does not break out into fond and effeminate complaints, he does not sigh to the winds, nor swell the fountain with his tears; his love does not, like Petrarch's, alternately freeze and burn him, nor is it "un dolce amaro," "a bitter sweet," with which his fancy can sport in good set terms. No; it shakes his whole being like an earthquake; it beats in every pulse and artery; it has dwelt in his heart till it has become a part of his life, or rather his life itself.^[39] Though we are not told so expressly, it is impossible to doubt, on a consideration of all those passages and poems which relate to Beatrice, that his love was approved and returned, and that his character was understood and appreciated by a woman too generous, too noble-minded, to make him the sport of her vanity. He complains, indeed, *poetically*, of her disdain, for which he excuses himself in another poem: "We know that the heavens shine on in eternal serenity, and that it is only our imperfect vision, and the rising vapours of the earth, that make the ever-beaming stars appear clouded at times to our eye." He expresses no fear of a rival in her affections; but the native jealousy as well as delicacy of his temper appears in those passages in which he addresses the eulogium of Beatrice to the Florentine ladies and her young companions.^[40] Those of his own sex, as he assures us, were not worthy to listen to her praises; or must perforce have become enamoured of this picture of female excellence, the fear of which made a coward of him—

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Ma tratterò del suo stato gentile
Donne e donzelle amorose, con vui;
Che non è cosa da parlarne altrui.

Among the young companions of Beatrice, Dante particularly distinguishes one, who appears to have been her chosen friend, and who, on account of her singular and blooming beauty, was called, at Florence, Primavera, (the Spring.) Her real name was Giovanna. Dante frequently names them together, and in particular in that exquisitely fanciful sonnet to his friend Guido Cavalcanti; where he addresses them by those familiar and endearing diminutives, so peculiarly Italian— [Pg 116]

E Monna Vanna e Monna Bice poi.^[41]

It appears from the 7th and 8th Sonnets of the Vita Nuova, that in the early part of their intercourse, Beatrice, indulging her girlish vivacity, smiled to see her lover utterly discountenanced in her presence, and pointed out her triumph to her companions. This offence seems to have deeply affected the proud, susceptible mind of Dante: it was under the influence of some such morose feeling, probably on this very occasion, that his dark passions burst forth in the bitter lines beginning, [Pg 117]

Io maledico il dì ch' io vidi imprima
La luce de' vostri occhi traditori.

"I curse the day in which I first beheld the splendour of those traitor eyes," &c. This angry sonnet forms a fine characteristic contrast with that eloquent and impassioned effusion of Petrarch, in which he multiplies blessings on the day, the hour, the minute, the season, and the spot, in which he first beheld Laura—

Benedetto sia l' giorno, e 'l mese, e l' anno, &c.

This fit of indignation was, however, short-lived. Every tender emotion of Dante's feeling heart seems to have been called forth when Beatrice lost her excellent father. Folco Portinari died in 1289; and the description we have of the inconsolable grief of Beatrice and the sympathy of her young companions,—so poetically, so delicately touched by her lover,—impress us with a high idea both of her filial tenderness and the general amiability of her disposition, which rendered her thus beloved. In the 12th and 13th Sonnets, we have, perhaps, one of the most beautiful groups ever presented in poetry. Dante meets a company of young Florentine ladies, who were returning from paying Beatrice a visit of condolence on the death of her father. Their altered and dejected looks, their downcast eyes, and cheeks "colourless as marble," make his heart tremble within him; he asks after Beatrice—"our gentle lady," as he tenderly expresses it: the young girls raise their downcast eyes, and regard him with surprise. "Art thou he," they exclaim, "who hast so often sung to us the praises of our Beatrice? the voice, indeed, is his; but, oh! how changed the aspect! Thou weepst!—why shouldst *thou* weep?—thou hast not seen *her* tears;—leave *us* to weep and return to our home, refusing comfort; for we, indeed, have heard her speak, and seen her dissolved in grief; so changed is her lovely face by sorrow, that to look upon her is enough to make one die at her feet for pity."^[42] [Pg 118]

It should seem that the extreme affliction of Beatrice for the loss of her father, acting on a delicate constitution, hastened her own end, for she died within a few months afterwards, in her 24th year. In the "Vita Nuova" there is a fragment of a canzone, which breaks off at the end of the first strophe; and annexed to it is the following affecting note, originally in the handwriting of Dante.

"I was engaged in the composition of this Canzone, and had completed only the above stanza, when it pleased the God of justice to call unto himself this gentlest of human beings; that she might be glorified under the auspices of that blessed Queen, the Virgin Maria, whose name was ever held in especial reverence by my sainted Beatrice." [Pg 120]

Boccaccio, who knew Dante personally, tells us, that on the death of Beatrice, he was so changed by affliction that his best friends could scarcely recognise him. He scarcely eat or slept; he would not speak; he neglected his person, until he became "una cosa selvatica a vedere," a *savage thing to the eye*: to borrow his own strong expression, he seems to have been "grief-stung to madness." To the first Canzone, written after the death of Beatrice, Dante has prefixed a note, in which he tells us, that after he had long wept in silence the loss of her he loved, he thought to give utterance to his sorrow in words; and to compose a Canzone, in which he should write, (weeping as he wrote,) of the virtues of her who through much anguish had bowed his soul to the earth. "Then," he says, "I thus began:—gli occhi dolenti,"—which are the first words of this Canzone. It is addressed, like the others, to her female companions, whom alone he thought worthy to listen to her praises, and whose gentle hearts could alone sympathise in his grief. [Pg 121]

Non vo parlare altrui
Se non a cor gentil, che 'n donna sia!

One stanza of this Canzone is unequalled, I think, for a simplicity at once tender and sublime. The sentiment, or rather the meaning, in homely English phrase, would run thus:—

"Ascended is our Beatrice to the highest Heaven, to those realms where angels dwell in peace;

and you, her fair companions, and Love and me, she has left, alas! behind. It was not the frost of winter that chilled her, nor was it the heat of summer that withered her; it was the power of her virtue, her humility, and her truth, that ascending into Heaven moved the ETERNAL FATHER to call her to himself, seeing that this miserable life was not worthy of any thing so fair, so excellent!"

On the anniversary of the death of Beatrice, Dante tells us that he was sitting alone, thinking upon her, and tracing, as he meditated, the figure of an angel on his tablets.^[43] Can any one doubt that this little incident, so natural and so affecting,—his thinking on his lost Beatrice, and by association sketching the figure of an angel, while his mind dwelt upon her removal to a brighter and better world,—must have been real? It gave rise to the 18th Sonnet of the Vita Nuova, which he calls "Il doloroso annovale," (the mournful anniversary.)

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Another little circumstance, not less affecting, he has beautifully commemorated in two Sonnets which follow the one last mentioned. They are addressed to some kind and gentle creature, who from a window beheld Dante abandon himself, with fearful vehemence, to the agony of his feelings, when he believed no human eye was on him. "She turned pale," he says, "with compassion; her eyes filled with tears, as if she had loved me: then did I remember my noble-hearted Beatrice, for even thus she often looked upon me," &c. And he confesses that the grateful, yet mournful pleasure with which he met the pitying look of this fair being, excited remorse in his heart, that he should be able to derive pleasure from anything.

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Dante concludes the collection of his *Rime*, (his miscellaneous poems on the subject of his early love) with this remarkable note:—

"I beheld a marvellous vision, which has caused me to cease from writing in praise of my blessed Beatrice, until I can celebrate her more worthily; which that I may do, I devote my whole soul to study, as *she* knoweth well; in so much, that if it please the Great Disposer of all things to prolong my life for a few years upon this earth, I hope hereafter to sing of my Beatrice what never yet was said or sung of woman."

And in this transport of enthusiasm, Dante conceived the idea of his great poem, of which Beatrice was destined to be the heroine. It was to no Muse, called by fancy from her fabled heights, and feigned at the poet's will; it was not to ambition of fame, nor literary leisure seeking a vent for overflowing thoughts; nor to the wish to aggrandise himself, or to flatter the pride of a patron;—but to the inspiration of a young, beautiful, and noble-minded woman, we owe one of the grandest efforts of human genius. And never did it enter into the imagination of any lover, before or since, to raise so mighty, so vast, so enduring, so glorious a monument to the worth and charms of a mistress. Other poets were satisfied if they conferred on the object of their love an immortality on earth: Dante was not content till he had placed *his* on a throne in the Empyreum, above choirs of angels, in presence of the very fountain of glory; her brow wreathed with eternal beams, and clothed with the ineffable splendours of beatitude;—an apotheosis, compared to which, all others are earthly and poor indeed.

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FOOTNOTES:

[38] "Membra formosi et grandi."

[39] It borrows even the solemn language of Sacred Writ to express its intensity:

Nelle man vostre, o dolce donna mia!
Raccomando lo spirito che muore.

SON. 34.

[40] I refer particularly to that sublime Canzone addressed to the ladies of Florence, and beginning

"Donne ch' avete intelletto d' amore."

[41] Monna Vanna, for *Madonna Giovanna*; and Monna Bice, *Madonna Beatrice*.

This famous sonnet has been translated by Hayley and by Shelley. I subjoin the version of the latter, as truer to the spirit of the original.

THE WISH.—TO GUIDO CAVALCANTI.

Guido! I would that Lapo, thou, and I,
Led by some strong enchantment, might ascend
A magic ship, whose charmed sails should fly
With winds at will, where'er our thoughts might wend:
And that no change, nor any evil chance
Should mar our joyous voyage; but it might be
That even satiety should still enhance
Between our hearts their strict community,
And that the bounteous wizard there would place
Vanna and Bice, and thy gentle love,
Companions of our wanderings, and would grace
With passionate talk, wherever we might rove
Our time!—and each were as content and free
As I believe that thou and I should be!

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 125]

DANTE AND BEATRICE CONTINUED.

Through the two first parts of the Divina Commedia, (Hell and Purgatory,) Beatrice is merely announced to the reader—she does not appear in person; for what should the sinless and sanctified spirit of Beatrice do in those abodes of eternal anguish and expiatory torment? Her appearance, however, in due time and place, is prepared and shadowed forth in many beautiful allusions: for instance, it is she, who descending from the empyreal height, sends Virgil to be the deliverer of Dante in the mysterious forest, and his guide through the abysses of torment.

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Io son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;
Vegno di loco ove tornar disio:
Amor mi mosse che mi fa parlare.

INFERNO, c. 2.

"I who now bid thee on this errand forth
Am Beatrice; from a place I come
Revisited with joy; love brought me thence,
Who prompts my speech."

CAREY'S TRANS.

And she is *indicated*, as it were, several times in the course of the poem, in a manner which prepares us for the sublimity with which she is at length introduced, in all the majesty of a superior nature, all the dreamy splendour of an ideal presence, and all the melancholy charm of a beloved and lamented reality. When Dante has left the confines of Purgatory, a wondrous chariot approaches from afar, surrounded by a flight of angelic beings, and veiled in a cloud of flowers ("un nuvola di fiori," is the beautiful expression.)—A female form is at length apparent in the midst of this angelic pomp, seated in the car, and "robed in hues of living flame:" she is veiled: he cannot discern her features, but there moves a hidden virtue from her,

[Pg 127]

At whose touch
The power of ancient love was strong within him.

He recognises the influence which even in his childish days had smote him—

Che già m'avea trafitto
Prima ch' io fuor della puerizia fosse;

and his failing heart and quivering frame confess the thrilling presence of his Beatrice—

Conosco i segni dell'antica fiamma!

The whole passage is as beautifully wrought as it is feelingly and truly conceived.

Beatrice,—no longer the soft, frail, and feminine being he had known and loved upon earth, but an admonishing spirit,—rises up in her chariot,

And with a mien
Of that stern majesty which doth surround
A mother's presence to her awe-struck child,
She looked—a flavour of such bitterness
Was mingled with her pity!

CAREY'S TRANS.

Dante then puts into her mouth the most severe yet eloquent accusation against himself: while he stands weeping by, bowed down by shame and anguish. She accuses him before the listening angels for his neglected time, his wasted talents, his forgetfulness of her, when she was no longer upon earth to lead him with the light of her "youthful eyes," (gli occhi giovinetti.)

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Soon as I had changed
My mortal for immortal, then he left me,
And gave himself to others; when from flesh
To spirit I had risen, and increase
Of beauty and of virtue circled me,
I was less dear to him and valued less!

This praise of herself and stern upbraiding of her lover, would sound harsh from woman's lips, but have a solemnity, and even a sublimity, as uttered by a disembodied and angelic being. When Dante, weeping, falters out a faint excuse—

Thy fair looks withdrawn,
Things present with deceitful pleasures turned
My steps aside,—

[Pg 129]

she answers by reproaching him with his inconstancy to her memory:—

Never didst thou spy
In art or nature aught so passing sweet
As were the limbs that in their beauteous frame
Enclosed me, and are scattered now in dust.
If sweetest thing thus failed thee with my death,
What afterward of mortal should thy wish
Have tempted?

PURGATORY, C. 31.

And she rebukes him, for that he could stoop from the memory of her love to be the thrall of a *slight girl*. This last expression is supposed to allude either to Dante's unfortunate marriage with Gemma Donati,^[44] or to the attachment he formed during his exile for a beautiful Lucchese named Gentucca, the subject of several of his poems. But, notwithstanding all this severity of censure, Dante, gazing on his divine mistress, is so rapt by her loveliness, his eyes so eager to recompense themselves for "their ten years' thirst," (Beatrice had been dead ten years) that not being yet freed from the stain of his earthly nature, he is warned not to gaze "too fixedly" on her charms. After a farther probation, Beatrice introduces him into the various spheres which compose the celestial paradise; and thenceforward she certainly assumes the characteristics of an allegorical being. The true distinction seems this, that Dante has not represented Divine Wisdom under the name and form of Beatrice, but the more to exalt his Beatrice, he has clothed her in the attributes of Divine Wisdom.

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She at length ascends with him into the Heaven of Heavens, to the source of eternal and uncreated light, without shadow and without bound; and when Dante looks round for her, he finds she has quitted his side, and has taken her place throned among the supremely blessed, "as far above him as the region of thunder is above the centre of the sea:" he gazes up at her in a rapture of love and devotion, and in a sublime apostrophe invokes her still to continue her favour towards him. She looks down upon him from her effulgent height, smiles on him with celestial sweetness, and then fixing her eyes on the eternal fountain of glory, is absorbed in ecstasy. Here we leave her: the poet had touched the limits of permitted thought; the seraph wings of imagination, borne upwards by the inspiration of deep love, could no higher soar,—the audacity of genius could dare no farther!

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Dante died at Ravenna in 1321, and was sumptuously interred at the cost of Guido da Polenta, the father of that unfortunate Francesca di Rimini, whose story he has so exquisitely told in the fifth canto of the *Inferno*. He left several sons and an only daughter, whom he had named Beatrice, in remembrance of his early love: she became a nun at Ravenna.

Now where, in the name of all truth and all feeling, were the heads, or rather the hearts, of those commentators, who could see nothing in the Beatrice thus beautifully portrayed, thus tenderly lamented, and thus sublimely commemorated, but a mere allegorical personage, the creation of a poet's fancy? Nothing can come of nothing; and it was no unreal or imaginary being who turned the course of Dante's ardent passions and active spirit, and burning enthusiasm, into one sweeping torrent of love and poetry, and gave to Italy and to the world the *Divina Commedia*!

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FOOTNOTES:

- [44] This marriage was one of policy, and negotiated by the friends of Dante and of Gemma Donati: her temper was violent and harsh, and their domestic peace was, probably, not increased by Dante's obstinate regret for his first love.

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 133]

CHAUCER AND PHILIPPA PICARD.

After Italy, England,—who has ever trod in her footsteps, and at length outstript her in the race

of intellect,—was the next to produce a great and prevailing genius in poetry, a master-spirit, whom no change of customs, manners, or language, can render wholly obsolete; and who was destined, like the rest of his tribe, to bow before the influence of woman, to toil in her praise, and soar by her inspiration.

Seven years after the death of Dante, Chaucer was born, and he was twenty-four years younger than Petrarch, whom he met at Padua in 1373; this meeting between the two great poets was memorable in itself, and yet more interesting for having first introduced into the English language that beautiful monument to the virtue of women,—the story of Griselda. [Pg 134]

Boccaccio had lately sent to his friend the MS. of the Decamerone, of which it is the concluding tale: the tender fancy of Petrarch, refined by a forty years' attachment to a gentle and elegant female, passed over what was vicious and blameable, or only recommended by the wit and the style, and fixed with delight on the tale of Griselda; so beautiful in itself, and so honourable to the sex whom he had poetically deified in the person of one lovely woman. He amused his leisure hours in translating it into Latin, and having finished his version, he placed it in the hands of a citizen of Padua, and desired him to read it aloud. His friend accordingly began; but as he proceeded, the overpowering pathos of the story so affected him, that he was obliged to stop; he began again, but was unable to proceed; the gathering tears blinded him, and choked his voice, and he threw down the manuscript. This incident, which Petrarch himself relates in a letter to Boccaccio, occurred about the period when Chaucer passed from Genoa to Padua to visit the poet and lover of Laura— [Pg 135]

Quel grande, alla cui fama angusto è il mondo.

Petrarch must have regarded the English poet with that wondering, enthusiastic admiration with which we should now hail a Milton or a Shakspeare sprung from Otaheite or Nova Zembla; and his heart and soul being naturally occupied by his latest work, he repeated the experiment he had before tried on his Paduan friend. The impression which the Griselda produced upon the vivid, susceptible imagination of Chaucer, may be judged from his own beautiful version of it in the **Canterbury Tales**; where the barbarity and improbability of the incidents are so redeemed by the pervading truth and purity and tenderness of the sentiment, that I suppose it never was perused for the first time without tears. Chaucer, as if proud of his interview with Petrarch, and anxious to publish it, is careful to tell us that he did not derive the story from Boccaccio, but that it was [Pg 136]

Learned at Padua of a worthy clerk,
As proved by his wordes and his work;
Francis Petrark, the Laureat Poete;

which is also proved by internal evidence.

Chaucer so far resembled Petrarch, that, like him, he was at once poet, scholar, courtier, statesman, philosopher, and man of the world; but considered merely as poets, they were the very antipodes of each other. The genius of Dante has been compared to a Gothic cathedral, vast and lofty, and dark and irregular. In the same spirit, Petrarch may be likened to a classical and elegant Greek temple, rising aloft in its fair and faultless proportions, and compacted of the purest Parian marble; while Chaucer is like the far-spreading and picturesque palace of the Alhambra, with its hundred chambers, all variously decorated, and rich with barbaric pomp and gold: he is famed rather as the animated painter of character, and manners, and external nature, than the poet of love and sentiment; and yet no writer, Shakspeare always excepted, (and perhaps Spenser) contains so many beautiful and tender passages relating to, or inspired by, women. He lived, it is true, in rude times, times strangely deficient in good taste and decorum; but when all the institutions of chivalry, under the most chivalrous of our kings and princes,^[45] were at their height in England. As a poet, Chaucer was enlisted into the service of three of the most illustrious, most beautiful, and most accomplished women of that age—Philippa, the high-hearted and generous Queen of Edward the Third; the Lady Blanche of Lancaster, first wife of John of Gaunt; and the lovely Anne of Bohemia, the Queen of Richard the Second,^[46] for whom, and at whose command, he wrote his "Legende of Gode Women," as some amends for the scandal he had spoken of us in other places. The Countess of Essex, the Countess of Pembroke, and that beautiful Lady Salisbury, the ancestress of the Montagu family, whose famous mischance gave rise to the Order of the Garter, were also among Chaucer's patronesses. But the most distinguished of all, and the favourite subject of his poetry, was the Duchess Blanche. The manner in which he has contrived to celebrate his own loves and individual feelings with those of Blanche and her royal suitor, has given additional interest to both, and has enabled his commentators to fix with tolerable certainty the name and rank of the object of his love, as well as the date and circumstances of his attachment. [Pg 137] [Pg 138]

In the earliest of Chaucer's poems, "The COURT OF LOVE," he describes himself as enamoured of a fair mistress, whom in the style of the time, he calls Rosial, and himself Philogenet: the lady is described as "sprung of noble race and high," with "angel visage," "golden hair," and eyes orient and bright, with figure "sharply slender," [Pg 139]

So that from the head unto the foot all is sweet womanhead,

and arrayed in a vest of green, with her tresses braided with silk and gold. She treats him at first with disdain, and the Poet swoons away at her feet: satisfied by this convincing proof of his

sincerity, she is induced to accept his homage, and becomes his "liege ladye," and the sovereign of his thoughts. In this poem, which is extremely wild, and has come down to us in an imperfect state, Chaucer quaintly admonishes all lovers, that an absolute faith in the perfection of their mistresses, and obedience to her slightest caprice, are among the first of duties; that they must in all cases believe their ladye faultless; that,

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In every thing she doth but as she should.
Construe the best, believe no tales new,
For many a lie is told that seem'th full true;
But think that she, so bounteous and so fair,
Could not be false; imagine this alway.

....*....*....*....*

And tho' thou seest a fault right at thine eye,
Excuse it quick, and glose it prettily.^[47]

Nor are they to presume on their own worthiness, nor to imagine it possible they can earn

By right, her mercie, nor of equity,
But of her grace and womanly pitye.^[47]

There is, however, no authority for supposing that at the time this poem was written, Chaucer really aspired to the hand of any lady of superior birth, or was very seriously in love; he was then about nineteen, and had probably selected some fair one, according to the custom of his age, to be his "fancy's queen," and in the same spirit of poetical gallantry, he writes to do her honour; he says himself,

[Pg 141]

My intent and all my busie care
Is for to write this treatise as I can,
Unto my ladye, stable, true, and sure;
Faithful and kind sith firste that she began
Me to accept in service as her man;
To her be all the pleasures of this book,
That, when her like, she may it rede and look.^[48]

Mixed up with all this gallantry and refinement are some passages inconceivably absurd and gross; but such were those times,—at once rude and magnificent—an odd mixture of cloth of frieze and cloth of gold!

The "Parliament of Birds," entitled in many editions, the "*Assembly of Fowls*," celebrates allegorically the courtship of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster.

Blanche, as the greatest heiress of England, with a duchy for her portion, could not fail to be surrounded by pretenders to her hand; but, after a year of probation, she decided in favour of John of Gaunt, who thus became Duke of Lancaster in right of his bride. This youthful and princely pair were then about nineteen.

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The "Parliament of Birds" being written in 1358, when Blanche had postponed her choice for a year, has fixed the date of Chaucer's attachment to the lady he afterwards married; for, here he describes himself as one who had not yet felt the full power of love—

For albeit that I know not love indeed,
Ne wot how that he quitteth folks their hire,
Yet happeth me full oft in books to read
Of his miracles.—

But the time was come when the poet, now in his thirty-second year, was destined to feel, that a strong attachment for a deserving object—for one who will not be obtained unsought, "was no sport," as he expresses it, but

Smart and sorrow, and great heavinesse.

During the period of trial which Lady Blanche had inflicted on her lover, it was Chaucer's fate to fall in love in sad earnest.—The object of this passion, too beautifully and unaffectedly described not to be genuine, was Philippa Picard de Rouet, the daughter of a knight of Hainault, and a favourite attendant of Queen Philippa. Her elder sister Catherine, was at the same time maid of honour to the Duchess Blanche. Both these sisters were distinguished at Court for their beauty and accomplishments, and were the friends and companions of the Princesses they served: and both are singularly interesting from their connection, political and poetical, with English history and literature.

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Philippa Picard is one of the principal personages in the poem entitled "Chaucer's Dream," which is a kind of epithalamium celebrating the marriage of John of Gaunt with the Lady Blanche, which took place at Reading, May 19, 1359. It is a wild, fanciful vision of fairy-land and enchantments, of which I cannot attempt to give an analysis. In the opening lines, written about twelve months after the "Parliament of Birds," we find Chaucer in deep love according to all its forms. He is

lying awake,

About such hour as lovers weep
And cry after their lady's grace,

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thinking on his mistress—all her goodness and all her sweetness, and marvelling how heaven had formed her so exceeding fair,

And in so litel space
Made such a body and such a face;
So great beauty, and such features,
More than be in other creatures!

He falls into a dream as usual, and in the conclusion fancies himself present at the splendid festivities which took place at the marriage of his patron. The ladye of his affection is described as the beloved friend and companion of the bride. She is sent to grace the marriage ceremony with her presence; and Chaucer seizes the occasion to plead his suit for love and mercy. Then the Prince, the Queen, and all the rest of the Court, unite in conjuring the lady to have pity on his pain, and recompence his truth; she smiles, and with a pretty hesitation at last consents.

Sith his will and yours are one,
Contrary in me shall be none.

They are married: the ladies and the knights wish them

—Heart's pleasance,
In joy and health continuance!

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The minstrels strike up,—the multitude send forth a shout; and in the midst of these joyous and triumphant sounds, and in the troubled exultation of his own heart, the sleeper bounds from his couch,—

Wening to have been at the feast,

and wakes to find it all a dream. He looks around for the gorgeous marriage-feast, and instead of the throng of knights and ladies gay, he sees nothing but the figures staring at him from the tapestry.

On the walls old portraiture
Of horsemen, of hawks and hounds,
And hurt deer all full of wounds;
Some like torn, some hurt with shot;
And as my dream was, *that* was not!^[49]

He is plunged in grief to find himself thus reft of all his visionary joys, and prays to sleep again, and dream thus for aye, or at least "a thousand years and ten."

Lo, here my bliss!—lo, here my pain!
Which to my ladye I complain,
And grace and mercy of her requere,
To end my woe and all my fear;
And me accept for her service—
That of my dream, the substance
Might turnen, once, to cognisance.^[50]

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And the whole concludes with a very tender "envoi," expressly addressed to Philippa, although the poem was written in honour of his patrons, the Duke and Duchess. It has been well observed, that nothing can be more delicate and ingenious than the manner in which Chaucer has complimented his mistress, and ventured to shadow forth his own hopes and desires; confessing, at the same time, that they were built on air and ended in a dream: it may be added, that nothing can be more picturesque and beautiful, and vigorous, than some of the descriptive parts of this poem.

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There is no reason to suppose that Philippa was absolutely deaf to the suit, or insensible to the fame and talents of her poet-lover. The delay which took place was from a cause honourable to her character and her heart; it arose from the declining health of her royal mistress, to whom she was most strongly and gratefully attached, and whose noble qualities deserved all her affection. It appears, from a comparison of dates, that Chaucer endured a suspense of more than nine years, during which he was a constant and fervent suitor for his ladye's grace. In this interval he translated the Romaunt of the Rose, the most famous poetical work of the middle ages. He addressed it to his mistress; and it is remarkable that a very elaborate and cynical satire on women, which occurs in the original French, is entirely omitted by Chaucer in his version; perhaps because it would have been a profanation to her who then ruled his heart: on other occasions he showed no such forbearance.

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In the year 1369, Chaucer lost his amiable patroness, the Duchess Blanche; she died in her thirtieth year; he lamented her death in a long poem, entitled the "Booke of the Duchesse." The

truth of the story, the virtues, the charms, and the youth of the Princess, the grief of her husband, and the simplicity and beauty of many passages, render this one of the most interesting and striking of all Chaucer's works.

The description of Blanche, in the "Booke of the Duchesse," shows how trifling is the difference between a perfect female character in the thirteenth century, and what would now be considered as such. It is a very lively and animated picture. Her golden hair and laughing eyes; her skill in dancing, and her sweet carolling; her "goodly and friendly speech;" her debonair looks; her gaiety, that was still "so womanly;" her indifference to general admiration; her countenance, "that was so simple and so benigne," contrasted with her high-spirited modesty and consciousness of lofty birth,

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No living wight might do her shame,
She loved so well her own name;

her disdain of that coquetterie which holds men "in balance,"

By half-word or by countenance;

her wit, "without malice, and ever set upon gladnesse;" and her goodness, which the Poet, with a nice discrimination of female virtue, distinguishes from mere ignorance of evil—for though in all her actions was perfect innocence, he adds,

I say not that she had no knowing
What harm was; for, else, she
Had known no good—so thinketh me;

are all beautifully and happily set forth, and are charms so appropriate to woman, as *woman*, that no change of fashion or lapse of ages can alter their effect. Time

"Can draw no lines there with his antique pen."

But afterwards follows a trait peculiarly characteristic of the women of that chivalrous period. She was not, says Chaucer, one of those ladies who send their lovers off

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To Walachie,
To Prussia, and to Tartary,
To Alexandria, ne Turkie;

and on other bootless errands, by way of displaying their power.

She used no such *knacks small*.

That is, she was superior to such frivolous tricks.

John of Gaunt, who is the principal speaker and chief mourner in the poem, gives a history of his courtship, and tells with what mixture of fear and awe, he then "right young," approached the lovely heiress of Lancaster: but bethinking him that Heaven could never have formed in any creature so great beauty and bounty "withouten mercie,"—in that hope he makes his confession of love; and he goes on to tell us, with exquisite *naïveté*,—

I wot not well how I began,
Full evil rehearse it, I can:

....*....*....*....*

For many a word I overskipt
In telling my tale—for pure fear,
Lest that my words misconstrued were.
Softly, and quaking for pure dred,
And shame,—
Full oft I wax'd both pale and red;
I durst not once look her on,
For wit, manner, and all was gone;
I said, "Mercie, sweet!"—and no more.

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Then his anguish at her first rejection, and his rapture when, at last, he wins from his ladye

The noble gift of her mercie;

his domestic happiness—his loss, and his regrets, are all told with the same truth, simplicity, and profound feeling. For such passages and such pictures as these, Chaucer will still be read, triumphant as the poet of nature, over the rust and dust of ages, and all the difficulties of antique style and obsolete spelling; which last, however, though repulsive, is only a difficulty to the eye, and easily overcome.

To return to Chaucer's own love.—In the opening lines of the "Booke of the Duchesse," he describes himself as wasted with his "eight years' sicknesse," alluding to his long courtship of the coy Philippa:

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I have great wonder, by this light,
 How that I live!—for day nor night
 I may not sleepen well-nigh nought:
 I have so many an idle thought
 Purely for the default of sleep;
 That, by my troth, I take no keep
 Of nothing—how it com'th or go'th,
 To me is nothing lief or lothe;^[51]
 All is equal good to me,
 Joy or sorrow—whereso it be;
 For I have feeling in no thing,
 But am, as 'twere, a mazed^[52] thing,
 All day in point to fall adown
 For sorrowful imagination, &c.

In the same year with the Duchess died the good Queen of Edward the Third; and Philippa Picard being thus sadly released from her attendance on her mistress, a few months afterwards married Chaucer, then in his forty-second year.

In consequence of her good service, Philippa had a pension for her life; and I regret that little more is known concerning her: but it should seem that she was a good and tender wife, and that long years of wedded life did not weaken her husband's attachment for her; for she accompanied Chaucer when he was exiled, about fifteen years after his marriage, though every motive of prudence and selfishness, on both sides, would then have induced a separation.^[53] Neither was the poet likely to be easily satisfied on the score of conjugal obedience; he was rather *exigeant* and despotic, if we may trust his own description of a perfect wife. The chivalrous and poetical lover was the slave of his mistress; but once married, it is all *vice versa*.

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She saith not once *nay*, when he saith *yea*
 "Do this," saith he, "all ready, Sir," saith she!

The precise date of Philippa's death is not known, but it took place some years before that of her husband. Their residence at the time of their marriage, was a small stone building, near the entrance of Woodstock Park; it had been given to Chaucer by Edward the Third; afterwards they resided principally at Donnington Castle, that fine and striking ruin, which must be remembered by all who have travelled the Newberry road. In the domain attached to this castle were three oaks of remarkable size and beauty, to which Chaucer gave the names of the Queen's oak, the King's oak, and Chaucer's oak; these venerable trees were felled in Evelyn's time, and are commemorated in his *Sylva*, as among the noblest of their species.

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Philippa's eldest son, Thomas Chaucer, had a daughter, Alice, who became the wife of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, the famous favourite of Margaret of Anjou. The grandson of Alice Chaucer, by the Duke of Suffolk, John Earl of Lincoln, was declared heir to the crown by Richard the Third;^[54] and had the issue of the battle of Bosworth been different, would undoubtedly have ascended the throne of England;—as it was, the lineage of Chaucer was extinguished on a scaffold.

The fate of Catherine Picard de Rouet, the sister of Chaucer's wife, was still more remarkable,—she was destined to be the mother of a line of kings.

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She had been *domicella*, or maid of honour to the Duchess Blanche, after whose death, the infant children of the Princess were committed to her care.^[55] In this situation she won the heart of their father, the Duke of Lancaster, who on the death of his second wife, Constance of Castile, married Catherine, and his children by her were solemnly legitimized. The conduct of Catherine, except in one instance, had been irreproachable: her humility, her prudence, and her various accomplishments, not only reconciled the royal family and the people to her marriage, but added lustre to her rank: and when Richard the Second married Isabella of France, the young Queen, then only nine years old, was placed under the especial care and tuition of the Duchess of Lancaster.

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One of the grand-daughters of Catherine, Lady Jane Beaufort, had the singular fortune of becoming at once the inspiration and the love of a great poet, the queen of an accomplished monarch, and the common ancestress of all the sovereigns of England since the days of Elizabeth.^[56]

Never, perhaps, was the influence of woman on a poetic temperament more beautifully illustrated, than in the story of James the First of Scotland, and Lady Jane Beaufort. It has been so elegantly told by Washington Irving in the *Sketch-Book*, that it is only necessary to refer to it. —James, while a prisoner, was confined in Windsor Castle, and immediately under his window there was a fair garden, in which the Lady Jane was accustomed to walk with her attendants, distinguished above them all by her beauty and dignity, even more than by her state and the richness of her attire. The young monarch beheld her accidentally, his imagination was fired, his heart captivated, and from that moment his prison was no longer a dungeon, but a palace of light and love. As he was the best poet and musician of his time, he composed songs in her praise, set them to music, and sang them to his lute. He also wrote the history of his love, with all its

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circumstances, in a long poem^[57] still extant; and though the language be now obsolete, it is described, by those who have studied it, as not only full of beauties both of sentiment and expression, but unpolluted by a single thought or allusion which the most refined age, or the most fastidious delicacy, could reject;—a singular distinction, when we consider that James's only models must have been Gower and Chaucer, to whom no such praise is due: we must rather suppose that he was no imitator, but that he owed his inspiration to modest and queenly beauty, and to the genuine tenderness of his own heart. His description of the fair apparition who came to bless his solitary hours, is so minute and peculiar, that it must have been drawn from the life:—the net of pearls, in which her light tresses were gathered up; the chain of fine-wrought gold about her neck; the heart-shaped ruby suspended from it, which glowed on her snowy bosom like a spark of fire; her white vest looped up to facilitate her movements; her graceful damsels who followed at a respectful distance; and her little dog gambolling round her with its collar of silver bells,—these, and other picturesque circumstances, were all noted in the lover's memory, and have been recorded by the poet's verse. And he sums up her perfections thus:

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In her was youth, beauty, and numble port,
Bountee, richesse, and womanly feature.
God better knows than my pen can report,
Wisdom, largesse,^[58] estate,^[59] and cunning^[60] sure:
In every point so guided her measure,
In word, in deed, in shape, in countenance,
That nature could no more her child advance.

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The account of his own feelings as she disappears from his charmed gaze,—his lingering at the window of his tower, till Phœbus

Had bid farewell to every leaf and flower,—

then resting his head pensively on the cold stone, and the vision which steals upon his half-waking, half-dreaming fancy, and shadows forth the happy issue of his love,—are all conceived in the most lively manner. It is judged from internal evidence, that this poem must have been finished after his marriage, since he intimates that he is blessed in the possession of her he loved, and that the fair vision of his solitary dungeon is realised.

When the King of Scots was released, he wooed and won openly, and as a monarch, the woman he had adored in secret. The marriage was solemnized in 1423, and he carried Lady Jane to Scotland where she was crowned soon after his bride and queen.

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How well she merited, and how deeply she repaid the love of her devoted and all-accomplished husband, is told in history. When James was surprised and murdered by some of his factious barons, his queen threw herself between him and the daggers of the assassins, received many of the wounds aimed at his heart, nor could they complete their purpose till they had dragged her by force from his arms. She deserved to be a poet's queen and love! These are the souls, the deeds which inspire poetry,—or rather which are themselves poetry, its principle and its essence. It was on this occasion that Catherine Douglas, one of the queen's attendants, thrust her arm into the stanchion of the door to serve the purpose of a bolt, and held it there till the savage assailants forced their way by shattering the frail defence. What times were those!—alas! the love of women, and the barbarity of men!

FOOTNOTES:

[45] Edward III. and the Black Prince.

[46] She was popularly distinguished as the "*good* Queen Anne," and as dear to her husband as to her people. Richard, who with many and fatal faults, really possessed sensibility and strong domestic affections with which Shakspeare has so finely portrayed him, was passionately devoted to his amiable wife. She died young, at the Palace of Sheen; and when Richard afterwards visited the scene of his loss, he solemnly cursed it in his anguish, and commanded it to be razed to the ground, which was done. One of our kings afterwards rebuilt it. I think Henry the VIIIth.

[47] Court of Love, v. 369-412.

[48] Court of Love, v. 36-42.

[49] *i. e.* the tapestry, like my dream, was a representation, not a reality.

[50] Chaucer's Dreame, v. 2185. "Here also is showed Chaucer's match with a certain gentlewoman, who was so well liked and loved of the Lady Blanche and her Lord (as Chaucer himself also was), that gladly they concluded a marriage between them."—*Arguments to Chaucer's Works. Edit. 1597.*

[51] To me there is nothing dear or hateful, every thing is indifferent.

[52] *Mazed*,—distracted.

[53] Godwin's Life of Chaucer, v. iii. p. 5.

[54] In right of his mother, Elizabeth Plantagenet, eldest sister of Edward IV.

[55] These were Henry of Lancaster, afterwards Henry IV. Philippa, Queen of Portugal, and

Elizabeth, Duchess of Exeter.

- [56] Catherine, Duchess of Lancaster, had three sons: the second was the famous Cardinal Beaufort; the eldest (created Earl of Somerset,) was grandfather to Henry the Seventh, and consequently ancestor to the whole race of Tudor: thus from the sister of Chaucer's wife are descended all the English sovereigns, from the fifteenth century; and likewise the present family of Somerset, Dukes of Beaufort.
- [57] "The King's Quhair," (i.e. *cahier* or book.)
- [58] Liberality.
- [59] Dignity.
- [60] Knowledge and discretion.

CHAPTER XI.

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LORENZO DE' MEDICI AND LUCRETIA DONATI.

To Lorenzo de' Medici,—or rather to the preëminence his personal qualities, his family possessions, and his unequalled talents, gave him over his countrymen,—some late travellers and politicians have attributed the downfall of the liberties of Florence, and attacked his memory as the precursor of tyrants and the preparer of slaves. It may be so:—yet was it the fault of Lorenzo, if his collateral posterity afterwards became the oppressors of that State of which he was the father and the saviour? And since in this world some must command and some obey, what power is so legitimate as that derived from the influence of superior virtue and talent? from the employ of riches obtained by honourable industry, and expended with princely munificence, and subscribed to by the will and the affections of the people?

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But I forget:—these are questions foreign to our subject. Politics I never could understand in my life, and history I have forgotten,—or would wish to forget,—perplexed by its conflicting evidence, and shocked by its interminable tissue of horrors. Let others then scale the height while we gather flowers at the foot; let others explore the mazes of the forest; ours be rather

The gay parterre, the chequered shade,
The morning bower, the evening colonnade,
Those soft recesses of uneasy minds,

whence the din of doleful war, the rumour of cruelty and suffering, and all the "fitful stir unprofitable" of the world are shut out, and only the beautiful and good, or the graceful and the gay, are admitted. There have been pens enough, Heaven knows, to chronicle the wrongs, the crimes, the sorrows of our sex: why should I add an echo to that voice, which from the beginning has cried aloud in the wilderness of this world, upon women betrayed, and betraying in self-defence? A nobler and more grateful task be mine, to show them how much of what is most fair, most excellent, most sublime among the productions of human genius, has been owing to their influence, direct or indirect; and call up the spirits of the dead,—those who from their silent urns still rule the pulses of our hearts—to bear witness to this truth.

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It is not, then, Lorenzo the MAGNIFICENT, the statesman, and the chief of a great republic, who finds a place in these pages,—but Lorenzo the lover and the poet, round whose memory hover a thousand bright recollections connected with the revival of arts and literature, and the golden age of Italy. Let politicians say what they will, there is a spell of harmony, there is music in his very name! how softly the vowelled syllables drop from the lips—LORENZO DE' MEDICI!—it even looks elegant when written. Yes, there is something in the mere sound of a name. I remember once taking up a book, and a very celebrated book, in which, after turning over some of the pages with pleasure, I came to *Peter* and *Laurence Medecis*,—I shut it hastily, as I would have covered my ears to protect them from a sudden discord in music.

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Between Petrarch and Lorenzo de' Medici, there occurs not a single great name in Italian poetry. The century seemed to lie fallow, as if preparing for the great birth of various genius which distinguished the succeeding age. The sciences and the classics were chiefly studied, and philosophy and Greek seemed to have banished love and poetry.

In such a state of things, it is rather surprising to find in Lorenzo de' Medici the common case reversed; for by his own confession, it appears that it was not love which made him a poet, but poetry which made him a lover.

Giuliano, the brother of Lorenzo,—he who was afterwards assassinated by the Pazzi, and was so beloved at Florence for his amiable character and personal accomplishments, had been seized with a passion for a lady named Simonetta, who was esteemed the most beautiful woman in Florence, and is scarcely ever mentioned but with the epithet, "La bella Simonetta."—She died in the bloom of early youth, and all the wit and eloquence of her native city were called forth in

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condolences addressed to Giuliano, or elegies to her memory, in prose and verse, Latin, Greek, and Italian. Among the rest, Lorenzo, who had already made several attempts in Italian poetry, pressed forward to celebrate the love and the loss of his amiable brother:—in his zeal to do justice to so dear a subject, he worked himself up into a fit of amorous and poetical enthusiasm which soon found a real and living beauty for its object. But to give this romantic tale its proper effect, it must be related in Lorenzo's own words. He has left us a most circumstantial and elegant as well as interesting and fanciful account of the birth and progress of his poetic passion, and I extract it at length from Mr. Roscoe's translation.

"A young lady of great personal attractions happened to die at Florence; and as she had been very generally admired and beloved, so her death was as generally lamented. Nor was this to be much wondered at; for, independent of her beauty, her manners were so engaging, that almost every person who had any acquaintance with her flattered himself that he had obtained the chief place in her affections." (In other words, this beautiful Simonetta was an exquisite coquette.)

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"This fatal event excited the extreme regret of her admirers; and as she was carried to the place of burial, with her face uncovered, those who had known her when living, pressed for a last look at the object of their adoration, and accompanied her funeral with their tears.

"On this occasion, all the eloquence, and all the wit of Florence were exerted in paying due honours to her memory, both in prose and verse. Amongst the rest, I also composed a few sonnets; and in order to give them greater effect, I endeavoured to convince myself, that I too had been deprived of the object of my love, and to excite in my own mind all those passions that might enable me to move the affections of others.—Under the influence of this delusion, I began to think how severe was the fate of those by whom she had been beloved; and from thence was led to consider, whether there was any other lady in this city deserving of such honour and praise, and to imagine the happiness that must be experienced by any one, whose good fortune could procure him such a subject for his pen. I accordingly sought for some time without having the satisfaction of finding any one, who in my judgment was deserving of a sincere and constant attachment. But when I had nearly resigned all expectations of success, chance threw in my way that which had been denied to my most diligent inquiry; as if the God of Love had selected this hopeless period, to give me a more decisive proof of his power.—A public festival was held in Florence, to which all that was noble and beautiful in the city resorted. To this I was brought by some of my companions (I suppose as my destiny led) against my will, for I had for some time past avoided such exhibitions; or if at times I attended them, it proceeded rather from a compliance with custom, than from any pleasure I experienced in them. Among the ladies there assembled, I saw one of such sweet and attractive manners, that while I regarded her, I could not help saying, 'If this person were possessed of the delicacy, the understanding, the accomplishments of her who is lately dead—most certainly she excels her in the charms of her person.—"

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"Resigning myself to my passion, I endeavoured to discover, if possible, how far her manners and her conversation agreed with her appearance; and here I found such an assemblage of extraordinary endowments, that it was difficult to say whether she excelled more in person or in mind. Her beauty was, as I have before mentioned, astonishing. She was of a just and proper height. Her complexion extremely fair, but not pale,—blooming but not ruddy. Her countenance was serious, without being severe,—mild and pleasant without levity or vulgarity. Her eyes were lively, without any indication of pride or conceit. Her whole shape was so finely proportioned, that amongst other women she appeared with superior dignity, yet free from the least degree of formality or affectation. In walking, in dancing, or in other exercises which display the person, every motion was elegant and appropriate. Her sentiments were always just and striking, and have furnished materials for some of my sonnets; she always spoke at the proper time, and always to the purpose, so that nothing could be added, nothing taken away. Though her remarks were often keen and pointed, yet they were so tempered as not to give offence. Her understanding was superior to her sex, but without the appearance of arrogance or presumption; and she avoided an error too common among women, who, when they think themselves sensible, become for the most part insupportable.^[61] To recount all her excellencies would far exceed my present limits, and I shall therefore conclude with affirming, that there was nothing which could be desired in a beautiful and an accomplished woman, which was not in her most abundantly found. By these qualities I was so captivated, that not a power or faculty of my body or mind remained any longer at liberty, and I could not help considering the lady who had died, as the star of Venus, which at the approach of the sun is totally overpowered and extinguished."

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The real name of this beautiful and accomplished creature, Lorenzo was too discreet to reveal; but from contemporary authors, we learn that she was Lucretia Donati—a noble lady, distinguished at Florence for her virtue and beauty, and of the same illustrious family which had given a wife to Dante.

When Lorenzo undertook to fall in love thus poetically, he was only twenty: the experiment was perilous; and it is not wonderful that this imaginary passion had at first in his ardent and susceptible mind all the effects of a real one: he neglected society—abandoned himself to musing and solitude—affected the rural shades, and gave up his time, and devoted all his powers, to celebrate, in the richest colouring of poetry, her whom he had selected to be the mistress of his heart, or rather the presiding goddess of his fancy.

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The result is exactly what may be imagined, and a proof of the theory on which I insist, that "nothing but what arises from the heart goes to the heart, and that the verse which never quickened a pulse in the bosom of the poet, never awakened a throb in that of his reader." If I were required to express in one word the distinguishing character of Lorenzo's amatory poems, I should say *grace*: they are full of refined sentiment, elegant simplicity, the most exquisite little touches of description, and illustrations, drawn either from external nature, or from the refined mysteries of platonism; but there is a want of passion, of power, and of pathos; there is no genuine emotion; no overflow of the heart, bursting with its own intense feeling; no voice that cries aloud for our sympathy, and echoes to our inmost bosom. What true lover ever thought of apologising for having given his time to celebrate the object of his love?

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"Persecuted as I have been from my youth," says Lorenzo, "some indulgence may perhaps be allowed me for having sought consolation in these pursuits."—And again, in allusion to his political situation,—"It is not to be wondered at if I endeavoured to alleviate my anxiety by turning to more agreeable subjects of meditation; and in celebrating the charms of my mistress, sought a temporary refuge from my cares."—Thus Lorenzo tells us that it was not in obedience to the dictates of his own overflowing heart, nor yet to celebrate the charms of his mistress, and win her favour, that he wrote in her praise, but to amuse himself and distract his mind from those cares and anxieties into which he was so early plunged. It has followed as a natural consequence, that elegant as are the amatory effusions of Lorenzo, they are less celebrated, less popular, than his descriptive and moral poems. His *Ambra*, *La Nencia*, and his songs for the carnival, have all in their respective style a higher stamp of excellence and originality than his love poetry. His forte seems to have been lively description, philosophical illustration, and brilliant and sportive fancy, combined with a classic taste and polished versification. Some of those sonnets, which, though addressed to *Madonna Lucretia*, turn chiefly on some beautiful thought or description, are finished like gems; as that on *Solitude*—

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Cerchi chi vuol le pompe e gli alti onori;

and that well known and charming one, "*Sopra Violetti*,"

Non di verdi giardin, ornati e colti, &c.

both of which have been happily translated by Roscoe; and to these may be added the address to *Cytherea*—

Lascia l' isola tua tanta diletta!
Lascia il tuo regno delicato e bello
Ciprigna Dea! &c.

There is another, not so well known, distinguished by its peculiar fancy and elegance—

Spesso mi torna a mente, anzi già mai, &c.

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In this he recalls to mind the time and the place, and even the vesture in which his gentle lady first appeared to him—

Quanto vaga, gentil, leggiadra, e pia
Non si può dir, ne imaginar assai;

and he beautifully adds,

Quale sopra i nevosi, ed alti monti
Apollo spande il suo bel lume adorno,
Tal' i crin suoi sopra la bianca gonna!
Il tempo e 'l luogo non convien ch' io conti,
Che dov' è si bel sole è sempre giorno;
E Paradiso, ov' è si bella Donna!

"As over the snowy summits of the high mountains Apollo sheds his golden beams, so flowed her golden tresses over her white vest.—But for the *time* and the *place*, is it necessary that I should note them? Where shines so fair a sun, can it be other than day? Where dwells so excellent a beauty, can it be other than Paradise?"

It happened in the midst of Lorenzo's visions of love and poetry, that he was called upon to give his hand to a wife chosen by his father for political reasons. His inclinations were not consulted, as is plain from the blunt amusing manner in which he has noted it down in his memoranda. "I, Lorenzo, took to wife *Donna Clarice Orsini*,—or rather she was given to me, (ovvero mi fu data) on such a day." Yet a union thus inauspiciously contracted, was rendered, by the affectionate disposition of Lorenzo, and the amiable qualities of his wife, rather happy than otherwise; it is true, we have no poetical compliments addressed by Lorenzo to *Donna Clarice*, but there is extant a little billet written to her a few months after their marriage, from the tone of which it is fair to suppose, that Lorenzo had exchanged his poetic flame for a real attachment to an amiable woman.^[62]

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There is a very beautiful and elegant passage in the beginning of Lorenzo's commentary on his own poems, in which he enlarges on the theory of love. "The conditions (he says) which appear

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necessarily to belong to a true, exalted, and worthy love, are two. First,—*to love but one*: secondly,—*to love that one always*. Not many lovers have hearts so generous as to be capable of fulfilling these two conditions; and exceedingly few women display sufficient attractions to withhold men from the violation of them; yet without these there is no true love." And afterwards, enumerating those charms of person and mind which inspire affection, he adds, "and yet these estimable qualities are not enough, unless the lover possess sensibility of heart to discern them, and elevation and generosity of soul to appreciate them."

This in the original is very elegantly expressed, and the sentiment is as true as it is exalted and graceful; but that Lorenzo was not always thus philosophically refined, that he could descend from these Platonics to be impassioned and in earnest, and that when touched to the heart, he could pour forth the language of the heart, we have a single instance, which it is impossible to allude to without feeling some emotion of curiosity, which can never now be gratified.

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We find among Lorenzo's poems, written later in life than those addressed to Lucretia Donati, one entitled simply "An Elegy;" the style is different from that of his earlier poetry, and has more of the terseness and energy of Dante than the sweetness and flow of Petrarch. It begins

"Vinto dagli amorosi, empi martiri."

"Subdued by the fierce pangs of my love, a thousand times have I taken up the pen, to tell thee, O gentle lady mine, all the sighs of my sick heart. Then fearing thy displeasure, I have, on a second thought, flung it from me. * * * Yet must I speak, for if words were wanting, my pallid cheek would betray my suffering."

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He then tells her that he does not seek her dishonour, but only her kind thoughts, and that he may find a place within her gentle heart.

Perchè non cerco alcun tuo disonore,
Ma sol la grazia tua, e che piaci
Che'l mio albergo sia dentro al tuo core!

He wishes that he might be once permitted to twine his fingers in her fair hair; to gaze into her eyes;—but he complains that she will not even meet his look,—that she resolutely turns her eyes another way at his approach.—"But do with me what thou wilt: while I live upon this earth, still I must love thee, since it so pleaseth Heaven—I swear it! and my hand writes it!"

"Come then! oh come, while yet thy gracious looks may avail me, for delay is death to one who loves likes me! Would I could send with this scroll all the torture of heart, the tears and sighs, the gesture and the look, that should accompany it!"

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Ma s' egli avvien, che soletti ambo insieme,
Posso il braccio tenerti al collo avvolto,
Vedrai come d'amore alto arde e geme,
Vedrai cader dal mio pallido volto,
Nel tuo candido sen lagrime tante.

(I leave these lines untranslated for the benefit of the Italian reader). After a few more stanzas, we have this very unequivocal passage:

"O would to Heaven, lady, that marriage had made us one! ah, why didst thou not come into this world a little sooner?—or I a little later? Yet why these vain thoughts? since I am doomed to see thee the bride of another, and am myself fettered in these marriage bonds!"

"Thou knowest, Madonna, that these sighs, these burning words, are not feigned; for even as Love dictates does my hand write."

"My life and death are with thee;—grant me but a few words, and I am content to live;—if not, let me die! and let my poor remains be laid in some forlorn and sequestered spot. Let none whisper the cause of my death, lest it should grieve thee! enough if some kind hand engrave upon my tomb,—'*He perished through too much love and too much cruelty.*'"

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I have given, literally, the leading sentiments of this little poem, but have left untranslated many of the stanzas. There are one or two concetti; but as Ginguené truly observes on a different occasion, "Dans les poètes Italiens, souvent la passion est vraie, même quand l'expression ne l'est pas."

The style is so natural, the transitions so abrupt, the expressions so energetic, and there are so few of those descriptive ornaments which are plentifully scattered through Lorenzo's other poems, that I should pronounce it the real effusion of a heart, touched,—and deeply touched. It is

to be regretted that we know nothing of the name or real character of an object who, deserving or not, could call forth such strong lines as these; and in the plenitude of his power and fame, and in the midst of his great and serious avocations, deeply, though secretly, tyrannise over the peace of Lorenzo.

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He is accused,—I regret that I must allude to it,—of considerable licence of manners with regard to women;—a reproach from which Roscoe has fairly vindicated him. United, at the age of twenty-one, to a woman he had never seen; residing in a dissipated capital, surrounded by temptation, and from disposition peculiarly sensible to the influence of women, it is not matter of astonishment if Lorenzo's conjugal faith was not preserved immaculate,—if he occasionally became the thrall of beauty, and—(since he was not likely to be caught by vulgar charms,)—if he sighed, *par hazard*, for one who was not to be tempted by power or gold: such a one as his Elegy indicates. Two points are certain,—that his uniform respect and kindness to his wife Clarice, left her no reason to complain; while his discretion was such, that though historians have hazarded a general accusation against him in this one particular, there exists not in any contemporary writer one scandalous anecdote of his private life, nor the name of any woman to whom he was attached, except that of his poetical love, Lucretia Donati.

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Lorenzo de' Medici was not handsome in face, nor graceful in form; but he was captivating in his manners, and excelled in all manly exercises. The engraving prefixed to Roscoe's life of him, does not do justice to his countenance. I remember the original picture in the gallery of Florence, on which I have looked day after day for many minutes together, with an interest that can only be felt on the very spot where the memory of Lorenzo is "wherever we look, wherever we move." In spite of the stoop in the shoulders, the unbecoming dress, and the harsh features, I was struck by the grand simplicity of the head, and the mingled expression of acuteness, benevolence, and earnest thought in the countenance; the imagination filled with the splendid character of the man, might possibly have perceived more than the eye,—but such was my impression.

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Lorenzo died in his forty-fourth year, in 1492. He is not interred in that celebrated chapel of his family, rich with the sublimest productions of Michael Angelo's chisel: he lies at the opposite side of the church, in a magnificent sarcophagus of bronze, which contains also the ashes of his murdered brother, Giuliano.—Among the recollections, sweet and bitter, which I brought from Florence, is the remembrance of a day when retiring, from the glare of an Italian noontide, I stood in the church of San Lorenzo, sketching the tomb of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici. The spot whence I viewed it was so obscure, that I could scarce see the lines traced by my pencil; but immediately behind the sarcophagus, there flowed from above a stream of strong light, relieving with added effect the dark outline of the sculptured ornaments. Through the grating which formed the background, I could see the figures of shaven monks and stoled priests gliding to and fro, like apparitions; and while I thought more,—O much more,—of the still and cold repose which wrapped the dead, than of their high deeds and far-spread fame, the plaintive music of a distant choir, chanting the *Via crucis*, floated through the pillared aisles, receding or approaching as the singers changed their station; swelling, sinking, and at length dying away on the ear.

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FOOTNOTES:

[61] Lorenzo tells us in the original, that the ladies who rendered themselves thus insupportable, were called (*vulgarly*) *Saccenti*:—query—*vulgarly*, *Blue-stockings*?

[62] Lorenzo de' Medici to his wife Clarice:—

"I arrived here in safety, and am in good health: this, I believe, will please thee better than any thing else, except my return, at least so I judge from my own desire to be once more with thee. Associate as much as possible with my father and sisters. I shall make all possible speed to return to thee, for it appears a thousand years till I see thee again. Pray to God for me—if thou want any thing from this place write in time. From Milan, 22d July, 1469. THY LORENZO."

CHAPTER XII.

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THE FAIR GERALDINE.

In the reign of the second Grand Duke of Tuscany, of Lorenzo's family, (Cosmo I.) Florence, it is said, beheld a novel and extraordinary spectacle: a young traveller, from a court and a country which the Italians of that day seemed to regard much as we now do the Esquimaux,^[63] combining the learning of the scholar and the amiable bearing of the courtier, with all the rash bravery of youthful romance, astonished the inhabitants of that queenly city, first, by rivalling her polished nobles in the splendour of his state, and gallantry of his manners, and next, by boldly proclaiming that his "lady love" was superior to all that Italy could vaunt of beauty, that she was "oltre le belle, bella," fair beyond the fairest,—and maintaining his boast in a solemn tourney held in her honour, to the overthrow of all his opponents.

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This was our English Surrey; one of the earliest and most elegant of our amatory poets, and the lover of the Fair Geraldine.

It must be admitted that the fame of the Earl of Surrey does not rest merely on title, and that if the fair Geraldine had never existed, he would still have lived in history as an accomplished scholar, soldier, courtier, and been lamented as the noble victim of a suspicious tyrant. But if some fair object of romantic gallantry had not given the impulse to his genius, and excited him to try his powers in a style of which no models yet existed in his native language,^[64]—it may be doubted whether his name would have descended to us with all those poetical and chivalrous associations which give a charm and an interest to his memory, far beyond that of a mere historical character. As for the fair-haired, blue-eyed Geraldine, the mistress of his fancy and affections, and the subject of his verse, her identity long lay *entombed*, as it were, in a poetical name; but Surrey had loved her, had maintained her beauty at the point of his lance—had made her "famous by his pen, and glorious by his sword." This was more than enough to excite the interest and the inquiries of posterity, and lo! antiquaries and commentators fell to work, archives were searched, genealogies were traced, and at length the substance of this beautiful poetical shadow was detected: she was proved to have been the Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald, afterwards the wife of a certain Earl of Lincoln, of whom little is known—but that he married the woman Surrey had loved.

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Surrey has ingeniously contrived to compress, within the compass of a sonnet, some of the most interesting particulars of the personal and family history of his mistress. The Fitzgeralds derive their origin from the Gheraldi of Tuscany,—hence

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From Tuscan came my ladye's worthy race,
Fair Florence was sometime their ancient seat.

She was born and nurtured in Ireland—

Fostered she was with milk of Irish breast.

Her father was the Earl of Kildare, her mother allied to the blood royal.

Her sire an Earl, her dame of Prince's blood.

She was brought up (through motives of compassion, after the misfortunes of her family,) at Hunsdon, with the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth, where Surrey, who frequently visited them in company with the young Duke of Richmond,^[65] first beheld her.

Hunsdon did first present her to mine eyes.

She was then extremely young, not above fourteen or fifteen, as it appears from comparative dates; and Surrey says very clearly,

She wanted years to understand
The grief that he did feel.

But even then her budding charms made him confess as he beautifully expresses it—

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How soon a look can print a thought
That never may remove!

It was during the festivals held at Hampton Court, whither she accompanied the Princesses, that her conquest was completed; and Surrey being afterwards confined at Windsor,^[66] was deprived of her society.

Bright is her hue, and Geraldine she hight;
Hampton me taught to wish her first for mine,
Windsor, alas! doth chase me from her sight.

Hampton Court was the scene of their frequent interviews. Surrey mentions a certain recessed or bow window, in which, retired apart from the gay throng around them, they held "converse sweet." Here she gave him, as it seems, some encouragement; too proud of such a distinguished suitor to let him escape. He in the same moment confesses himself a very slave, and betrays an indignant consciousness of the arts by which she keeps him entangled in her chain.

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In silence tho' I keep to such secrets myself,
Yet do I see how she sometime, doth yield a look by stealth;
As tho' it seemed, I wis,—"I will not lose thee so!"
When in her heart so sweet a thought did never truly grow.

He accuses her expressly of a love of general admiration, and of giving her countenance and favour to unworthy rivals. In "The Warning to a Lover how he is abused by his Love," he thus addresses himself as the deceived lover:—

Where thou hast loved so long, with heart and all thy power,
I see thee fed with feigned words, &c.
I see her pleasant cheer in chiefest of thy suit:
When thou art gone, I see him come who gathers up the fruit;
And eke in thy respect, I see the base degree

Of him to whom she gives the heart, that promised was to thee!^[67]

The fair Geraldine must have been a practised coquette to have sat for a picture so finished and so strongly marked: yet before we blame her for this disdainful trifling, it should be remembered that Lord Surrey, at the time he was wooing her with "musicke vows," was either married or contracted to another,^[68]—a circumstance quite in keeping with the fashionable system of Platonic gallantry introduced from Italy—

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O Plato! Plato! you have been the cause, &c.

and so forth. I forbear to continue the apostrophe.

According to the old tradition, repeated by all Surrey's biographers, he visited on his travels the famous necromancer Cornelius Agrippa, who in a magic mirror revealed to him the fair figure of his Geraldine, lying dishevelled on a couch, and, by the light of a taper, reading one of his tenderest sonnets.

Fair all the pageant, but how passing fair
The slender form that lay on couch of Ind!
O'er her white bosom strayed her hazel hair,
Pale her dear cheek, as if for love she pined.
All in her night-robe loose, she lay reclined,
And pensive read from tablet eburnine,
Some strain that seemed her inmost soul to find;—
That favoured strain was Surrey's raptured line,
That fair and lovely form, the Lady Geraldine!^[69]

This beautiful incident is too celebrated, too touching, not to be one of the articles of our poetical faith. It was believed by Surrey's contemporaries, and in the age immediately following was gravely related by a grave historian. It shows at least the celebrity which his poetry, unequalled at that time, had given to his love, and the object of it. In fact, when divested of the antique spelling, which, at the first glance, revolts by the impression it gives of difficulty and obscurity, some of the lyrics of Surrey have not since been surpassed either in elegance of sentiment, or flowing grace of expression:—for example—

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A Praise of his Love, wherein he reproveth them that compare their Ladies with his.

Give place ye lovers here before,
That spent your boastes and braggs in vain,
My ladye's beauty passeth more
The best of yours, I dare well sayne,
Then doth the sun the candle light,
Or brightest day the darkest night.
And thereto hath a truth as just,
As had Penelope the fair:
For what she sayeth you may it trust.
As it by writing sealed were;
And virtues hath she many moe,
Than I with pen have skill to show.

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The following sonnet is rather a specimen of versification than of sentiment: the subject is borrowed from Petrarch.

A COMPLAINT, BY NIGHT, OF A LOVER NOT BELOVED.

Alas! so all things now do hold their peace,
Heaven and earth disturbed in no thing;
The beasts, the air, the birds their song do cease,
And the night's car the stars about doth bring:
Calm is the sea, the waves work less and less:
So am not I, whom love, alas! doth wring,
Bringing before my face the great increase
Of my desires, whereas I weep and sing,
In joy and woe, as in a doubtful case.
For my sweet thoughts, some time do pleasure bring;
But by and by, the cause of my disease,
Gives me a pang, that inwardly doth sting,
When that I think, what grief it is again
To live, and lack the thing should rid my pain.

Geraldine was so beautiful as to authorise the raptures of her poetical lover. Even in her later years, when as Countess of Lincoln, she attended on Queen Elizabeth, she retained so much of her excelling loveliness, that the adoration paid to her in youth, was not wondered at; and her celebrity as Surrey's early love, is alluded to by cotemporary writers.^[70] There can be no doubt

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that she was an accomplished woman: the learned education the Princesses received at Hunsdon, (in the advantages of which she participated,) is well known. Her father, Lord Kildare, was a man of vigorous intellect and uncommon attainments for the age in which he lived. He was the eighth Earl of his noble family, and being engaged in the disturbances of Ireland, then a scene of eternal dissension and bloodshed between the native princes and the lords of the English pale, he fell under the displeasure of Henry the Eighth: his eldest son, and his five brothers, who had been seized as hostages, were executed on the same day at Tyburn, and the "stout old Earl," as he is called in history, died broken-hearted in the Tower. The mother of Geraldine is rendered interesting to us by a little family trait, related by one of our old Chroniclers.^[71] Lord Kildare, he tells us, "was so well affected to his wife, as he would not at anie time buy a suite of apparel for himself, but he would suite her with the same stuffe; the which gentlenesse she recompensed with equal kindnesse; for after that he, the said Earle, deceased in the Tower, she did not onely live a chaste and honourable widow, but also nightly, before she went to bed, she would resorte to his picture, and there, with a solemn *congé*, she would bid her Lorde good nighte."

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This Countess of Kildare was Lady Elizabeth Grey, granddaughter of that famous Lady Elizabeth Grey, whose virtue made her the queen of Edward the Fourth. Thus the fair Geraldine was cousin to the young princes who were smothered in the Tower, and may truly be said to have been of "Prince's blood."

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It must be admitted that the general tone of Surrey's poems does not give us a favourable idea of the fair Geraldine's manners and character. She was variable, coquetish, and fond of admiration;—on this point I have offered some apology for her. She is accused also of marrying twice, from *mercenary* motives, and thus forfeiting the attachment of her noble and poetical lover.^[72] This is unfair, I think; there is no *proof* that Geraldine married solely from *mercenary* motives. Surrey was himself married, and both the men to whom she was successively united,^[73] were eminent in their day for high personal qualities, though in comparison with Surrey, they have been reduced to hide their diminished heads in peerages and genealogies.

The Earl of Surrey was beheaded in 1547. The fair Geraldine was living forty years afterwards: she survived for a short time her second husband, Lord Lincoln; and with him lies buried under a sumptuous tomb at Windsor: she left no descendants. Her youngest brother, Edward Fitzgerald, was the lineal ancestor of the present Duke of Leinster.

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The only original portrait of the fair Geraldine, now extant, is in the gallery of the Duke of Bedford, at Woburn; and I am told that it is sufficiently beautiful to justify Surrey's admiration.^[74]

FOOTNOTES:

- [63] "Those bears of English—those barbarous islanders," are common phrases in the Italian writers of that age.
- [64] Surrey introduced the sonnet, and the use of blank verse into our literature. It is a curious fact, that the earliest blank verse extant was written by Saint Francis.
- [65] Natural brother of the princesses: he was the son of Henry VIII. by Lady Talbot.
- [66] He was imprisoned for eating meat in Lent.
- [67] Lady Frances Vere.
- [68] Surrey's Works: Nott's Edit. 4to.
- [69] Lay of the Last Minstrel.
- [70] Queen Elizabeth's Progresses, vol. i.
- [71] Holinshed.
- [72] See Nott's edition of Surrey's Works.
- [73] She was the second wife of Sir Anthony Browne, and the third wife of the Earl of Lincoln, ancestor to the Duke of Newcastle.
- [74] Those who are curious about historic proofs, may consult Anecdotes of the family of Howard, Memoirs and works of Henry Howard Earl of Surrey, edited by Dr. Nott, Park's Royal and Noble Authors, and Collins' Peerage, by Brydges.

CHAPTER XIII.

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GINEVRA, AND ALESSANDRA STROZZI.

While the sagacity of Horace Walpole was tracking the identity of the fair Geraldine, through the mazes of poetry and probability,—through parchments, through peerages, through papers, and through patents, he must now and then have been annoyed by the provoking discretion of her chivalrous adorer, which had led him such a chase. But of all the discreet lovers that ever baffled

commentators or biographers, commend me to Ariosto! though one of the last from whom discretion might have been expected on such a subject. He is known to have been particularly susceptible to the power of beauty; passionate in his attachments; and though pensive and abstracted in his general habits, almost irresistibly captivating in his intercourse with women. Yet such was his fine chivalrous feeling for the honour of those who, won by his rare qualities, yielded it to his keeping—"such his marvellous secrecy and modesty," say his Italian biographers, that although the public gaze was fixed upon him in his lifetime, and although, since his death, the minutest circumstances relative to him have been subjects of as much curiosity and research in Italy, as Shakspeare among us; yet a few scattered notices are all that can be brought together to illustrate his charming lyrics.

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This mystery was not in Ariosto the effect of chance or affectation; it arose from a principle of conduct faithfully adhered to from youth to age; in behalf of which, and the many beautiful passages expressive of devotion and reverential tenderness towards our sex, scattered through his great poem, we will endeavour, (though at some little sacrifice of the pride and delicacy of women,) to pardon him, for having treated us most wickedly, on sundry other occasions. As an emblem of the reserve he had imposed on himself, a little bronze Cupid, with his finger on his lip, in token of silence, ornamented his inkstand, which is still preserved at Ferrara.

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Of Ariosto's amatory poems, so full of spirit, grace, and a sort of earnest triumphant tenderness, it is impossible to doubt that the objects were real. The earliest of his serious attachments, was to a young girl of the Florentine family of the Lapi, but residing at Mantua, or in its vicinity. Her name was Ginevra,—a name he has tenderly commemorated in the *Orlando Furioso*, by giving it to one of his most charming and interesting heroines,—Ginevra di Scozia. He has also, after Petrarch's fashion, *played* upon this name in one or two of his sonnets; *Ginevra* signifying a juniper-tree:

Non voglio (e Febo e Bacco mi perdoni)
Che lor frondi mi mostrino poeta,
Ma che un *Ginevra* sia che mi coroni!

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"I wish not, (may Bacchus and Phœbus pardon me!) either the laurel or the ivy to crown my brows; let my wreath be rather of the thorny juniper!"

His love for Ginevra (which was fondly returned,) began in very early youth; their first interview occurred at a *Festa di Ballo*,—a fête-champêtre, where Ginevra excelled all her young companions in the dance, as much as she surpassed them in her blooming beauty. He alludes to stolen interviews, in a grove of laurels, and on the banks of the Mincio: and on the whole, confesses that he had no reason to complain of cruelty from the fair Ginevra.^[75] This attachment lasted long; for, four years after their first meeting, Ariosto addresses her in a most impassioned strain, and vows that she was then "dearer to him than his own soul, and fairer than ever in his eyes." She seems to have left that permanent impression on his memory and fancy, that shade of tender regret with which a man of strong sensibility and ardent imagination always recurs to the first love of his youth, even when the passion itself is past. He says himself, when revisiting Mantua many years afterwards, that the scene revived all his former tenderness—

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Quel foco ch' io pensai che fosse estinto,
Dal tempo, dagli affanni, ed il star lunge
Signor pur arde.—

I cannot discover what became of Ginevra ultimately: her fate was a common one: she was loved by a celebrated man, was forsaken, and in exchange for happiness and for love, she has enjoyed for some time a shadowy renown. Her name was usually connected with that of Ariosto, till the researches of later biographers discovered the object of that more celebrated, more serious, and more lasting passion which inspired Ariosto's finest lyrics, which was subsequently sealed by a private marriage, and ended only with the poet's life. In this instance, the modesty of the lady and the discretion of Ariosto have proved in vain, for the name of *Alessandra Strozzi* is now so inseparably linked with that of her poet, that Beatrice is not more identified with Dante, nor Laura with Petrarch; though their names be more popular, and their fame more widely spread.

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Minor di grido, ma del vanto altera,
(E ciò le basta) che suo saggio amante
Fu'l grande che cantò l'armi e gli amori—
Vedi Alessandra!^[76]

Alessandra Strozzi was the daughter of Filippo Benucci, and the widow of Tito Strozzi, a noble Florentine and famous Latin poet. At the period of her first acquaintance with Ariosto, she must have been about six-and-twenty, and a beautiful woman, on a very magnificent scale. Though I cannot find that she was distinguished for talents, or any particular taste for literature, she seems to have possessed higher and more loveable qualities, which won Ariosto's admiration and secured his respect to the last.

It was on his return from Rome in 1515, that Ariosto visited Florence, intending merely to witness the grand festival which was then celebrated in honour of St. John the Baptist, and lasted several days. With what animation, what graphic power, he has described in one of his canzoni, the scene and occasion in which he first beheld his mistress! The magnificence of Florence left, he says, few traces on his memory: he could only recollect that in all that fair city, he saw nothing

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so fair as herself.

Sol mi resta immortale
Memoria, ch'io non vidi in tutta quella
Bella città, di voi, cosa più bella.

He had arrived just in time to be present at a fête, to which both were invited, and which Alessandra, notwithstanding her recent widowhood, condescended to adorn with her presence, "da preghi vinta"—conquered by the entreaties of her friends. The whole scene is set forth like some of the living and moving pictures which glow before us in the Orlando. [Pg 205]

Porte, finestre, vie, templi, teatri,
Vidi pieni di Donne,
A giochi, a pompe, a sacrifici intenti.

The portrait of Alessandra in her festal attire, and all her matronly loveliness, looks forth, as it were, from this gorgeous frame, like one of Titian's breathing, full-blown beauties. Her dress is minutely described: it was black, embroidered over with wreaths of vine-leaves and bunches of grapes, in purple and gold; her fair luxuriant hair, gathered in a net behind and parted in front, fell down on either side of her face, in long curls which touched her shoulders.

In aurei nodi, il biondo e spesso crine
In rara e sottil rete, avea raccolto;
Soave ombra di drieto
Rendea al collo, e dinanzi alle confine
Delle guance divine;
E discendea fin a l' avorio bianco
Del destro omero, e manco;
Con queste reti, insidiosi amori
Preser quel giorno, più de mille cori!

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"In golden braids, her fair
And richly flowing hair
Was gather'd in a subtle net behind,—
(A subtle net and rare!)
And cast sweet shadows there
Over her neck, whilst parted ringlets, twined
In beauty, from her forehead fell away,
And hung adown her cheek where roses lay,
Touching the ivory pale, (how pale and white!)
Of both her rounded shoulders, left and right.
O crafty Loves! no more ye need your darts;
For well ye know, how many thousand hearts,
(Willing captives on that day,)
In those golden meshes lay!"^[77]

On her brow, just where her hair is parted, she wears a sprig of laurel, wondrously wrought in gems and gold;

Quel gemmato
Alloro, tra la serena fronte e l' calle assunto.

After a rapturous, but general description of the lady's surpassing beauty, this animated and admirable canzone concludes with the fine comparison of himself to the wild falcon, tamed at length to a master's hand and voice:— [Pg 207]

La libertade apprezza,
Fin che perduta ancor non l' ha il falcone;
Preso che sia, depone
Del gire errando sì l' antica voglia,
Che sempre che si scioglia,
Al suo Signor a render con veloci
Ali s' andrà, dove udirà le voci!

Ariosto, thus enamoured, forgot the flight of time; instead of remaining at Florence a few days, his stay was prolonged to six months; and as he resided in the house of his friend Vespucci, who was the brother-in-law of Alessandra, he had daily opportunities of seeing her, without in any way compromising her matronly dignity. On a certain occasion he finds her employed at her embroidery. She is working a robe, with wreaths of lilies and amaranthes; these emblems of purity and love suggest, of course, the obvious compliments, but in a spirit that places the whole scene before us: Alessandra, gracefully bending at her embroidery-frame, and listening, with veiled lids and suspended needle, to the tender homage of Ariosto, who repeats, as he hangs over her,— [Pg 208]

Non senza causa il giglio e l' amaranto,
L' uno di fede, e l' altro fior d' amore, &c.

Even the pattern from which she is working, the silk, the gold, the lawn, made happy by her touch, are sanctified, are envied,—

Avventuroso man! beato ingegno!
Beata seta! beatissimo oro!
Ben nato lino! inclito bel lavoro,
Da chi vuol la mia dea prender disegno,
Per far a vostro esempio un vestir degno,
Che copra avorio, e perle ed un tesoro!^[78]

And he adds, "Ah, that she would rather take pattern after me, and imitate the constant love I bear her!"

Alessandra must have excelled in needle-work, for we find frequent mention of her favorite occupation; and it is even alluded to in the Orlando, where describing the wound of Zerbino, Ariosto uses a comparison rather too fanciful for the occasion.

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Così talora un bel purpureo nastro
Ho veduto partir tela d'argento,
Da quel bianca man più ch'alabastro
Da cui partire il cor spesso mi sento.

And so, I sometimes have been wont to view
A hand more white than alabaster, part
The silver cloth, with ribbons red of hue,
A hand I often feel divide my heart.^[79]

Among the personal charms of Alessandra, the most striking was the beauty and luxuriance of her hair. In the days of Ariosto, fair hair, with a golden tinge, was so much admired that it became a fashion; we are even informed that the Venetian women had invented a dye, or extract, by which they discharged the natural colour of their tresses, and gave them this admired hue. Almost all Titian's and Giorgione's beauties have fair hair; the "richissima capellatura bionda" of Alessandra, was a principal charm in the eyes of her lover, but it was one she was destined to lose prematurely; during a dangerous illness, some rash and luckless physician ordered all her beautiful tresses to be cut off. The remedy, it seems, was equally unnecessary and unfortunate; but here was a fine theme for an indignant lover! and Ariosto has, accordingly, lavished on it some of his most graceful and poetical ideas. Of the three elegant sonnets^[80] in which he has commemorated the incident, it is difficult to decide which is the finest—the last, perhaps, is the most spirited: the poet bursts at once into his subject, as in a transport of grief and rage.

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"When I think, as I do, a thousand, thousand times a-day, upon those golden tresses, which neither wisdom nor necessity, but hasty folly, tore, alas! from that fair head, I am enraged,—my cheek burns with anger,—even tears gush forth, bathing my face and bosom;—I could die to be revenged on the impious stupidity of that rash hand! O Love, if such wrong goes unpunished, thine be the reproach! Remember how Bacchus avenged on the Thracian King,^[81] the clusters torn from his sacred vines: wilt thou, who art greater far than he, do less? Wilt thou suffer the loveliest and dearest of thy possessions to be audaciously ravished, and yet bear it in silence?"^[82]

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This is powerful enough to be in downright earnest: and unsoftened by the flowing harmony of the verse and rhyme, appears even harsh, both in sentiment and expression: but the poetry and spirit being inherent, have not, I trust, quite escaped in the *transfusion*. When Ariosto, after a long absence, revisits the scene in which he first beheld the lady of his thoughts, he addresses those "marble halls, and lofty and stately roofs,

"Marmoree logge, alti e superbi tetti,"

in a strain which leaves the issue of his suit something less than doubtful:—

"Well do ye remember, ye scenes, when I left ye a captive sick at heart, and pierced with Love's sweet pain: but ye know not perhaps how sweetly I died, and was restored again to life: how my gentlest Lady, seeing that my soul had forsaken me, sent me hers in return to dwell with me for ever!"

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"Ben vi sovvien, che di qui andai captivo,
Trafitto il cor! ma non sapete forse
Com' io morissi, e poi tornassi in vita.

E che madonna, tosto che s' accorse
Esser l' anima in lei da me fuggita,
La sua mi diede, e ch' or con questa vivo!"

The exact date of Ariosto's marriage cannot be ascertained, but the marriage itself is proved beyond a doubt:^[83] it must have taken place about 1522. The reasons which induced Ariosto to involve in doubt and mystery his union with this admirable woman, can only be conjectured,^[84] their intercourse was so carefully concealed, and the discretion and modesty of Alessandra so remarkable, that no suspicion of the ties which bound them to each other, existed during the life

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of the poet; nor did the slightest imputation ever sully the fair fame of her he loved.

It were endless to point out the various beauties of Ariosto's lyrics,—beauties which, as they spring from feeling, are *felt*. We have few sonnets in a dolorous strain, few complaints of cruelty; and even these seem inspired, not by the habitual coldness of Alessandra, but by some occasional repulses which he confesses to have deserved.

Per poco consiglio, e troppo ardire.

But we have, in their place, all the glow of sensibility, the sparkling of hope, the grateful rapture of returned affection, and that power of imagery, by which, with one vivid stroke, he turns his emotions into pictures: these predominate throughout. As an instance of the latter, there is the apostrophe to Hope, "now bounding and leaping along, now creeping with coward steps and slow:"

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O speranza! che ancor dietro si mena
Quando a gran salti, e quando a passi lenti!

In one of his madrigals, he says, with an elegance which is perhaps a little quaint, "my wishes soar so high, that my hopes shrink back, and dare not follow them." In the same spirit, when he is blest with the presence of his love, grief is not only banished, but "flies with the rapidity of a falcon before the wind,"

Vola, com' un falcone che ha seco il vento!

Merely to compare his mistress to a rose, would have been common-place. She is a rose "unfolding her *paradise* of leaves,"—a charming expression, which has been adopted, I think, by one of our living poets. Mingled with the most rapturous praise of Alessandra's triumphant beauty, we have constantly the most delightful impression of her tenderness, her frank and courteous bearing, and the gladness which her presence diffuses through his heart, which, after the sentimental lamentations of former poets, are really a relief.

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I can understand the self-congratulation, the secret enjoyment, with which Ariosto dwelt on the praises of Alessandra, celebrated her charms, and exulted in her love, while her name remained an impenetrable secret,

Nor pass'd his lips in holy silence seal'd!

But when once he had introduced her into the Orlando, he must have had a very modest idea of his own future renown, not to have anticipated the consequences. A famous passage in the 42d canto, is now universally admitted to be a description of Alessandra.^[85] She is very strikingly introduced, and yet with the usual characteristic mystery; so that while nothing is omitted that can excite interest and curiosity, every means are taken to baffle and disappoint both. Rinaldo, while travelling in Italy, arrives at a splendid palace on the banks of the Po. It is minutely described, with all the prodigal magnificence of the Arabian Nights', and all the taste of an architect; and among other riches, is adorned with the statues of the most celebrated women of that age, all of whom are named at length; but among them stands the effigy of one so preëminent in majesty, and beauty, and intellect, that though she is partly veiled, and habited in modest black, (alluding to her recent widowhood,) though she wears neither jewels nor chains of gold, she eclipses all the beauties around her, as the evening star outshines all others.

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Che sotto puro velo, in nera gonna
Senza oro e gemme, in un vestire schietto,
Fra le più adorne non pareva men bella
Che sia tra l'altre la ciprigna stella!^[86]

At her side stands the image of one, who in humble strains had dared to celebrate her virtues and her beauty (meaning himself). "But," adds the poet modestly, "I know not why he alone should be placed there, nor what he had done to be so honoured; of all the rest, the names were sculptured beneath; but of these two, the names remained unknown."—No, not so! for those whom Love and Fame have joined together, who shall henceforth sunder?

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The Orlando Furioso was completed and published shortly after Ariosto's visit to Florence; and this passage must have been written apparently not only before his marriage with Alessandra, but before he was even secure of her affection; perhaps he read it aloud to her, and while his stolen looks and faltering voice betrayed the true object of this most beautiful and refined homage, she must have felt the delicacy which had suppressed her name. In such a moment, how little could she have heeded or thought of the voice of future fame, while the accents of her lover thrilled through her heart!

Alessandra removed from Florence to Ferrara, about 1519, and inhabited the Casa Strozzi, in the street of Santa Maria in Vado. The residence of Ariosto was in the Via Mirasole, at some distance. Both houses are still standing. She died in 1552, having survived the poet about nineteen years; and she was buried in the church of San Rocco at Ferrara.

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She bore no children to Ariosto; and her son, by her first marriage (Count Guido Strozzi), died before her.

Ariosto left two sons, whom he tenderly loved, and had educated with extreme care. The eldest, Virginio, was the son of a beautiful Contadinella, whose name was Orsolina; the mother of the youngest, Giovanbattista, was also a girl of inferior rank; her name was Maria. Neither are once mentioned or alluded to by Ariosto; but the mischievous industry of the poet's commentators has immortalized their names and their frailty.

FOOTNOTES:

- [75] —Non ebbe unqua pastore
Di me più lieto, o più felice amore!
- See the canzone to Ginevra, quoted by Baruffaldi. Vita, p. 148.
- [76] Monti. Poesie varie, p. 88.
- [77] Translated by a friend.
- [78] Sonnet 27.
- [79] Stewart Rose's translation.
- [80] The 26th, 27th, and 28th.
- [81] Lycurgus, King of Thrace.
- [82] Ariosto. Rime.
- [83] The proofs may be consulted in Baruffaldi, "Vita di M. Ludovico Ariosto," published in 1807; and also in Frizzi, "Memorie della Famiglia Ariosto."
- [84] Baruffaldi gives some family reasons, but they are far from being satisfactory.—See VITA, in p. 159.
- [85] Ruscelli, Fabroni, Baruffaldi, and the late poet Monti, are all agreed on this point.
- [86] Orlando Furioso, c. 42, st. 93.

CHAPTER XIV.

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SPENSER'S ROSALIND AND SPENSER'S ELIZABETH.

Pass we from the Ariosto of Italy, to Spenser, our English Ariosto; the transition is natural:—they resemble each other certainly, but with a difference, and this difference reigns especially in their minor poems.

The tender heart and luxuriant fancy of Spenser have thrown round his attachments all the strong interest of reality and all the charm of romance and poetry; and since we know that the first developement of his genius was owing to female influence, his Rosalind ought to have been deified for what her beauty achieved, had she possessed sufficient soul to appreciate the lustre of her conquest.

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Immediately on leaving college, Spenser retired to the north of England, where he first became enamoured of the fair being to whom, according to the fashion of the day, he gave the fanciful appellation of Rosalind. We are told that the letters which form this word being "well ordered," (that is, *transposed*) comprehend her real name; but it has hitherto escaped the penetration of his biographers. Two of his friends were entrusted with the secret, and they, with a discretion more to be regretted than blamed, have kept it. One of these, who speaks from personal knowledge, tells us, in a note on the Eclogues, that she was the daughter of a widow; that she was a gentlewoman, and one "that for her rare and singular gifts of person and mind, Spenser need not have been ashamed to love." We can believe this of a poet, whose delicate perception of female worth breathes in almost every page of his works; but after having, as he hoped, made some progress in her heart, a rival stepped in, whom Spenser accuses expressly of having supplanted him by treacherous arts;^[87] and on this obscure and nameless wight, Rosalind bestowed the hand which had been coveted,—the charms which had been sung by Spenser! He suffered long and deeply, wounded both in his pride and in his love: but her beauty and virtue had made a stronger impression than her cruelty; and her lover, with a generous tenderness, not only pardoned, but found excuses for her disdain.

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"I have often heard,
Fair Rosalind of divers foully blam'd,
For being to that swain too cruel hard;
But who can tell what cause had that fair maid
To use him so, that loved her so well?
Or who with blame can justly her upbraid,
For loving not; for who can love compel?"

And (sooth to say) it is full handy thing
Rashly to censure creatures so divine;
For demi-gods they be; and first did spring
From heaven, though graft in frailness feminine."^[88]

The exquisite sentiment of these lines is worthy of him who sung of "heavenly Una and her milk-white lamb."

To the memory of Rosalind,—to the long felt influence of this first passion, and to the melancholy shade which his early disappointment cast over a mind naturally cheerful, we owe some of the most tender and beautiful passages scattered through his later poems:—for instance—the bitter sense of recollected suffering, seems to have suggested that fine description of a lover's life, which may almost rank as a *pendant* to the miseries of the courtier, so well known and often quoted. [Pg 222]

Full little know'st thou that hast not tied, &c.

It occurs in the "Hymn to Love."

The gnawing envy, the heart-fretting fear,
The vain surmises, the distrustful shows,
The false reports that flying tales do bear,
The doubts, the dangers, the delays, the woes,
The feigned friends, the unassured foes,
With thousands more than any tongue can tell—
Do make a lover's life, a wretch's hell!

And again in the Fairey Queen:—

What equal torment to the grief of mind.
And pining anguish, hid in gentle heart,
That inly feeds itself with thoughts unkind,
And nourisheth its own consuming smart;
And will to none its malady impart!

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The effects produced in a noble and gentle spirit, by virtuous love for an exalted object, are not less elegantly described in another stanza of the Hymn to Love; and must have been read with rapture in that chivalrous age. The last line is particularly beautiful.

Then forth he casts in his unquiet thought,
What he may do, her favour to obtain;
What brave exploit, what peril hardly wrought,
What puissant conquest, what adventurous pain,
May please her best, and grace unto him gain;
He dreads no danger, nor misfortune fears,—
His faith, his fortune, in his breast he bears!

And in what a fine spirit of poetry, as well as feeling, is that description of the power of true beauty, which forms part of his second Hymn! It is indeed imitated from the refined Platonics of the Italian school, which then prevailed in the court, the camp, the grove, and is a little diffuse in style, a little redundant; but how rich in poetry, and in the most luxuriant and graceful imagery! [Pg 224]

How vainly then do idle wits invent,
That beauty is nought else but mixture made
Of colours fair, and goodly temperament
Of pure complexions, that shall quickly fade
And pass away, like to a summer's shade;
Or that it is but comely composition
Of parts well measured, with meet disposition!

Hath white and red in it such wondrous power,
That it can pierce through th' eyes into the heart,
And therein stir such rage and restless stowre,
As nought but death can stint his dolor's smart?
Or can proportion of the outward part
Move such affection in the inward mind,
That it can rob both sense, and reason blind?

Why do not then the blossoms of the field,
Which are array'd with much more orient hue,
And to the sense most dainty odours yield,
Work like impression in the looker's view?
Or why do not fair pictures like power show,
In which oft-times we Nature see of Art
Excell'd, in perfect limning every part?

But ah! believe me, there is more than so,

That works such wonders in the minds of men,
I, that have often prov'd, too well it know.
And who so list the like essaies to ken,
Shall find by trial, and confess it then,
That beauty is not, as fond men misdeem,
An outward show of things that only seem.

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For that same goodly hue of white and red,
With which the cheeks are sprinkled, shall decay,
And those sweet rosy leaves, so fairly spread
Upon the lips, shall fade and fall away,
To that they were, even to corrupted clay:—
That golden wire, those sparkling stars so bright
Shall turn to dust, and lose their goodly light.

But that fair lamp, from whose celestial ray
That light proceeds, which kindleth lovers' fire,
Shall never be extinguished nor decay;
But, when the vital spirits do expire,
Unto her native planet shall retire;
For it is heavenly born and cannot die,
Being a parcel of the purest sky!

At a late period of Spenser's life, the remembrance of this cruel piece of excellence,—his Rosalind, was effaced by a second and a happier love. His sonnets are addressed to a beautiful Irish girl, the daughter of a rich merchant of Cork. She it was who healed the wound inflicted by disdain and levity, and taught him the truth he has expressed in one charming line—

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Sweet is that love alone, that comes with willingnesse!

Her name was Elizabeth, and her family (as Spenser tells us himself,) obscure; but, in spite of her plebeian origin, the lady seems to have been a very peremptory and Juno-like beauty. Spenser continually dwells upon her pride of sex, and has placed it before us in many charming turns of thought, now deprecating it as a fault, but oftener celebrating it as a virtue. For instance,—

Rudely thou wrongest my dear heart's desire,
In finding fault with her too portly pride:
The thing which I do most in her admire,
Is of the world unworthy most envied;
For in those lofty looks is close implied,
Scorn of base things, disdain of foul dishonour;
Threatening rash eyes which gaze on her so wide,
That loosely they ne dare to look upon her.
Such pride is praise; such portliness is honour.^[89]

And again, in the thirteenth sonnet,—

In that proud port, which her so goodly graceth,
Whiles her fair face she rears up to the sky,
And to the ground, her eyelids low embaseth,
Most goodly temperature ye may descry;
Mild humblesse, mixt with awful majesty!

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This picture of the deportment erect with conscious dignity, and the eyelids veiled with feminine modesty, is very beautiful. We have the figure of his Elizabeth before us in all her maidenly dignity and proud humility. The next is a softened repetition of the same characteristic portrait:

Was it the work of Nature or of Art,
Which temper'd so the features of her face,
That pride and meekness, mixt by equal part,
Do both appear to adorn her beauty's grace!^[90]

He rebukes her with a charming mixture of reproof and flattery, in the lines—

Fair Proud! now tell me, why should fair be proud? &c.

This imperious and high-souled beauty at length gives some sign of relenting; and pursuing the train of thought and feeling through the latter part of the collection, we can trace the vicissitudes of the lady's temper, and how the lover sped in his wooing. First, she grants a smile, and it is hailed with rapture—

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Sweet smile! the daughter of the Queen of Love,
Expressing all thy mother's powerful art,
With which she wont to temper angry Jove,
When all the gods he threats with thundering dart:
Sweet is thy virtue, as thyself sweet art!

For, when on me thou shinedst late in sadness,
A melting pleasance ran through every part,
And me revived with heart-robbing gladness!^[91]

The effect of a first relenting and affectionate smile, from a being of this character, must, in truth, have been irresistible. He tells us how lovely she appeared in his eyes,—how surpassing fair:

When that the cloud of pride which oft doth dark
Her goodly light, with smiles she drives away!

He finds her one day embroidering in silk a bee and a spider,

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Woven all about,
With woodbynd flowers and fragrant eglantine,

and he playfully compares himself to a spider, and her to the bee, whom, after long and weary watching, he has at length caught in his snare. This pretty incident is the subject of the 71st Sonnet. The rapture of grateful affection is more eloquent in the Sonnet beginning

Joy of my life! full oft for loving you
I bless my lot, that was so lucky placed, &c.

When he is allowed to hope, the pride which had before checked and chilled him, seems to change its character. He feels all the exultation of being beloved of one, not easily gained, and "assured unto herself."

Thrice happy she that is so well assured
Unto herself, and settled so in heart, &c.^[92]

After a courtship of about three years, he sues for the possession of the fair hand to which he had so long aspired; promising her (and not vainly,) all the immortality his verse could bestow,—

Even this verse, vowed to eternity,
Shall be of her immortal monument,
And tell her praise to all posterity!

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The fair Elizabeth at length confesses herself won; but expresses some fears at the idea of relinquishing her maiden freedom. His reply is, perhaps, the most beautiful of all the Sonnets. It has all the tenderness, elegance, and fancy, which distinguish Spenser in his happiest moments of inspiration.

The doubt which ye misdeem, fair love, is vain,
That fondly fear to lose your liberty;
When, losing one, two liberties ye gain,
And make him bound that bondage erst did fly.
Sweet be the bands, the which true love doth tie
Without constraint, or dread of any ill:
The gentle bird feels no captivity
Within her cage; but sings, and feeds her fill:
There pride dare not approach, nor discord spill
The league 'twixt them, that loyal love hath bound:
But simple Truth, and mutual Good-will,
Seeks, with sweet peace, to salve each other's wound:
There Faith doth fearless dwell in brazen tower,
And spotless Pleasure builds her sacred bower.^[93]

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The *Amoretti*, as Spenser has fancifully entitled his Sonnets, are certainly tinged with a good deal of the verbiage and pedantry of the times; but I think I have shown that they contain passages of earnest feeling, as well as high poetic beauty. Spenser married his Elizabeth, about the year 1593, and he has crowned his amatory effusions with a most impassioned and triumphant epithalamion on his own nuptials, which he concludes with a prophecy, that it shall stand a perpetual monument of his happiness, and thus it has been. The passage in which he describes his youthful bride, is perhaps one of the most beautiful and vivid *pictures* in the whole compass of English poetry.

Behold, while she before the altar stands,
Hearing the holy priest that to her speaks,
And blesses her with his two happy hands.
How the red roses flush up in her cheeks.
And the pure snow, with goodly vermeil stain,
Like crimson died in grain!
That even the angels, which continually
About the sacred altar do remain,
Forget their service, and about her fly,
Oft peeping in her face, which seems more fair,

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The more they on it stare.
 But her sad eyes, still fastened on the ground,
 Are governed with a goodly modesty
 That suffers not a look to glance away,
 Which may let in a little thought unsound.
 Why blush ye, love! to give to me your hand
 The pledge of all our band!
 Sing! ye sweet angels! Hallelujah sing!
 That all the woods may answer, and their echoes ring!

And the rapturous apostrophe to the evening star is in a fine strain of poetry.

Late, though it be, at last I see it gloom,
 And the bright evening star, with golden crest,
 Appear out of the west!
 Fair child of beauty! glorious lamp of love!
 That all the host of heaven in ranks dost lead,
 And guidest lovers through the night's sad dread,
 How cheerfully thou lookest from above,
 And seem'st to laugh atween thy twinkling light!

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As Ariosto has contrived to introduce his personal feelings, and the memory of his love, into the Orlando Furioso, so Spenser has enshrined *his* in the Fairy Queen; but he has not, I think, succeeded so well in the *manner* of celebrating the woman he delighted to honour. Ariosto has the advantage over the English poet, in delicacy and propriety of feeling as well as power. Spenser's picture of the swelling eminence, the lawn, the clustering trees, the cascade—

Whose silver waves did softly tumble down,

haunted by nymphs and fairies; the bevy of beauties who dance in a circle round the lady of his love, while he himself, in his character of Colin Clout, sits aloof piping on his oaten reed, remind us of one of Claude's landscapes: and the difference between the pastoral luxuriance of this diffuse description, and the stately magnificence of Ariosto's, is very characteristic of the two poets. Were I to choose, however, I would rather have been the object of Ariosto's compliment than of Spenser's. The passage in the Fairy Queen occurs in the 10th canto of the Legend of Sir Calidore; and all his commentators are agreed that the allusion is to his Elizabeth, and not to Rosalind.

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Both are mentioned in "Colin Clout's come home again." Rosalind, and her disdainful rejection of the poet's love, are alluded to near the end, in some lines already quoted; but a very beautiful passage, near the commencement of the poem, clearly alludes to Elizabeth, under whose thrall he was at the time it was written.

Ah! far be it, (quoth Colin Clout,) fro me,
 That I, of gentle maids, should ill deserve,
 For that myself I do profess to be
 Vassal to one, whom all my days I serve;
 The beam of Beauty, sparkled from above,
 The flower of virtue and pure chastitie;
 The blossom of sweet joy and perfect love;
 The pearl of peerless grace and modesty!
 To her, my thoughts I daily dedicate;
 To her, my heart I nightly martyrize;
 To her, my love I lowly do prostrate;
 To her, my life I wholly sacrifice:
 My thought, my heart, my life, my love, is she! &c.

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Spenser married his Elizabeth about the year 1593. He resided at this time at the Castle of Kilcolman, in the south of Ireland, a portion of the forfeited domains of the Earl of Desmond having been assigned to him: but the adherents of that unhappy chief saw in Spenser only an invader of their rights,—a stranger living on their inheritance, while they were cast out to starvation or banishment. He and his family dwelt in continual fears and disturbance from the distracted state of the country; and at length, about two years after his marriage, he was attacked in his castle by the native Irish. He and his wife escaped with difficulty, and one of their children perished in the flames. After this catastrophe they came to England, and Spenser died in 1598, about five years after his marriage with Elizabeth. The short period of their union, though disturbed by misfortunes, losses, and worldly cares, was never clouded by domestic disquiet. This haughty beauty,

Whose lofty countenance seemed to scorn
 Base thing, and think how she to heaven might climb,

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became the tenderest and most faithful of wives. How long she survived her husband is not known; but though scarce past the bloom of youth at the period of her loss, we have no account of her marrying again.

FOOTNOTES:

- [87] Eclogue 6.
- [88] Colin Clout.
- [89] Sonnet 5.
- [90] Sonnet 21.
- [91] Sonnet 39.
- [92] Sonnet 39.
- [93] Sonnet 65.

CHAPTER XV.

[Pg 237]

ON THE LOVE OF SHAKSPEARE.

Shakspeare—I approach the subject with reverence, and even with fear,—is the only poet I am acquainted with and able to appreciate, who appears to have been really heaven-inspired: the workings of his wondrous and all-embracing mind were directed by a higher influence than ever was exercised by woman, even in the plenitude of her power and her charms. Shakspeare's genius waited not on Love and Beauty, but Love and Beauty ministered to *him*; he perceived like a spirit; he was created, to create; his own individuality is lost in the splendour, the reality, and the variety of his own conceptions. When I think what those are, I feel how needless, how vain it were to swell the universal voice with one so weak as mine. Who would care for it that knows and feels Shakspeare? Who would listen to it that does not, if there be such?

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It is not Shakspeare as a great power bearing a great name,—but Shakspeare in his less divine and less known character,—as a lover and a man, who finds a place here. The only writings he has left, through which we can trace any thing of his personal feelings and affections, are his Sonnets. Every one who reads them, who has tenderness or taste, will echo Wordsworth's denunciation against the "flippant insensibility" of some of his commentators, who talked of an Act of Parliament not being strong enough to compel their perusal, and will agree in his opinion, that they are full of the most exquisite feelings, most felicitously expressed; but as to the object to whom they were addressed, a difference of opinion prevails. From a reference, however, to all that is known of Shakspeare's life and fortunes, compared with the internal presumptive evidence contained in the Sonnets, it appears that some of them are addressed to his amiable friend, Lord Southampton; and others, I think, are addressed in Southampton's name, to that beautiful Elizabeth Vernon, to whom the Earl was so long and ardently attached.^[94] The Queen, who did not encourage matrimony among her courtiers, absolutely refused her consent to their union. She treated him as she did Raleigh in the affair of Elizabeth Throckmorton; and Southampton, after four years of impatient submission and still increasing love, as tenderly returned by his mistress, married without the Queen's knowledge, lost her favour for ever, and had nearly lost his head.^[95]

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That Lord Southampton is the subject of the first fifty-five Sonnets is sufficiently clear; and some of these are perfectly beautiful,—as the 30th, 32d, 41st, 54th. There are others scattered through the rest of the volume, on the same subject; but there are many which admit of no such interpretation, and are without doubt inspired by the real object of a real passion, of whom nothing can be discovered, but that she was dark-eyed^[96] and dark-haired,^[96] that she excelled in music,^[97] and that she was one of a class of females who do not always, in losing all right to our respect, lose also their claim to the admiration of the sex who wronged them, or the compassion of the gentler part of their own, who have rejected them. This is so clear from various passages, that unhappily there can be no doubt of it.^[98] He has flung over her, designedly it should seem, a veil of immortal texture and fadeless hues, "branched and embroidered like the painted Spring," but almost impenetrable even to our imagination. There are few allusions to her personal beauty, which can in any way individualise her, but bursts of deep and passionate feeling, and eloquent reproach, and contending emotions, which show, that if she could awaken as much love and impart as much happiness as woman ever inspired or bestowed, he endured on her account all the pangs of agony, and shame, and jealousy;—that our Shakspeare,—he who, in the omnipotence of genius, wielded the two worlds of reality and imagination in either hand, who was in conception and in act scarce less than a GOD, was in passion and suffering not more than MAN.

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Instead of any elaborate description of her person, we have, in the only sonnet which sets forth her charms, the rich materials of a picture, rather than the picture itself.

The forward violet thus did I chide:
Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
If not from my Love's breath? The purple pride

Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells,
In my Love's veins thou hast too grossly dy'd.
The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stolen thy hair:
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair:
A third, nor red nor white, had stolen of both,
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath;
But for his theft, in pride of all his growth
A vengeful canker eat him up to death.
More flowers I noted, yet I none could see,
But sweet, or colour, it had stolen from thee.

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He intimates that he found a rival in one of his own most intimate friends, who was also a poet.

[99] He laments her absence in this exquisite strain;—

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen,
What old December's bareness everywhere!

....*....*....*....*

For Summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And thou away, the very birds are mute!

He dwells with complacency on her supposed truth and tenderness, her bounty, like Juliet's, "boundless as the sea, her love as deep."

Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence.

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Then, as if conscious upon how unstable a foundation he had built his love, he expresses his fear lest he should be betrayed, yet remain unconscious of the wrong.

For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change!
In many looks, the false heart's history
Is writ in moods and frowns, and wrinkles strange.
But heaven in thy creation did decree,
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell.

He bitterly reproaches her with her levity and falsehood, and himself that he can be thus unworthily enslaved,—

What potions have I drunk of Syren tears, &c.

Then, with lover-like inconsistency, excuses her,—

As on the finger of a throned queen
The basest jewel will be well esteemed:
So are those errors that in thee are seen
To truths translated, and for true things deem'd.

And the following are powerfully and painfully expressive:—

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How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which, like the canker in a fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!
Oh, in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose!

And what a mansion have those vices got,
Which for their habitation chose out thee,
Where Beauty's veil doth cover every blot,
And all things turn to fair that eyes can see!

"Who taught thee," he says in another sonnet,

—to make me love thee more
The more I hear, and see just cause for hate?

He who wrote these and similar passages was certainly under the full and irresistible influence of female fascination. But who it was that thus ruled the universal heart and mighty spirit of our Shakspeare, we know not. She stands beside him a veiled and a nameless phantom. Neither dare we call in Fancy to penetrate that veil; for who would presume to trace even the faintest outline of such a being as Shakspeare could have loved?

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I think it doubtful to whom were addressed those exquisite lines,

Then hate me when thou wilt, if ever, now! &c.^[100]

but probably to this very person.

The Sonnets in which he alludes to his profession as an actor; where he speaks of the brand, "which vulgar scandal stamped upon his brow," and of having made himself "a motley to men's view,"^[101] are undoubtedly addressed to Lord Southampton.

O, for my sake, do you with fortune chide
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide,
Than publick means, which public manners breeds;
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
Pity me then, and wish I were renew'd.

The last I shall remark, perhaps the finest of all, and breathing the very soul of profound tenderness and melancholy feeling, must, I think, have been addressed to a female.

No longer mourn for me when I am dead,
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile earth, with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse;
But let your love even with my life decay:
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.

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The period assigned to the composition of these Sonnets, and the attachment which inspired them, is the time when Shakspeare was living a wild and irregular life, between the court and the theatre, after his flight from Stratford. He had previously married, at the age of seventeen, Judith Hathaway, who was eight or ten years older than himself: he returned to his native town, after having sounded all depths of life, of nature, of passion, and ended his days as the respected father of a family, in calm, unostentatious privacy.

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One thing I will confess:—It is natural to feel an intense and insatiable curiosity relative to great men, a curiosity and interest for which nothing can be too minute, too personal.—And yet when I had ransacked all that had ever been written, discovered, or surmised, relative to Shakspeare's private life, for the purpose of throwing some light upon his Sonnets, I felt no gratification, no thankfulness to those whose industry had raked up the very few particulars which can be known. It is too much, and it is not enough: it disappoints us in one point of view—it is superfluous in another: what need to surround with common-place, trivial associations, registers of wills and genealogies, and I know not what,—the mighty spirit who in dying left behind him not merely a name and fame, but a perpetual being, a presence and a power, identified with our nature, diffused through all time, and ruling the heart and the fancy with an uncontrollable and universal sway!

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I rejoice that the name of no one woman is popularly identified with that of Shakspeare. He belongs to us all!—the creator of Desdemona, and Juliet, and Ophelia, and Imogen, and Viola, and Constance, and Cornelia, and Rosalind, and Portia, was not the poet of one woman, but the POET OF WOMANKIND.

FOOTNOTES:

[94] She was the grandmother of Lady Russell.

[95] Elizabeth Vernon was first cousin to Essex. "Was it treason?" asks Essex indignantly, in one of his eloquent letters; "Was it treason in my Lord of Southampton to marry my poor kinswoman, that neither long imprisonment, nor any punishment besides that hath been usual in such cases can satisfy or appease?"

[96] Sonnets 127, 130

[97] Sonnet 128.

[98] See "Douce's Illustrations of Shakspeare."

[99] Sonnets 80, 83.

CHAPTER XVI.

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SYDNEY'S STELLA.

At the very name of Sir Philip Sydney,—the generous, gallant, all-accomplished Sydney,—the roused fancy wakes, as at the sound of a silver trumpet, to all the gay and splendid associations of chivalry and romance. He was in the court of Elizabeth, what Surrey had been in that of her father, Henry the Eighth; and like his prototype. Sir Calidore in the Fairy Queen,—

Every look and word that he did say
Was like enchantment, that through both the ears
And both the eyes, did steal the heart away.

And as Surrey had his Fair Geraldine, Sydney had his STELLA.

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Simplicity was not the fashion of Elizabeth's age in any particular: the conversation and the poetry addressed by her stately romantic courtiers to her and her maids of honour, were like the dresses they wore,—stiff with jewels and standing on end with embroidery, gorgeous of hue and fantastic in form; but with many a brilliant gem of exceeding price, scattered up and down, where one would scarce think to find them; losing something of their effect by being misplaced, but none of their inherent beauty and value. The poetry of Sir Philip Sydney was extravagantly admired in his own time, and it has since been less read than it deserves. It contains much of the pedantic quaintness, the laboured ornament, the cumbrous phraseology, which was the taste, the language of the day: but he had elegance of mind and tenderness of feeling; above all, he was in earnest, and accordingly, there are beautiful and brilliant things scattered through both his poetry and prose. If his "Phoenix-Stella" be less popularly celebrated than the Fair Geraldine,—her name less intimate with our fancy,—it is not because her poet lacked skill to immortalize her in superlatives: it is the recollection of the mournful fate and darkened fame of that beautiful but ill-starred woman, contrasted with the brilliant career and spotless glory of her lover, which strikes the imagination with a painful contrast, and makes us reluctant to dwell on her memory.

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The Stella of Sydney's poetry, and the Philoclea of his Arcadia, was the Lady Penelope Devereux, the elder sister of the favourite Essex. While yet in her childhood, she was the destined bride of Sydney, and for several years they were considered as almost engaged to each other: it was natural, therefore, at this time, that he should be accustomed to regard her with tenderness and unreproved admiration, and should gratify both by making her the object of his poetical raptures. She was also less openly, but even more ardently, loved by young Charles Blount, afterwards Lord Mountjoy, who seems to have disputed with Sydney the first place in her heart.

She is described as a woman of exquisite beauty, on a grand and splendid scale; dark sparkling eyes; pale brown hair; a rich vivid complexion; a regal brow and a noble figure. Sydney tells us that she was at first "most fair, most cold;"—and the beautiful sonnet,

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"With how sad steps, O moon, thou climb'st the sky!^[102]
How silently, and with how wan a face!"

refers to his earlier feelings. He describes a tilting-match, held in presence of the Queen and Court, in which he came off victor—

Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance,
Guided so well, that I obtained the prize, &c.^[103]

"Stella looked on," he says, "and from her fair eyes sent forth the encouraging glance that gave him victory." These soft and brilliant eyes are often and beautifully touched upon; and it must be remarked, never without an allusion to the *modesty* of their expression.

O eyes! that do the spheres of beauty move,
Which while they make Love conquer, conquer Love.

And on some occasion, when she turned from him bashfully, he addresses her in a most impassioned strain,—

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Soul's joy! bend not those morning stars from me,
Where virtue is made strong by beauty's might,
Where love is chasteness—pain doth learn delight
And humbleness doth dwell with majesty:
Whatever may ensue, O let me be
Copartner of the riches of that sight;
Let not mine eyes be hell-driven from that light.

O look! O shine! O let me die, and see!^[104]

Another, "To Sleep," is among the most beautiful, and I believe more generally known.

Lock up, fair lids! the treasure of my heart! &c.

There is also much vivacity and earnest feeling in the lines addressed to one who had lately left the presence of Stella, and of whom he inquires of her welfare. Whoever has known what it is to be separated from those beloved, to ask after them with anxious yet suppressed fondness, of some unsympathising acquaintance, to be alternately tantalised and *desesperé*, by their vague and careless replies, will understand, will feel their truth and beauty. Even the quaint, petulant commencement is true to the sentiment:

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Be your words made, good Sir, of Indian ware,
That you allow me them at so small rate?

....*....*....*....*

When I demand of Phoenix-Stella's state,
You say, forsooth, "You left her well of late."
O God! think you that satisfies *my* care?
I would know whether she do sit or walk,—
How clothed, how waited on? sighed she, or smiled?
Whereof—with whom—how often did she talk?
With what pastime, time's journey she beguiled?
If her lips deign'd to sweeten my poor name?
Say all! and all well said, still say the same!

At length, after the usual train of hopes, fears, complaints, and raptures, the lady begins to look with pity and favour on the "ruins of her conquest;"^[105] and he exults in an acknowledged return of love, though her heart be given conditionally,—

His only, while he virtuous courses takes.

So far Stella appears in a most amiable and captivating light, worthy the romantic homage of her accomplished lover. But a dark shade steals, like a mildew, over this bright picture of beauty, poetry, and love, even while we gaze upon it. The projected union between Sydney and Lady Penelope was finally broken off by their respective families, for reasons which do not appear.^[106] Sir Charles Blount offered himself, and was refused, though evidently agreeable to the lady; and she was married by her guardians to Lord Rich, a man of talents and integrity, but most disagreeable in person and manners, and her declared aversion.^[107]

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This inauspicious union ended, as might have been expected, in misery and disgrace. Lady Rich bore her fate with extreme impatience. Her warm affections, her high spirit, and her strength of mind, so heroically displayed in behalf of her brother, served but to render her more poignantly sensible of the tyranny which had forced her into detested bonds. She could not forget,—perhaps never wished or sought to forget—that she had received the homage of the two most accomplished men of that time,—Sydney and Blount; "and not finding that satisfaction at home she ought to have received, she looked for it abroad where she ought not to find it."

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Sydney describes a secret interview which took place between himself and Lady Rich shortly after her marriage. I should have observed, that Sydney designates himself all through his poems by the name of Astrophel.

In a grove, most rich of shade,
Where birds wanton music made,
May, then young, his pied weeds showing,
New perfumed with flowers fresh growing.
Astrophel, with Stella sweet,
Did for mutual comfort meet;
Both within themselves opprest,
But each in the other blest;
Him great harms had taught much care,
Her fair neck a foul yoke bear,
But her sight his cares did banish,
In his sight her yoke did vanish, &c.

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He pleads the time, the place, the season, and their divided vows; and would have pressed his suit more warmly,

But her hand, his hands repelling,
Gave repulse—all grace excelling!

....*....*....*....*

Then she spake! her speech was such
As not ear, but heart did touch.

"Astrophel, (said she) my love,
 Cease in these effects to prove!
 Now be still!—yet still believe me,
 Thy grief more than death would grieve me.
 Trust me, while, I thus deny,
 In myself the smart I try:
 Tyrant honour doth thus use thee;
 Stella's self might not refuse thee!
 Therefore, dear! this no more move:
 Lest, though I leave not thy love,
 (Which too deep in me is framed!)
I should blush when thou art named!"

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The sentiment he has made her express in the last line is beautiful, and too feminine and appropriate not to have been taken from nature; but, unhappily, it did not always govern her conduct. How far her coquetry proceeded we do not know. Sydney, about a year afterwards, married the daughter of Secretary Walsingham, and survived his marriage but a short time. This theme of song, this darling of fame, and ornament of his age, perished at the battle of Zutphen, in the very summer of his glorious youth. "He had trod," as the author of the *Effigies Poeticæ* so beautifully expresses it, "from his cradle to his grave, amid incense and flowers—and died in a dream of glory!"

His death was not only such as became the soldier and Christian;—the natural elegance and sensibility of his mind followed him even to the verge of the tomb: in his last moments, when the mortification had commenced, and all hope was over, he called for music into his chamber, and lay listening to it with tranquil pleasure. Sydney died in his thirty-fourth year.

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Among the numerous poets who lamented this deep-felt loss (volumes, I believe, were filled with the tributes paid to his memory), was Spenser, whom Sydney had early patronised. His elegy, however, is too laboured, too lengthy, too artificial, to please altogether, though containing some lines of great beauty. It is singular, and a little incomprehensible to our modern ideas of *bienséance* and good taste, that in this elegy, which Spenser dedicates to Sydney's widow after her remarriage with Essex, he introduces Stella as lamenting over the body of Astrophel, tells us how she beat her fair bosom—"the treasury of joy,"—how she tore her lovely hair, wept out her eyes,—

And with sweet kisses suckt the parting breath
 Out of his lips.

At length, through excess of grief, or the compassion of the gods, she is changed into the flower, "by some called starlight, by others penithia." This might pass in those days; though, considering all the circumstances, it is strange that, even then, it escaped ridicule.

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The tears shed for Sydney, by those nearest and dearest to him, were but too soon dried. His widow was consoled by Essex, and his Stella, by her old lover Mountjoy, who returned from Ireland, flushed with victory and honours, and cast himself again at her feet. Their secret intercourse remained, for several years, undiscovered. Lady Rich, who was tenderly attached to her brother, was guarded in her conduct, fearing equally the loss of his esteem, and the renewal of those hostile feelings which had already caused one duel between Essex and Mountjoy. She had also children; and as all, without exception, lived to be distinguished men and virtuous women, we may give her credit for some attention to their education,—some compunctious visitings of nature on their account.

During her brother's imprisonment, she made the most strenuous, the most persevering efforts to save his life: she besieged Elizabeth with the richest presents, the most eloquent letters of supplication;—she waylaid her at the door of her chamber, till commanded to remain a prisoner in her own house;—she bribed, or otherwise won, all whom she thought could plead his cause;—and when these were of no avail, and Essex perished, she seems, in her despair, to have thrown off all restraint—and at length, fled from the house of her husband.

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In 1605 she was legally divorced from Lord Rich; and soon after married Mountjoy, then Earl of Devonshire. The marriage of a divorced wife in the lifetime of her first husband, was in those days a thing almost unprecedented in the English court, and caused the most violent outcry and scandal. Laud (the archbishop, then chaplain to the Earl of Devonshire,) incurred the censure of the Church for uniting the lovers, and ever after fasted on the anniversary of this fatal marriage. The Earl, one of the most admirable and distinguished men of that chivalrous age, who "felt a stain as a wound," found it impossible to endure the infamy brought on himself and the woman he loved: he died about a year after: "the griefe," says a contemporary, "of this unhappie love brought him to his end."^[108]

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His unfortunate Countess lingered but a short time after him, and died in a miserable obscurity.—Such is the history of Sydney's STELLA.

Three of her sons became English earls; the eldest, Earl of Warwick; the second, Earl of Holland; and the third (her son by Mountjoy) Earl of Newport. The earldoms of Warwick and Holland were held by her lineal descendants, till the death of that young Lord Warwick, whose mother married Addison.

FOOTNOTES:

- [102] Sonnet 31.
[103] Sonnet 41.
[104] Sonnet 48.
[105] Sonnet 54.
[106] "All the lords that wish well to the children of the Earl of Essex, and I suppose all the best sorte of the English lords besides, doe expect what will become of the treaty between Mr. Philip and my lady Penelope. Truly, my Lord, I must say to your lordship, as I have said it to my Lord of Leicester and Mr. Philip, the breaking off this match, if the default be on your parts, will turn to more dishonour than can be repaired with any other marriage in England."—*Letter of Mr. Waterhouse to Sir Henry Sydney, in the Sydney Papers.*
[107] Zouch's Life of Sir P. Sydney.
[108] Memoirs of King James's Peers, by Sir E. Brydges.

CHAPTER XVII.

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COURT AND AGE OF ELIZABETH.

DRAYTON, DANIEL, DRUMMOND, &c.

The voluminous Drayton^[109] has left a collection of sonnets under the fantastic title of his IDEAS. Ideas they may be,—but they have neither poetry, nor passion, nor even elegance:—a circumstance not very surprising, if it be true that he composed them merely to show his ingenuity in a style which was then the prevailing fashion of his time. Drayton was never married, and little is known of his private life. He loved a lady of Coventry, to whom he promises an immortality he has not been able to confer.

How many paltry, foolish, painted things
That now in coaches trouble every street,
Shall be forgotten, whom no poet sings,
E'er they be well wrapp'd in their winding-sheet;

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While I to thee eternity shall give,
When nothing else remaineth of these days,

*And Queens hereafter shall be glad to live
Upon the alms of thy superfluous praise;*

Virgins and matrons reading these my rhimes,
Shall be so much delighted with thy story,

That they shall grieve they liv'd not in these times,
To have seen thee, their sex's only glory:

So thou shall fly above the vulgar throng,
Still to survive in my immortal song.

There are fine nervous lines in this Sonnet: we long to hail the exalted beauty who is announced by such a flourish of trumpets, and are proportionably disappointed to find that she has neither "a local habitation nor a name." Drayton's little song,

I prythee, love! love me no more,
Take back the heart you gave me!

stands unique, in point of style, among the rest of his works, and is very genuine and passionate. Daniel,^[110] who was munificently patronized by the Lord Mountjoy, mentioned in the preceding sketch, was one of the most graceful sonnetteers of that time; and he has touches of tenderness as well as fancy; for *he* was in earnest, and the object of his attachment was real, though disguised under the name of Delia. She resided on the banks of the river Avon, and was unmoved by the poet's strains. Rank with her outweighed love and genius. Daniel says of his Sonnets—

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Though the error of my youth in them appear,
Suffice they show I lived, and loved thee dear.

The lines

Restore thy tresses to the golden ore,
Yield Citherea's son those arcs of love,

are luxuriantly elegant, and quite Italian in the flow and imagery. Her modesty is prettily set forth in another Sonnet—

A modest maid, deck'd with a blush of honour,
Whose feet do tread green paths of youth and love,
The wonder of all eyes that look upon her,
Sacred on earth, designed a Saint above!

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After a long series of sonnets, elaborately plaintive, he interrupts himself with a little touch of truth and nature, which is quite refreshing;

I must not grieve my love! whose eyes should read
Lines of delight, whereon her youth might smile;
The flowers have time before they come to seed,
And she is young, and now must sport the while.
And sport, sweet maid! in season of these years,
And learn to gather flow'rs before they wither;
And where the sweetest blossom first appears,
Let Love and Youth conduct thy pleasures thither.

If the lady could have been won by poetical flattery, she must have yielded. At length, unable to bear her obduracy, and condemned to see another preferred before him, Daniel resolved to travel; and he wrote, on this occasion, the most feeling of all his Sonnets.

And whither, poor forsaken! wilt thou go?

Daniel remained abroad several years, and returning, cured of his attachment, he married Giustina Florio, of a family of Waldenses, who had fled from the frightful persecutions carried on in the Italian Alps against that miserable people. With her, he appears to have been sufficiently happy to forget the pain of his former repulse, and enjoy, without one regretful pang, the fame it had given him as a poet.

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Drummond, of Hawthornden,^[111] is yet more celebrated, and with reason. He has elegance, and sweetness, and tenderness; but not the pathos or the passion we might have expected from the circumstances of his attachment, which was as real and deep, as it was mournful in its issue. He loved a beautiful girl of the noble family of Cunningham, who is the Lesbia of his poetry. After a fervent courtship, he succeeded in securing her affections; but she died, "in the fresh April of her years," and when their marriage-day had been fixed. Drummond has left us a most charming picture of his mistress; of her modesty, her retiring sweetness, her accomplishments, and her tenderness for him.

O sacred blush, empurpling cheeks, pure skies
With crimson wings, which spread thee like the morn;
O bashful look, sent from those shining eyes;
O tongue in which most luscious nectar lies,
That can at once both bless and make forlorn;
Dear coral lip, which beauty beautifies,
That trembling stood before her words were born;
And you her words—words! no, but golden chains,
Which did enslave my ears, ensnare my soul;
Wise image of her mind,—mind that contains
A power, all power of senses to controul;
So sweetly you from love dissuade do me,
That I love more, if more my love can be.

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The quaint iteration of the same word through this Sonnet has not an ill effect. The lady was in a more relenting mood when he wrote the Sonnet on her lips, "those fruits of Paradise,"—

I die, dear life! unless to me be given
As many kisses as the Spring hath flowers,
Or there be silver drops in Iris' showers,
Or stars there be in all-embracing heaven;
And if displeas'd ye of the match remain,
Ye shall have leave to take them back again!

He mentions a handkerchief, which, in the days of their first tenderness, she had embroidered for him, unknowing that it was destined to be steeped in tears for her loss!—In fact, the grief of Drummond on this deprivation was so overwhelming, that he sunk at first into a total despondency and inactivity, from which he was with difficulty roused. He left the scene of his happiness, and his regrets—

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Are these the flowery banks? is this the mead
Where she was wont to pass the pleasant hours?
Is this the goodly elm did us o'erspread,
Whose tender rind, cut forth in curious flowers
By that white hand, contains those flames of ours?

Is this the murmuring spring, us music made?
Deflourish'd mead, where is your heavenly hue?

He travelled for eight years, seeking, in change of place and scene, some solace for his wounded peace. There was a kind of constancy even in Drummond's inconstancy; for meeting many years afterwards with an amiable girl, who bore the most striking resemblance to his lost mistress, he loved her for that very resemblance, and married her. Her name was Margaret Logan. I am not aware that there are any verses addressed to her.

Drummond has been called the Scottish Petrarch: he tells us himself, that "he was the first in this Isle who did celebrate a dead mistress,"—and his resemblance to Petrarch, in elegance and sentiment, has often been observed: he resembles him, it is true—but it is as a professed and palpable imitator resembles the object of his imitation. [Pg 270]

On glancing back at the age of Elizabeth,—so adorned by masculine talent, in arts, in letters, and in arms,—we are at first surprised to find so few distinguished women. It seems remarkable that a golden epoch in our literature, to which she gave her name "the Elizabethan age,"—a court in which a female ruled,—a period fruitful in great poets, should have produced only one or two women who are interesting from their poetical celebrity. Of these, Alice Spenser, Countess of Derby, and Mary Sydney, Countess of Pembroke, (the sister of Sir Philip Sydney) are the most remarkable; the first has enjoyed the double distinction of being celebrated by Spenser in her youth, and by Milton in her age,—almost too much honour for one woman, though she had been a muse, and a grace, and a cardinal virtue, moulded in one. Lady Pembroke has been celebrated by Spenser and by Ben Jonson, and was, in every respect, a most accomplished woman. To these might be added other names, which might have shone aloft like stars, and "shed some influence on this lower world:" if the age had not produced two women, so elevated in station, and so every way illustrious by accidental or personal qualities, that each, in her respective sphere, extinguished all the lesser orbs around her. It would have been difficult for any female to seize on the attention, or claim either an historical or poetical interest, in the age of Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart. [Pg 271]

In her own court, Elizabeth was not satisfied to preside. She could as ill endure a competitor in celebrity or charms, as in power. She arrogated to herself all the incense around her; and, in point of adulation, she was like the daughter of the horse-leech, whose cry was, "give! give!" Her insatiate vanity would have been ludicrous, if it had not produced such atrocious consequences. This was the predominant weakness of her character, which neutralized her talents, and was pampered, till in its excess it became a madness and a vice. This precipitated the fate of her lovely rival, Mary Queen of Scots. This elevated the profligate Leicester to the pinnacle of favour, and kept him there, sullied as he was by every baseness and every crime;^[112] this hurried Essex to the block; banished Southampton; and sent Raleigh and Elizabeth Throckmorton to the Tower. Did one of her attendants, more beautiful than the rest, attract the notice or homage of any of the gay cavaliers around her,—was an attachment whispered, a marriage projected,—it was enough to throw the whole court into consternation. "Her Majesty, the Queen, was in a passion;" and, then, heaven help the offenders! It was the spirit of Harry the Eighth let loose again. Yet such is the reflected glory she derives from the Sydneys and the Raleighs, the Walsinghams and Cecils, the Shakspeares and Spensers of her time, that we can scarce look beyond it, to stigmatise the hard unfeminine egotism of her character. [Pg 272]

There was something extremely poetical in her situation, as a maiden queen, raised from a prison to a throne, exposed to unceasing danger from without and treason from within, and supported through all by her own extraordinary talents, and by the devotion of the chivalrous, gallant courtiers and captains, who paid to her, as their queen and mistress, a homage and obedience they would scarce have paid to a sovereign of their own sex. All this display of talent and heroism, and chivalrous gallantry, has a fine gorgeous effect to the imagination;—but for the woman herself,—as a woman, with her pedantry, and her absurd affectation; her masculine temper and coarse insolence; her sharp, shrewish, cat-like face, and her pretension to beauty, it is impossible to conceive any thing more anti-poetical.

Yet had she praises in all plenteousness
Pour'd upon her, like showers of Castalie.^[113]

She was a favourite theme of the poets of the time, and by right divine of her sceptre and her sex, an object of glorious flattery, not always feigned, even where it was false. [Pg 273]

She is the Gloriana of Spenser's Fairy Queen,—she is the "Cynthia, the ladye of the sea,"—she is the "Fair Vestal throned in the West," of Shakspeare—

That very time I saw, (but thou couldst not,)
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
At a fair Vestal, throned by the West,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft

Quench'd in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon;
And the imperial vot'ress passed on
In maiden meditation, fancy free.

And the previous allusion to Mary of Scotland, as the "Sea Maid on the Dolphin's back,"

Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,

is not less exquisite.

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It would, in truth, have been easier for Mary to have calmed the rude sea than her ruder and wilder subjects. These two queens, so strangely misplaced, seem as if, by some sport of destiny, each had dropt into the sphere designed for the other. Mary should have reigned over the Sydneys, the Essexes, the Mountjoys;—and with her smiles, and sweet words; and generous gifts, have inspired and rewarded the poets around her. Elizabeth should have been transferred to Scotland, where she might have bandied frowns and hard names with John Knox, cut off the heads of rebellious barons, and boxed the ears of ill-bred courtiers.

This is no place to settle disputed points of history, nor, if it were, should I presume to throw an opinion in to one scale or the other; but take the two queens as women merely, and with a reference to apparent circumstances, I would rather have been Mary than Elizabeth; I would rather have been Mary, with all her faults, frailties, and misfortunes,—all her power of engaging hearts,—betrayed by her own soft nature, and the vile or fierce passions of the men around her, to die on a scaffold, with the meekness of a saint and the courage of a heroine, with those at her side who would willingly have bled for her,—than I would have been that heartless flirt, Elizabeth, surrounded by the oriental servility, the lip and knee homage of her splendid court; to die at last on her palace-floor, like a crushed wasp—sick of her own very selfishness—torpid, sullen, and despairing,—without one friend near her, without one heart in the wide world attached to her by affection or gratitude.

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There is more true and earnest feeling in some little verses written by Ronsard on the unhappy Queen of Scots, than in all the elegant, fanciful, but extravagant flattery of Elizabeth's poets. After just mentioning the English Queen, whom he dispatches in a single line,—

Je vis leur belle reine, honnête et vertueuse;

he thus dwells on the charms of Mary:—

Je vis des Ecosais la Reine sage et belle,
Qui de corps et d'esprits ressemble une immortelle;
J'approchai de ses yeux, mais bien de deux soleils,
Deux soleils de beauté, qui n'ont point leurs pareils.
Je les vis larmoyer d'une claire rosée,
Je vis d'un clair crystal sa paupière arrosée,
Se souvenant de France, et du sceptre laissé,
Et de son premier feu, comme un songe passé!

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And when Mary was a prisoner, he dedicated to her a whole book of poems, in which he celebrates her with a warmth, the more delightful that it was disinterested. He thanks her for selecting his poems, to amuse her solitary hours, and adds feelingly,—

Car, je ne veux en ce monde choisir
Plus grand honneur que vous donner plaisir!

Mary did not leave her courteous poet unrewarded. She contrived, though a prisoner, to send him a casket containing two thousand crowns, and a vase, on which was represented Mount Parnassus, and a flying Pegasus, with this inscription:—

A Ronsard, l'Apollon de la source des Muses.

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No one understood better than Mary the value of a compliment from a beauty, and a queen; had she bestowed more precious favours with equal effect and discrimination, her memory had escaped some disparagement. Ronsard, we are told, was sufficiently a poet, to value the inscription on his vase more than the gold in the casket.

Apropos to Ronsard: the history of his loves is so whimsical and so truly French, that it must claim a place here.

Yet now I am upon French ground, I may as well take the giant's advice, and "begin at the beginning."^[114] It seems at first view unaccountable that France, which has produced so many remarkable women, should scarce exhibit one poetical heroine of great or popular interest, since its language and literature assumed their present form; not one who has been rendered illustrious or dear to us by the praises of a poet lover. The celebrity of celebrated French women is, in truth, very anti-poetical. The memory of the kiss which Marguerite d'Ecosse^[115] gave to Alain Chartier, has long survived the verses he wrote in her praise. Clement Marot, the court poet of Francis the First, was the lover, or rather one of the lovers, of Diana of Poitiers (mistress to the Dauphin, afterwards Henry the Second). She was confessedly the most beautiful and the

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most abandoned woman of her time. Marot could hardly have expected to find her a paragon of constancy; yet he laments her fickleness, as if it had touched his heart.

A DIANE.

Puisque de vous je n'ai autre visage,
Je m'en vais rendre hermite en un desert,
Pour prier Dieu, si un autre vous sert,
Qu'autant que moi en votre honneur soit sage.

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Adieu, Amour! adieu, gentil corsage!
Adieu ce teint! adieu ces friands yeux!
Je n'ai pas eu de vous grand avantage,—
Un moins aimant aura peut-être mieux.

In a *liaison* of mere vanity and profligacy, the transition from love (if love it be) to hatred and malignity, is not uncommon—as Spenser says so beautifully,

Such love might never long endure,
However gay and goodly be the style,
That doth ill cause or evil end enure:
For Virtue is the band that bindeth hearts most sure!

From being the lady's *lover*, Marot became her satirist; instead of *chansons* in praise of her beauty, he circulated the most biting and insufferable epigrams on her person and character. We are told by one, who, I presume, speaks *avec connaissance de fait*, that a woman's revenge

Is like the tiger's spring,
Deadly and quick, and crushing.

Diana was a libelled beauty, all powerful and unprincipled. Marot, in some moment of gaiety and overflowing confidence, had confessed to her that he had eaten meat on a "jour maigre:" he had better in those days have committed all the seven deadly sins; and when the lady revealed his unlucky confession, and denounced him as a heretic, he was immediately imprisoned. Instead, however, of being depressed by his situation, or moved to make any concessions, he published from his prison a most ludicrous lampoon on his *ci-devant* mistress, of which the burthen was, "Prenez le, il a mangé le lard!" He afterwards made his escape, and took refuge in the court of Renée, Duchess of Ferrara; and though subsequently recalled to France, he continued to pursue Diana with the most bitter satire, became a second time a fugitive, partly on her account, and died in exile and poverty.^[116]

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Marot has been called the French Chaucer. He resembles the English poet in liveliness of fancy, picturesque imagery, simplicity of expression, and satirical humour; but he has these merits in a far less degree; and in variety of genius, pathos and power, is immeasurably his inferior.

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Ronsard, to whom I at length return, was the successor of Marot. In his time the Italian sonnetteers, as Petrarch, Bembo, Sanazzaro, were the prevailing models, and classical pedantry the prevailing taste. Ronsard, having filled his mind with Greek and learning, determined to be a poet, and looked about for a mistress to be the object of his songs: for a poet without a mistress was then an unheard-of anomaly. He fixed upon a beautiful woman of Blois, named Cassandre, whose Greek appellation, it is said, was her principal attraction in his fancy. To her he addressed about two hundred and twenty sonnets, in a style so lofty and pedantic, stuffed with such hard names and philosophical allusions, that the fair Cassandra must have been as wise as her namesake, the daughter of Priam, to have comprehended her own praises.

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Ronsard's next love was more interesting. Her name was Marie: she was beautiful and kind: the poet really loved her; and consequently, we find him occasionally descending from his heights of affectation and scholarship, to the language of truth, nature and tenderness. Marie died young; and among Ronsard's most admired poems are two or three little pieces written after her death. As his works are not commonly met with, I give one as a specimen of his style:—

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EPITAPHE DE MARIE.

Ci reposent les os de la belle Marie,
Qui me fit pour un jour quitter mon Vendomois,^[117]
Qui m'echauffa le sang au plus verd de mes mois;
Qui fût toute mon tout, mon bien, et mon envie.

En sa tombe repose honneur et courtoisie,
Et la jeune beauté qu'en l'ame je sentoie,
Et le flambeau d'Amour, ses traits et son carquois,
Et ensemble mon cœur, mes pensées et ma vie.

Tu es, belle Angevine,^[117] un bel astre des cieux;
Les anges, tous ravis, se paissent de tes yeux,
La terre te regrette, O beauté sans seconde!

Maintenant tu es vive, et je suis mort d'ennui,
Malheureux qui se fie en l'attente d'autrui;
Trois amis m'ont trompé,—toi, l'amour, et le monde.

Ronsard had by this time acquired a reputation which eclipsed that of all his contemporaries. He was caressed and patronised by Charles the Ninth (of hateful memory), who, like Nero, exhibited the revolting combination of a taste for poetry and the fine arts, with the most sanguinary and depraved dispositions. Ronsard, having lost his Marie, was commanded by Catherine de' Medicis to select a mistress from among the ladies of her court, to be the future object of his tuneful homage. He politely left her Majesty to choose for him, prepared to fall in love duly at the royal behest; and Catherine pointed out Helène de Surgeres, one of her maids of honour, as worthy to be the second Laura of a second Petrarch. The docile poet, with zealous obedience, warbled the praises of Helène for the rest of his life. He also consecrated to her a fountain near his château in the Vendomois, which has popularly preserved her name and fame. It is still known as the "Fontaine d'Helène."

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Helène was more witty than beautiful, and, though vain of the celebrity she had acquired in the verses of Ronsard, she either disliked him in the character of a lover, or was one of those lofty ladies

Who hate to have their dignity profaned
With any relish of an earthly thought.^[118]

She desired the Cardinal du Perron would request Ronsard (in her name) to prefix an epistle to the odes and sonnets addressed to her, assuring the world that this poetical love had been purely Platonic. "Madam," said the Cardinal, "you had better give him leave to prefix your picture."^[119]

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I presume my fair and gentle readers (I shall have none, I am sure, who are not one or the other, or both,) are as tired as myself of all this affectation, and glad to turn from it to the interest of passion and reality.

"There is not," says Cowley, "so great a lie to be found in any poet, as the vulgar conceit of men, that lying is essential to good poetry." On the contrary, where there is not truth, there is nothing

Rien n' est beau que le vrai,—le vrai seul est aimable!

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While the Italian school of amatory verse was flourishing in France, Spain, and England, almost to the extinction of originality in this style, the brightest light of Italian poesy had arisen, and was shining with a troubled splendour over that land of song. How swiftly at the thought does imagination shoot, "like a glancing star," over the wide expanse of sea and land, and through a long interval of sad and varied years! I am again standing within the porch of the church of San Onofrio, looking down upon the little slab in its dark corner, which covers the bones of TASSO.

FOOTNOTES:

[109] Died 1631

[110] Died in 1619.

[111] Died 1649.

[112] Leicester's influence over Elizabeth appeared so unaccountable, that it was ascribed to magic, and to her evil stars.

[113] Spenser's *Daphnaida*.

[114] Béliet, mon ami! Commencez par le commencement!
COUNT HAMILTON.

[115] "La gentille Marguerite," the unhappy wife of Louis the Eleventh. Beautiful, accomplished, and in the very spring of life, she died a victim to the detestable character of her husband. When one of her attendants spoke of hope and life, the Queen, turning from her with an expression of deep disgust, exclaimed with a last effort, "Fi de la vie! ne m'en parlez plus!"—and expired.

[116] At Althorp, the seat of Lord Spenser, there is a most curious picture of Diana of Poitiers, once in the Crawford collection: it is a small half-length; the features are fair and regular; the hair is elaborately dressed with a profusion of jewels; but there is no drapery whatever, except a curtain behind: round the head is the legend from the forty-second Psalm,—"*Comme le cerf braie après le décours des eaues, ainsi brait mon âme après toi, O Dieu!*" which is certainly a most extraordinary and profane application. In the days of Diana of Poitiers, Marot had composed a version of the Psalms, then very popular. It was the fashion to sing them to dance and song tunes; and the courtiers and beauties had each their favourite psalm, which served as a kind of *devise*. This may explain the very singular inscription on this very singular picture.

[117] Ronsard was a native of the Vendomois, and Marie, of Anjou.

[118] Ben Jonson.

[119] V. Bayle *Dictionnaire Historique*.—Pierre de Ronsard was born in 1524, and died in

CHAPTER XVIII.

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LEONORA D'ESTE.

Leonora d'Este, a princess of the proudest house in Europe, might have wedded an emperor, and have been forgotten. The idea, true or false, that she it was who broke the heart and frenzied the brain of Tasso, has glorified her to future ages; has given her a fame, something like that of the Greek of old, who bequeathed his name to immortality, by firing the grandest temple of the universe.

The question of Tasso's attachment to the Princess Leonora, is, I believe, set at rest by the acute researches and judicious reasoning of M. Ginguené, and those who have followed in his steps. A body of circumstantial evidence has been collected, which would not only satisfy a court of love—but a court of law, with a Lord Chancellor, to boot, "*perpending*" at the head of it. That which was once regarded as a romance, which we wished to believe, if we *could*, is now an established fact, which we cannot disbelieve if we would.

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No poet perhaps ever owed so much to female influence as Tasso, or wrote so much under the intoxicating inspiration of love and beauty. He paid most dearly for such inspiration; and yet not *too* dearly. The high tone of sentiment, the tenderness, and the delicacy which pervade all his poems, which prevail even in his most voluptuous descriptions, and which give him such a decided superiority over Ariosto, cannot be owing to any change of manners or increase of refinement produced by the lapse of a few years. It may be traced to the tender influence of two elegant women. He for many years read the cantos of the Gerusalemme, as he composed them, to the Princesses Lucretia and Leonora, both of whom he admired—one of whom he adored.

Au reste—the kiss, which he is said to have imprinted on the lips of Leonora in a transport of frenzy, as well as the idea that she was the primary cause of his insanity, and of his seven years' imprisonment at St. Anne's, rest on no authority worthy of credit; yet it is not less certain that she was the object of his secret and fervent admiration, and that this hopeless passion conspired, with many other causes, to fever his irritable temperament and unsettle his imagination, beyond that "fine madness," which we are told *ought* "to possess the poet's brain."

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When Tasso first visited Ferrara, in 1565, he was just one-and-twenty, with all the advantages which a fine countenance, a majestic figure, (for he was tall even among the tallest,) noble birth, and excelling talents could bestow: he was already distinguished as the author of the Rinaldo, his earliest poem, in which he had celebrated (as if prophetically,) the Princesses d'Este—and chiefly Leonora.

Lucrezia Estense, e l'altra i cui crin d'oro,
Lacci e reti saran del casto amore.^[120]

When Tasso was first introduced to her in her brother's court, Leonora was in her thirtieth year; a disparity of age which is certainly no argument against the passion she inspired. For a young man, at his first entrance into life, to fall in love ambitiously—with a woman, for instance, who is older than himself, or with one who is, or ought to be, unattainable—is a common occurrence. Tasso, from his boyish years, had been the sworn servant of beauty. He tells us, in grave prose, "che la sua giovanezza fu tutta sotto-posta all' amorose leggi;"^[121] but he was also refined, even to fastidiousness, in his intercourse with women. He had formed, in his own poetical mind, the most exalted idea of what a female ought to be, and unfortunately, she who first realised all his dreams of perfection, was a Princess—"there seated where he durst not soar." Leonora was still eminently lovely, in that soft, artless, unobtrusive style of beauty, which is charming in itself, and in a princess irresistible, from its contrast with the loftiness of her station and the trappings of her rank. Her complexion was extremely fair; her features small and regular; and the form of her head peculiarly graceful, if I may judge from a fine medallion I once saw of her in Italy. Ill health, and her early acquaintance with the sorrows of her unfortunate mother, had given to her countenance a languid and pensive cast, and sicklied all the natural bloom of her complexion; but "Paleur, qui marque une ame tendre, a bien son prix:" so Tasso thought; and this "vago Pallore," which "vanquishes the rose, and makes the dawn ashamed of her blushes," he has frequently and beautifully celebrated; as in the pretty Madrigal—

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Vita della mia Vita!
O Rosa scolorita! &c.

and in those graceful lines,

Languidetta beltà vinceva amore, &c.

applicable only to Leonora. Her eyes were blue; her mouth of peculiar beauty, both in form and expression. In the seventh Sonnet, "Bella è la donna mia," he says it was the most lovely feature in her face; in another, still finer,^[122] he styles this exquisite mouth "a crimson shell"—

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Purpurea conca, in cui si nutre
Candor di perle elette e pellegrine;

and he concludes it with one of those disguises under which he was accustomed to conceal Leonora's name.

E di sì degno cor tuo strale ONORA.

She was negligent in her dress, and studious and retired in her habits, seldom joining in the amusements of her brother's court, then the gayest and most magnificent in Italy.^[123] Her accomplished and unhappy mother, Renée of France,^[124] had early instilled into her mind a love of literature, and especially of poetry. She was passionately fond of music, and sang admirably. One of Tasso's most beautiful sonnets was composed on some occasion when her physician had forbidden her to sing. He who had so often felt the magic of that enchanting voice, thus describes its power and laments his loss:—

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Ahi, ben è reo destin, ch' invidia, e toglie
Almondo il suon de' vostri chiari accenti,
Onde addivien che le terrene genti
De' maggior pregi, impoverisca e spoglie.

Ch' ogni nebbia mortal, che 'l senso accoglie,
Sgombrar potea dalle più fosche menti
L' armonia dolce, e bei pensieri ardenti
Spirar d' onore, e pure e nobil voglie.

Ma non si merta qui forse cotanto;
E basta ben che i sereni occhi, e 'l riso
N' infiammin d' un piacer celeste e santo.

Nulla fora più bello il Paradiso,
Se 'l mondo udisse, in voi d' angelo il canto,
Siccome vede in voi d' angelo il viso.

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"O cruel—O envious destiny, that hast deprived the world of those delicious accents, that hast made earth poor in what was dearest and sweetest! No cloud ever gathered over the gloomiest mind, which the melody of that voice could not disperse; it breathed but to inspire noble thoughts and chaste desires.—But, no! it was more than mortals could deserve to possess. Those soft eyes, that smile were enough to inspire a sacred and sweet delight.—Nor would Paradise any longer excel this earth, if in your voice we heard an angel sing, as we behold an angel's beauty in your face!"

Leonora, to a sweet-toned voice, added a gift, which, unless thus accompanied, loses half its value, and almost all its charm—she spoke well; and her eloquence was so persuasive, that we are told she had power to move her brother Alphonso, when none else could. Tasso says most poetically,

E l'aura del parlar cortese e saggio,
Fra le rose spirar, s'udia sovente;

—meaning—for to translate literally is scarce possible,—that "eloquence played round her lips, like the zephyr breathing over roses." [Pg 296]

"I (he adds), beholding a celestial beauty walk the earth, closed my eyes in terror, exclaiming, O rashness! O folly! for any to dare to gaze on such charms! Alas! I quickly perceived that this was my least peril. My heart was touched through my ears; her gentle wisdom penetrated deeper than her beauty could reach."

With what emotions must a young and ardent poet have listened to his own praises from a beautiful mouth, thus sweetly gifted! and it may be added, that Leonora's eloquence, and the influence she possessed over her brother, were ever employed in behalf of the deserving and unfortunate. The good people of Ferrara had such an exalted idea of her piety and benevolence, that when an earthquake caused a terrible inundation of the Po, and the destruction of the surrounding villages, they attributed the safety of their city entirely to her prayers and intercession.

Leonora then was not unworthy of her illustrious conquest, either in person, heart, or mind. To be summoned daily into the presence of a Princess thus beautiful and amiable, to read aloud his verses to her, to hear his own praises from her lips, to bask in her approving smiles, to associate with her in her retirement, to behold her in all the graceful simplicity of her familiar life,—was a dangerous situation for Tasso, and surely not less so for Leonora herself. That she was aware of his admiration, and perfectly understood his sentiments, and that a mysterious intelligence existed between them, consistent with the utmost reverence on his part, and the most perfect delicacy and dignity on hers, is apparent from the meaning and tendency of innumerable passages scattered through his minor poems—too significant in their application to be mistaken. Though that application be not avowed, and even disguised—the very disguise, when once detected, points to the object. Leonora knew, as well as her lover, that a Princess "was no love-

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mate for a bard." She knew far better than her lover, until *he* too had been taught by wretched experience, the haughty and implacable temper of her brother Alphonso, who never was known to brook an injury or forgive an offender. She must have remembered too well the twelve years' imprisonment and the narrow escape from death, of her unfortunate mother for a less cause. She was of a timid and reserved nature, increased by the extreme delicacy of her constitution. Her hand had frequently been sought by princes and nobles, whom she had uniformly rejected, at the risk of displeasing her brother; and the eyes of a jealous court were upon her. Tasso, on the other hand, was imprudent, hot-headed, fearless, ardently attached. For both their sakes, it was necessary for Leonora to be guarded and reserved, unless she would have made herself the fable of all Italy. And in what glowing verse has Tasso described all the delicious pain of such a situation! now proud of his fetters, now execrating them in despair. In allusion to his ambitious passion, he is Phaeton, Icarus, Tantalus, Ixion.

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Se d' Icàro leggesti c di Fetonte, &c.

But though presumption flung to ruin Icarus and Phaeton, did not the power of love bring even Dian down "from her amazing height?"

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E che non puote
Amor, che con catena il ciel unisce?
Egli già trae delle celeste rote
Di terrana beltà Diana accesa,
E d'Ida il bel Fanciul^[125] al' ciel rapisce.

This at least is *clearly* significant, however poetical the allusions; but what a world of passion and of meaning breathes through the Sonnet which he has entitled "The constrained Silence," ("*Il Silenzio Imposto.*")

"She is content that I should love her; yet, O what hard restraint of galling silence has she imposed!"

Vuol che l' ami costei; ma duro freno
Mi pone ancor d' aspro silenzio; or quale
Avrò da lei, se non conosce il male
O medecina, o refrigerio almeno?

....*....*....*....*

Tacer ben posso, e tacerò! ch' io toglia
Sangue alle piaghe, e luce al vivo foco
Non brami già; questa e impossibil voglia
Troppo spinse pungenti a dentro i colpi,
E troppo ardore accolse in picciol loco:
S' apparirà, natura, e sè n' incolpi.^[126]

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"Yes, I can, I will keep silence; but to command that the wound shall not bleed nor the fire burn, is to command impossibility. Too, too deep hath the blow been struck; too ardently glows the flame; and if betrayed, the fault is in nature—not in me!"

And again, what can be more exquisitely tender, more beautiful in its fervent simplicity of expression, than the effusion which follows? How miserably does an inadequate prose translation halt after the glowing poetry, the rhythmical music, the "linked sweetness" of the original!

Io non cedo in amar, Donna gentile
A' chi mostra di fuor l' interno affetto;
Perchè 'l mio si nasconda in mezzo 'l petto,
Nè co' fior s' apra del mio nuovo Aprile,
Co' vaghi sguardi, e col sembiante umile,
Co' detti sparsi in variando aspetto
Altri si veggia al vostro amor soggetto,
E co' sospiri, e con leggiadro stile.

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E quando gela il cielo, e quando infiamma,
E quando parte il sole, e quando riede,
Vi segua; come il can selvaggia damma.

Ch' io se nel cor vi cerco, altri noi vede,
E sol mi vanto di nascosa fiamma,
E sol mi glorio di secreta fede.^[127]

"I yield not in love, O gentlest lady! to those who dare to show their love more openly, though I conceal it within the centre of my heart, nor suffer it to spread forth, like the other flowers of my spring. Let others boast themselves subjects of love for your sake, and slaves of your beauty, with admiring looks, with humble aspect, with sighs, with eloquent words, with lofty verse! whether the winter freeze or the summer burn,—at set of sun, and when he laughs again in heaven, let them still pursue you, as dogs the shy and timid deer. But I—O, I seek you in my own heart, where none else behold you! My hidden love be my only boast: my secret faith, my only glory!"

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Without multiplying quotations, which would extend this sketch from pages into volumes, it is sufficient to trace through Tasso's verses the little incidents which varied this romantic intercourse. The frequent indisposition of Leonora, her absence when she went to visit her brother, the Cardinal d'Este, at Tivoli, form the subjects of several beautiful little poems; as the Sonnets

Dianzi al vostro languir, &c.

Donna! poichè fortuna empia mi nega
Seguirvi, &c.

Al nobil colle, ove in antichi marmi
Di Greco mano opre famose ammira
Vaga LEONORA il mio pensier mi gira.

Here he names her expressly; while in the little lament—

Lunge da voi, ben mio!
Non ho vita ne core! e non son io
Non sono, oimè! non sono
Quel ch' altra volta fui, ma un Ombra mesta,
Un lagrimevol suono, &c.

—the tone is too passionate to allow of it. He finds her looking up one night at the stars; it is sufficient to inspire that beautiful little song,

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Mentre, mia stella, miri
I bei celesti giri,
Il cielo esser vorrei,
Perchè negli occhi mici
Fiso tu rivolgessi
Le tue dolci faville;
Io vagheggiar potessi
Mille bellezze tue, con luci mille!^[128]

He relates, in another little madrigal, that standing alone with her in a balcony, he chanced, perhaps in the eagerness of conversation, to extend his arm on hers. He asks pardon for the freedom, and she replies with sweetness, "You offended not by placing your arm there, but by withdrawing it." This little speech in a coquette would have been *sans consequence*; from such a woman as Leonora, it spoke volumes; and her lover felt it so. He breaks forth in a rapture at the tender condescension,

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O parolette amoroze, &c.

Then comes a cloud, but whether of temper or jealousy, we know not. One of those luckless trifles, perhaps,

—that move
Dissension between hearts that love.

Tasso accompanied Lucrezia d'Este, then Duchess of Urbino, to her villa of Castel Durante, where he remained for some time, partaking in all the amusements of her gay court, without once seeing Leonora. He then wrote to her, and the letter fortunately has been preserved entire.

Though guarded in expression, it is throughout in the tone of a lover piqued, and yet conscious that he has himself offended; and seeking, with a sort of proud humility, the reconciliation on which his happiness depends. He sends her a sonnet, which he admits is "far unlike the elegant effusions he supposes her now in the habit of receiving." He begs to assure her, that though it be in art and wit as poor as he is himself in happiness, yet in his present pitiable condition, he could do no better; (not that he was to all appearance so very much to be pitied). He adds, "do not think, however, that in this vacancy of thought, my heart has found leisure for love. The Sonnet is merely composed at the request of a certain poor lover, who has for some time past quarrelled with his mistress; and now no longer able to endure his hard fortune, is obliged to yield, and sue for grace and pardon." "Il quale essendo stato un pezzo in colera con la sua donna, ora non potendo più, bisogna che si renda e che dimanda mercè." The Sonnet enclosed in this letter, ("Sdegno, debil Guerrier,") appears to me one of the least pleasing in the collection; as if his genius and his feelings were both under some benumbing influence when he wrote it.

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In the meanwhile, there was a report that Leonora was about to be united to a foreign Prince. Her hand had been demanded of her brother with the usual formalities. On this occasion Tasso wrote the fine Canzone,

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Amor, tu vedi, e non hai duolo o sdegno, &c.

"Love! canst thou look on without grief or indignation, to see my gentle lady bow her fair neck to the yoke of another?"

The expression in the 6th strophe is very unequivocal—

"Nor let my mistress, though she suffer her bosom to be invaded by a newer flame, forget the former bond."

Nè la mia Donna, perchè scaldi il petto
Di nuovo amore, nodo *antico* sprezzi.

In one of his Sonnets, this jealous pain is yet more strongly expressed:—

Io sparso, ed altri miete! &c.

"I sow, another reaps! I water a lovely blossom, unworthy, alas! to tend it; and another gathers the fruit. O rage!—yet must I, through coward fear, lock my grief within my own bosom!" &c.

This intended marriage never took place; and Tasso, relieved from his fears, and restored to the confidence of Leonora, was again comparatively blessed. He sometimes ventured to name her openly in his poems,—as in the little Madrigal,

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Cantava in riva al fiume
Tirse di LEONORA,
E rispondean le selve, e l'onde, *onora*.

Sometimes he disguised her name as l'Aurora, l'Aura, Onor, le onora,^[129]

Dell' Onor simulacro e'l nome vostro.

To these the preceding Madrigal is a sort of *key*; or the better to conceal the true object of his adoration, he carried his apparent homage, and often his poetical gallantry, to the feet of other fair ladies. Lucretia d'Este, the elder sister of Leonora; Tarquinia Molza, a beauty and a poetess; and Lucretia Bendidio, another most accomplished woman, who numbered all the poets and literati of Ferrara in her train, frequently inspired him.

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The mention of Lucretia Bendidio reminds me of an incident in Tasso's early life, which, besides being characteristic of his times and genius, is extremely *apropos* to my present purpose and subject. In the days of his first enthusiasm for Lucretia, when he and Guarini were rivals for her favour, he undertook to maintain, publicly, fifty *theses*, or difficult questions, in the "Science of Love." These "Conclusion! amorosi" may be found in the third volume of the great folio edition of his works; and some of them, it must be confessed, afforded matter for much amusing and edifying discussion; for instance,—"*Amore esser più nell' amata che nell' amante*," "that love exists rather in the person beloved than in the lover," which seems to involve a nice distinction in metaphysics; and "*Nessuna amata essere, o poter essere ingrata*,"—"that no woman truly beloved, is or can be ungrateful," which involves a mystery—and a truth. And the 48th, "*Se più si patisca, o non ricevendo alcun premio, o ricevendo minor del desiderio*,"—"whether in love, it be harder to receive no recompense whatever, or less than we desire,"—a question so difficult to settle, and so depending on individual feeling, that it should have been put to the vote. Others prove, that whatever was the practice in those days, the received and philosophical theory of love was sublime enough; for instance, the 14th, "That the more love is regulated by reason, the more noble it is in its nature." (Agreed to, with exceptions, of which Tasso himself might furnish the most prominent.) That "compassion in our sex is never a sign of reciprocal affection, but on the contrary." (True, generally.) The 34th, "That the respect of the lover for her he loves increases the value and delight of every favour she grants him." (I think this must have passed undisputed, or by acclamation.)

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The 38th of these curious propositions, "*L'uomo in sua natura amar più intentamente e stabilmente che la donna*,"—that "men by nature love more intensely and more permanently than women," was opposed by Signora Orsolina Cavaletta, a woman of singular accomplishments, and who displayed, in defence of her sex, so much wit and talent, such various learning, ingenuity, and eloquence, that the young disputant, perhaps placed in a dilemma between his honour and his gallantry, came very hardly off. This singular exhibition continued for three days, and was conducted with infinite solemnity, in presence of the Court and the Princesses; all the nobility and even the superior clergy of Ferrara crowded to witness it; and I doubt whether any lecture at the British Institution, on mathematics, or electricity, or geology, was ever listened to by our fair bas-bleus with half as much interest as Tasso's "Fifty Theses on Love" excited in Ferrara.

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Several years after his first introduction to Leonora d'Este, and after some of the most impassioned and least ambiguous of his verses were written, the Court of Ferrara was embellished by the arrival of two of the most beautiful women in all Italy,—Leonora di Sanvitali, Countess of Scandiano, then a youthful bride, and her not less lovely mother-in-law, Barbara, Countess of Sala. The Countess of Scandiano is the *other* LEONORA who has puzzled all the biographers, from the open gallantry and avowed adoration with which Tasso has celebrated her; but in strains,—O how different from the sentiment, the veneration, the tenderness, and the mystery which breathe through his verses to Leonora d'Este! A third Leonora was said to exist in the person of the Countess's favourite attendant: but this is untrue. The name of Leonora's waiting-maid was Laura. Tasso has addressed several little poems to her; and there can be no doubt that she occasionally served as a blind to his real attachment for her mistress. The Countess of Scandiano's attendant was the fair Olympia, to whom is addressed that exquisitely graceful Canzone,

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O con le Grazie elette, e con gli amori.

The Duchess of Ferrara's maid, the beautiful Livia d'Arco, and even her dwarf, are also immortalised in Tasso's verses, who poured forth his courtly gallantry with an exhaustless and splendid prodigality, fitting their praises to his lyre, as if it had never resounded to higher themes.

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At a court festival given by the Duke Alphonso, in honour of his beautiful and illustrious visitors, the Countess of Sala appeared with her fine hair wreathed round her head in the form of a coronet, which with her grand style of beauty and majestic deportment, gave her the air of a Juno. The young Countess of Scandiano, on the other hand, enchanted by her Hebe-like graces, her smiles, and the unequalled beauty of a pouting underlip;—nothing was talked of at Ferrara but these braided tresses and this lovely lip; the poets and the young cavaliers were divided into parties on the occasion. Tasso has celebrated both with the same voluptuous elegance of style in which he described his Armida. To the Countess of Scandiano he wrote,

Quel labbro, che le rose han colorito
Molle si sporge, e tumidetto in fuore, &c.

To the Countess of Sala,

Barbara! meraviglia de' tempi nostri.

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But the Countess of Scandiano was more especially the object of his public adoration. It was a poetical passion, openly professed; and flattering, as it appears, both to the lady and to her husband, without in any degree implicating either her discretion or that of Tasso. Compare his verses to this young Countess—this *peregrina Fenice*,^[130] as he fancifully styles her, who comes shining forth, not *to be consumed*, but *to consume*,—to the profound tenderness, the intense yet mournful feeling of some of the poems composed for the Princess d'Este, about the same time; when he must have daily contrasted the rich bloom, the smiling eyes, and sparkling graces of the youthful Countess, with the fading or faded beauty, the languid form, and pale cheek of his long-loved Leonora. See particularly the Sonnet

Tre gran Donne vid' io, &c.

"Three illustrious ladies did I behold,—I sung them all—*one only* I loved," &c. And another equally beautiful and significant,

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Perchè 'n giovenil volto amor mi mostri
Talor, Donna *Real*, rose e ligustri
Oblío non pone in me, de' miei trilustri
Affanni, o de miei spesi indarno inchiostri.

E 'l cor, che s' invaghi degli onor vostri
Da prima, e vostro fu poscia più lustri
Reserba, amo in sè forme più illustri
Che perle e gemme, e bei coralli ed ostri.

Queste egli in suono di sospir sì chiari
Farebbe udir, che d' amorosa face
Accenderebbe i più gelati cori.

Ma oltre suo costume è fatto avaro
De' vostri pregi, suoi dolci tesori,
Che in se medesimo gli vagheggia e *tace!*

TRANSLATION.

"Albeit in younger faces Love at times
May show me where a fresher rose is set,
Yet, *Royal* Lady, can I not forget
My fifteen years of pain and useless rhymes.
This heart, so touch'd by all thy beauty bright,
After so many years is still thine own,
And still retaineth forms more exquisite
Than pearls, or purple gems, or coral stone.
All this my heart in soft sighs would make known,
And thus with fire the coldest bosom fill,
But that, unlike itself, that heart hath grown
So covetous of thy sweet charms, and thee,
(Its secret treasures,) that it aye doth flee
Inwards, and dwells upon them, and is still."^[131]

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Lastly, that most perfect Sonnet, so well known and so celebrated, that I should not insert it here, but that I am enabled to give, for the first time, a translation equally faithful to the sentiment and the poetry of the original.

Negli anni acerbi tuoi, purpurea rosa
Sembravi tu, ch' ai rai tepidi, all' ora
Non apre 'l sen, ma nel suo verde ancora
Verginella s' asconde, e vergognosa.

O più tosto parei (che mortal cosa,
Non s' assomiglia a te) celeste Aurora,
Che le campagne imperla, e i monti indora,
Lucida in ciel sereno e rugiadosa.

Or la men verde età nulla a te toglie;
Ne te, benche negletta, in manto adorno
Giovinetta beltà vince, o pareggia.

Così più vago è 'l fior, poiché le foglie
Spiega odorate: e 'l sol nel mezzo giorno
Viè-più, che nel mattin, luce e fiammeggia.

TRANSLATION.

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"Thou, in thy unripe years, wast like the rose,
Which shrinketh from the summer dawn, afraid,
And with her green veil, like a bashful maid,
Hideth her bosom sweet, and scarcely blows:
Or rather,—(for what shape ever arose
From the dull earth like thee,) thou didst appear
Heavenly Aurora, who, when skies are clear,
Her dewy pearls o'er all the country sows.
Time stealeth nought: thy rare and careless grace
Surpasseth still the youthful bride when neatest,—
Her wealth of dress, her budding blooming face,
So is the full-blown rose for age the sweetest,
So doth the mid-day sun outshine the morn,
With rays more beautiful and brighter born!"^[132]

Yet all this was too little. His minor lyrics, the unlaboured and spontaneous effusions of leisure, of fancy, of sentiment, would have been glory enough for any other poet, and fame enough for any other woman: but Tasso had founded his hopes of immortality on his great poem, *The Jerusalem Delivered*; and it was imperfect in his eyes unless Leonora were shined in it. To convert the pale, gentle, elegant invalid into a heroine, seemed impossible: she was no model for his lovely amazon, Clorinda; nor his exquisite sorceress, Armida; nor his love-sick Erminia: for her, therefore, and to her honour, and to the eternal memory of his love for her, he composed the episode in the second Canto, where we have her portrait at full length as Sophronia.

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Vergine era fra lor, di già matura
Verginità, d'alta pensieri e regi,
D'alta Beltà; ma sua beltà non cura,
O tanto sol quant' onestà sen fregi;
E 'l suo pregio maggior che tra le mura
D'angusta casa, asconde i suoi gran pregi:
E da' vagheggiatori ella s'invola,
Alle lodi, agli sguardi, inculta e sola.

Non sai ben dir s'adorno, o se negletta,
Se caso od arte, il bel volto compose,
Di natura, d'amor, di cieli amici,
Le negligenze sue sono artifici.

Mirata da ciascun, passa, e non mira
L'altera donna!

TRANSLATION.

Among them dwelt a noble maid, matured
In loveliness, of thoughts serene and high,
And loftiest beauty;—beauty which herself
Esteem'd not more than modesty might own.
Within an humble dwelling did she hide
Her peerless charms, and shunning lovers' eyes,
From flattering words and glances, lived retired.

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Whether 'tis curious care, or sweet neglect,
Or chance, or art, that have array'd her thus,
One scarce can tell: for each unstudied grace
Has been the work of Nature, heaven, and love.

And thus admired by all, unheeding all,
Forth steps the noble maid.

It is impossible to mistake, in this finished and exquisite portrait, the matured beauty, the negligent attire, and love of solitude which characterised Leonora: the resemblance was so perfect, as to be universally recognised and acknowledged. But is it not, as M. Ginguené remarks, equally certain that Tasso has portrayed himself as Olindo?

Ei che modesto è, com' essa è bella,
Brama, assai, poco spera, nulla chiede!

He, full of modesty and truth,
Loved much, hoped little, and desired nought!

Has he not in the verse

Ed o mia morte avventurosa appiena,

breathed forth all the smothered passion of his soul?—

Ed o mia morte avventurosa appiena!
Oh fortunati miei dolci martiri!
S'impetrerò che giunto seno a seno
L'anima mia nella tuo bocca io spiri,
E venendo tu meco a un tempo meno
In me fuor mandi gli ultimi sospiri!

And O! how happy were my death! how blest
These tortures,—could I but the meed obtain,
That breast to breast, and lip to lip, our souls
Might flee together, and our latest sighs
Mingle in death.

This episode is critically a defect in the poem: it seems to stand alone, unconnected in any way with the main action; he acknowledged this; but he absolutely, and obstinately, refused to alter it, or strike it out. He, who was in general amenable to criticism, even to a degree of weakness, willed that it should stand an everlasting monument of his tenderness, and of the virtues and the charms of her who inspired it:—and thus it has been.

A cruel, and, as I think, a most unjust imputation rests on the memory of the Princess Leonora. She is accused of cold-heartedness, in suffering Tasso to remain so long imprisoned, without interceding in his favour, or even vouchsafing any reply to his affecting supplications for release, and for her mediation in his behalf. The excuse alledged by those who would fain excuse her,—"That she feared to compromise herself by any interference," is ten times worse than the accusation itself. But though there exists, I suppose, no *written* proof that Leonora pleaded the cause of Tasso, or sought to mitigate his sufferings; neither is there any proof of the contrary. We know little, or rather nothing, of the private intrigues of Alphonso's palace: we have no "mémoires secrètes" of that day; no diaries kept by prying courtiers, to enlighten us on what passed in the recesses of the royal apartments: and upon mere negative presumption, shall we brand the character of a woman, who appears on every other occasion so blameless, so tender-hearted, and beneficent, with the imputation of such barbarous selfishness? for the honour of our sex, and human nature, I must believe it impossible.

In no other instance was the homage which Tasso loved to pay to high-born beauty repaid with ingratitude; all his life he seems to have been an object of affectionate interest to women. They, in his misery, stood not aloof, but ministered to him the oil and balm, which soothed his vexed and distempered spirit. The Countesses of Sala and Scandiano never forgot him. Lucretia Bendidio, who had married into the Marchiavelli family, sent him in his captivity all the consolation she could bestow, or he receive. The Duchess of Urbino (Lucretia d'Este,) was munificently kind to him. The young Princess of Mantua, she for whom he wrote his "Torrismo," loaded him with courtesy and proofs of her regard. He was ill at the Court of Mantua, after his release from Ferrara; and her exertions to procure him a copy of Euripides, which he wished to consult, (an anecdote cited somewhere, as a proof of the rarity of the book at that time,) is also a proof of the interest and attention with which she regarded him. It happened when he was at the Court of the Duke of Urbino, that he had to undergo a surgical operation; and the sister of the Duke, the young and beautiful Lavinia di Rovera, prepared the bandages, and applied them with her own fair and princely hands;—a little instance of affectionate interest, which Tasso has himself commemorated. If then we do not find Leonora publicly appearing as the benefactress of Tasso, and using her influence over her brother in his behalf, is it not a presumption that she was implicated in his punishment? What comfort or kindness she could have granted, must, under such circumstances, have been bestowed with infinite precaution; and, from gratitude and discretion, as carefully concealed. We know, that after the first year of his confinement, Tasso was removed to a less gloomy prison; and we know that Leonora died a few weeks afterwards; but what share she might have had in procuring this mitigation of his suffering, we do not know; nor how far the fate of Tasso might have affected her so as to hasten her own death. If we are to argue upon probabilities, without any preponderating proof, in the name of womanhood and charity, let it be on the side of indulgence; let us not believe Leonora

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guilty, but upon such authority as never has been,—and I trust never can be produced.

About two years after the completion of the *Jerusalem Delivered*, and four years after the first representation of the *Aminta*;—when all Europe rung with the poet's fame, Tasso fled from the Court of Ferrara, in a fit of distraction. His frenzy was caused partly by religious horrors and scruples; partly by the petty but accumulated injuries which malignity and tyranny had heaped upon him; partly by a long-indulged and hopeless passion; and with these, other moral and physical causes combined. He fled, to hide himself and his sorrows in the arms of his sister Cornelia. The brother and sister had not met since their childish years; and Tasso, wild with misery, forlorn, and penniless, knew not what reception he was to meet with. When arrived within a league of his birthplace, Sorrento,^[133] he changed clothes with a shepherd, and in this disguise appeared before his sister, as one sent with tidings of her brother's misfortunes. The recital, we may believe, was not coldly given. Cornelia, who appears to have inherited with the personal beauty, the sensibility and strong domestic affections of her mother, Portia,^[134] was so violently agitated by the eloquence of the feigned messenger, that she fainted away; and Tasso was obliged to hasten the denouement by discovering himself. In the same moment he was clasped in her affectionate arms, and bathed with her tears. How often, when I have stood on my balcony at Naples, have I looked towards the white buildings of Sorrento, glittering afar upon the distant promontory, and thought upon this scene! and felt, how that which is already surpassingly beautiful to the eye, may be hallowed to the imagination by such remembrances as these!

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Tasso resided with his sister for three years, the object of her unwearied and tender attention. It was on his return to Ferrara, (recalled, as Manso says, by the tenor of Leonora's letters^[135]) that he was imprisoned as a lunatic at St. Anne's. They show to travellers the cell in which he was confined. Over the entrance of the gallery leading to it, is written up in large letters, "Ingresso alla Prigione di Torquato Tasso," as if to blazon, in the eye of the stranger, what is at once the renown and disgrace of that fallen city. The cell itself is small, dark and low. The abhorred grate,

Marring the sun-beams with its hideous shade,

is a semicircular window, strongly cross-barred with iron; it looks into a court-yard, so built up, if I remember rightly, that the noon-day sun could scarce reach it. Even without the hallowed associations connected with the spot, it would have chilled and saddened me. With them, the very air had a suffocating weight; and the cold dark walls, and low-bowed roof, struck a shivering awe through the blood. Upon the plaster outside the grated window, I observed several names written in pencil; among the rest, those of Byron and Rogers. I must observe here, that the "Lament of Tasso" is, in fact, a cento taken from Tasso's minor poems. Almost every sentiment there expressed, may be found in the Italian; but the soul of the poet has been transfused with such a glowing impulse into its new mould, it never seems to have been adapted to another; the precious metal is the same, only the impress is different, and it has been stamped by a kindred and a master spirit. Lord Byron says,

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Yes, Leonora! it shall be our fate
To be entwined for ever; but too late!

Tasso had said, that his name and that of Leonora should be united and soar to fame together.

"Ella à miei versi, ed io
Circondava al suo nome altere piume,
E l'un per l'altro andò volando a prova;"

—and a long list of corresponding passages and sentiments might easily be pointed out.

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The inscription on the door of Tasso's cell, *lies*, I believe, like many other inscriptions. Tasso was *not* confined in this cell for seven years; but here it was that he addressed that affecting Canzone to Leonora and her sister Lucrezia, which begins "Figlie di Renata,"—"daughters of Renée!" Thus in the very commencement, by this delicate and tender apostrophe, bespeaking their compassion, by awakening the remembrance of their mother, like him so long a wretched prisoner. He reminds them of the years he spent at their side—"their noble servant and their dear companion,"

Gli anni miei tra voi spese,—
Qual son,—qual fui,—che chiedo—ove mi trovo!^[136]

He was, after the first year, removed to a larger cell, with better accommodations. Here he made a collection of his smaller poems lately written, and dedicated them to the two Princesses. But Leonora was no longer in a state to be charmed by the verses, or flattered or touched by the admiring devotion of her lover,—her poet,—her faithful servant: she was dying. A slow and cureless disease preyed on her delicate frame, and she expired in the second year of Tasso's imprisonment. When the news of her danger was brought to him, he requested his friend Pignarola to kiss her hand in his name, and ask her whether there was any thing which, in his sad state, he could do for her ease or pleasure? We do not know how this tender message was received or answered; but it was too late. Leonora died in February 1581, after lingering from the November previous.

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Thus perished, of a premature decay, the woman who had been for seventeen years the idol of a poet's imagination—the worship of a poet's heart; she who was not unworthy of being enshrined in the rich tracery-work of sweet thoughts and bright fancies she had herself suggested. The love of Tasso for the Princess Leonora might have appeared, in his own time, something like the "desire of the night-moth for the star;" but what is it *now*? what was it *then* in the eyes of her whom he adored? How far was it permitted, encouraged, repaid in secret? This we cannot know; and perhaps had we lived at the time,—in the very Court, and looked daily into her own soft eyes, practised to conceal,—we had been no wiser. Yet one more observation.

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When Leonora died, all the poets of Ferrara pressed forward with the usual tribute of elegy and eulogium; but the voice of Tasso was not heard among the rest. He alone flung no garland on the bier of her, whose living brow he had wreathed with the brightest flowers of song. This is adduced by Serassi as a proof that he had never loved her. Ginguené himself can only account for it, by the presumption that he was piqued by that coldness and neglect, which I have shown was merely supposititious. Strange reasoning! as if Tasso, while his heart bled over his loss, in his solitary cell, could have deigned to join this crowd of courtly mourners! as if, under such circumstances, in such a moment, the greatness of his grief could have burst forth in any terms that must not have exposed himself to fresh rigours, and the fame, at least the discretion, of her he had loved, to suspicion! No! nothing remained to him but silence;—and he was silent.

FOOTNOTES:

[120] See the Rinaldo, c. 8.

[121] ———From my very birth
My soul was drunk with love, &c.
LAMENT OF TASSO.

[122] Rose, che l' arte invidiosa mira. &c.

[123] Alteramente umile
Te chiudi ne' tuoi cari alti soggiorni.

[124] The daughter of Louis XII. She was closely imprisoned during twelve years, on suspicion of favouring the early reformers.

[125] Ganymede.

[126] Sonnet 37.

[127] Sonnet 29.

[128] I am told the original idea is in Plato; prettier, however, than either, was the speech of a modern lover, whose mistress was gazing pensively on a star: "Ne la regardez pas tant, chère amie!—je ne puis pas te la donner!"

[129] The Canzono which is, I believe, esteemed the finest of those addressed to Leonora,

Mentre ch' a venerar muovon le gente,
concludes with this play upon her name—

Costei LE ONORA col bel nome sante.

She does them HONOUR by her sacred name.

[130] "Foreign Phoenix."

[131] Translated by a friend.

[132] Translated by a friend.

[133] Near Naples: thus, in his pathetic Canzone on himself,—

Sassel la gloriosa alma Sirena
Appresso il cui sepolcro, ebbi la cuna!

[134] The wife of Bernardo Tasso. See an account of her in Black's Life of Tasso.

[135] Manso, Vita di T. Tasso.

[136] Part of this Canzone has been elegantly translated by Mr. Wiffen in his Life of Tasso, p. 83.

CHAPTER XIX.

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MILTON AND LEONORA BARONI.

The Marquis Manso of Naples, who in his early youth had entertained Tasso in his palace, had cherished and honoured him when that great but unhappy man was wandering, brain-struck with

misery, from one court to another,—was, in his old age, the host and admirer of Milton; thus, by a singular good fortune, allying his name to two of the most illustrious of earth's diviner sons: while theirs, linked together by the recollection of this common friend, follow each other in our memory by a natural transition. We can think of them as pressing, though at an interval of many years, the same friendly hand, and gracing the same hospitable board with "colloquy sublime." Tasso, from the romance of his story, and his personal character, is the most interesting of the two; yet Milton, besides standing highest in the scale of moral dignity, sits nearest to our hearts as an Englishman, whose genius, speaking through our native accents, strikes upon our sense,

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Like the large utterance of the early gods.

We rise from reading Johnson's Biography of Milton, either with the most painful and indignant feeling of the malignity of the critic,^[137] or with an impression of Milton's character, as false as it is odious. Of moral inconsistency and weakness, blended with splendid genius, we have proofs lamentable and numerous enough: to be obliged to regard the mighty father of English verse,—him "who rode sublime upon the seraph wings of ecstasy,"—him, whose harmonious soul was tuned to the music of the spheres, though when struck in evil times, and by an adverse hand, it sent forth a crash of discord,—him, who has left us the most exquisite pictures of tenderness and beauty—to think of such a being as a petty domestic tyrant, a coarse-minded fanatic, stern and unfeeling in all the relations of life, were enough to confound all our ideas of moral fitness. When we figure to ourselves the author of *Rasselas* trampling over the ashes of Milton, lending his mighty powers to degrade the majestic, to disfigure the beautiful, and to darken the glorious, it is with the same feeling of concentrated disgust with which we recall the violation of the poet's grave, some years ago, when vulgar savages defaced and carried off his sacred and venerable remains piece-meal.^[138] Let us for a moment imagine our Milton descending to earth to assert his injured fame, and confronted with his great biographer—

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Look here upon this picture, and on this—

The one, like his own Adam, with fair large front and hyacinthine locks, serene and blooming as his own Eden; in all the dignified graces which temperance and self-conquest lend to youth,^[139] in all the purity of his stainless mind, radiant like another Moses, with the reflected glories of the Empyreum,—and then look upon the other!—But it is an awful thing for little people, to meddle with great and sacred names; and so leaving the Hippopotamus of literature in his den—proceed we.

It relieves the heart from an oppressive contradiction to behold Milton, such as he is represented by his other biographers, and such as undoubtedly he really was. It is well known, that in his youth, and even at a late age, he had an uncommonly fine person, almost to effeminacy; and was as gracefully endowed in form and manners, as he was highly and holily gifted in mind. His natural mildness, cheerfulness, and courtesy, are commemorated by all who knew him, or lived near his time.^[140] He whom Johnson accuses of a "Turkish contempt of females, as inferior beings," and whom he represents in a light so ungentle and gloomy, that we cannot imagine him under the influence of beauty, was early touched by the softest passions, and during his whole life peculiarly sensible to the charm of female society: witness his successive marriages, and his friendship and intercourse with Lady Margaret Ley, and the all-accomplished Countess of Ranelagh, who supplied to him, as he says, the place of every friend:^[141]—witness, too, a thousand most lovely and glorious passages scattered through his works, which women may quote with triumph, as proofs that we had no small influence over the imagination of our great epic poet. What but the most reverential and lofty feeling of the graces and virtues proper to our sex, could have embodied such an exquisite vision as the Lady in *Comus*? or created his delightful Eve? on whom, "as on a queen, a pomp of winning graces waited still."

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All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded; wisdom, in discourse with her,
Loses discountenanc'd, and like folly shows;
Authority and reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally; and to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat,
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard angelic plac'd.

And this is the being whom a lady-author calls a "great overgrown baby, with nothing to recommend her but her submission, and her fine hair!"^[142]—two things, be it observed, among the most graceful of our feminine attributes, mental and exterior. The poet who conceived and wrote this description, most assuredly had not a "Turkish contempt" for the female character.

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Milton was in love, as he tells us himself, at nineteen; but the object cannot even be guessed at. He has celebrated this boyish passion very beautifully in one of his Latin elegies. One of the passages in this poem, in which he compares the effect produced on him by the first momentary view of his mistress, followed by her immediate absence to the Theban *Cleides*,^[143] swallowed

up by the abyss which opens beneath him, and gazing back upon the parting light of day, is admired for its classic sublimity and appropriate beauty.

There is a tradition mentioned by all his biographers, that while Milton was a student at Cambridge, an Italian lady of rank, who was travelling in England, found him sleeping one day under the shade of a tree, and, struck with his beauty, wrote with her pencil on a slip of paper, the pretty madrigal of Guarini, which Menage translated for Madame de Sevigné, "Occhi, stelle mortali," and leaving it in his hand, pursued her journey. This fair unknown is said to have been the cause of Milton's travels into Italy; but the story rests on no authority: and it is clear, that the "foreign fair" to whom the Sonnets are addressed, was neither imaginary nor unknown. During his stay at Rome, he was received with particular distinction by the Cardinal Barberini, the nephew of the reigning Pope, and at his palace had frequent opportunities of hearing Leonora Baroni, the finest singer in Italy. She was the daughter of Adriana of Mantua, surnamed, for her beauty, La Bella Adriana, and the best singer and player on the lute of her time. Leonora inherited her mother's extraordinary talent for music, and conquered all hearts by the inexpressible charm of her voice and style. She was also a poetess, frequently composing the words of her own songs. Though not a regular beauty, she had brilliant eyes, and a captivating countenance and manner. Count Fulvio Testi, in a Sonnet addressed to her, celebrates the union of so many charms:

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Tra il concento e 'l fulgor, dubbio è se sia
L'udir più dolce, o il rimirar più caro.
Deh fammi cieco, o fammi sordo, amore!

M. Maugars, himself a musician, who saw and heard Leonora at Rome, praises her talents generally, and adds, that she was no coquette; that she sang with confidence, but with modesty; that there was nothing in her manners that could be censured; that the effect she produced on those who heard her, was owing, not only to the wonderful rapidity and delicacy of her execution, but to the care with which she gave the exact sense and proper expression of the words she sang. He tells us, that on one occasion, she *favoured* him by singing with her mother and her sister, each accompanying herself on a different instrument (in those days pianos were not, and Leonora's favourite instrument was the Theorbo, on which she excelled). This little concert so enraptured our musician, that, to use his own words, he forgot his mortality, "et crut être déjà parmi les anges, jouissant des contentemens des bienheureux."

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It is no wonder that the charms and talents which exalted this prosaic Frenchman almost into a poet, should turn the heads of poets themselves. The verses addressed to Leonora were collected into a volume, and published under the title of "Applausi poetici alle glorie della Signora Leonora Baroni."—"Poetical eulogies to the glory of Signora Leonora Baroni." A similar homage had been paid to her mother, Adriana, who reckoned Tasso among her panegyrists. This may seem too high a distinction for a species of talent, which, however admirable, can leave behind no durable monument, and therefore can claim no interest with posterity. Yet is it just, that those whom heaven has enriched with the gift of melody, and who have cultivated that delicious faculty to its height, until with angel-skill they can suspend the dominion of pain in aching hearts,^[144]—that such should ravish with delight a whole generation, and then perish from the earth, they and their memory, with the pleasure they bestowed, and gratitude be voiceless and tuneless in their praise? The gift of song is fleeting as that of beauty; but while the painter fixes on his canvas

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The vermeil-tinctur'd lip,
Love-darting eyes, and tresses like the morn,

what shall immortalise the tones which "turned sense to soul?" what but poetry, which, while it preserves the memory of such excellence, gives back to the fancy some reflection of the delight we have felt, when the full tide of a divine voice is poured forth to the sense, like wine from an enchanted cup, making us thrill "with music's pulse in every artery." Leonora Baroni had her poets, and her name, linked with that of Milton, shall never die.

It is a curious circumstance, and one but little consonant with the popular idea of Milton's austerity, that the object of his poetical homage, and even of his serious admiration, was an Italian singer; but it must be remembered, that Milton, the son of an accomplished musician,^[145] was, by nature and education, peculiarly susceptible to the power of sweet sounds. Next to poetry, music was with him a passion; and the profession of a singer in those days, when the art was in its second infancy, was more highly estimated, in proportion as excellence was more rare and less publicly exhibited. I cannot find that either Leonora Baroni, or her mother Adriana, ever appeared on a stage; yet their celebrity had spread from one end of Italy to the other. Milton joined the crowd of Leonora's votaries at Rome, and has expressed his enthusiastic admiration, not only in verse but in prose.^[146] He addressed her in Latin and Italian, the languages she understood, and which he had perfectly at command. In one of his Latin poems, "To Leonora, singing at Rome," the allusion to Leonora d'Este,

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Another Leonora once inspired
Tasso, by hopeless love to phrenzy fired, &c.

is as happy as it is beautiful, and shows the belief which then prevailed of the real cause of Tasso's delirium.

Two of Milton's Italian sonnets are very beautiful, and have been translated by Cowper with singular felicity. All his biographers agree that Leonora Baroni is the subject of both; the first, addressed to Carlo Diodati, describes the lady, whose dark and foreign charms are opposed to those of the *blonde* beauties he had admired in his youth.

SONNET.

[Pg 343]

Diodati! e te 'l diro con maraviglia, &c.

Charles,—and I say it wondering,—thou must know
That I, who once assumed a scornful air,
And scoffed at Love, am fallen into his snare;
(Full many an upright man has fallen so.)
Yet think me not thus dazzled by the flow
Of golden locks, or damask rose; more rare
The heartfelt beauties of my foreign fair!
A mien majestic, with dark brows, that show
The tranquil lustre of a lofty mind,—
Words exquisite, of idioms more than one;
And song, whose fascinating power might bind,
And from her sphere draw down the lab'ring moon;
With such fire-darting eyes, that should I fill
Mine ears with wax, she would enchant me still!

In this translation, though elegant and faithful, the lines

A mien majestic, with dark brows, that show
The tranquil lustre of a lofty mind,

have much diluted the energy of Milton's

Portamenti alti onesti, e nelle ciglia
Quel sereno fulgor d'amabil nero.

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In the other Sonnet, addressed to Leonora, he gives, with all the simplicity of conscious worth, this lofty description of himself, and of his claims to her preference.

SONNET.

Giovane, piano, e semplicetto amante, &c.

Enamour'd, artless, young, on foreign ground,
Uncertain whither from myself to fly,
To thee, dear lady, with an humble sigh,
Let me devote my heart, which I have found,
By certain proofs not few, intrepid, sound,
Good, and addicted to conceptions high:
When tempests shake the world, and fire the sky,
It rests in adamant, self-wrapt around,
As safe from envy and from outrage rude,
From hopes and fears that vulgar minds abuse,
As fond of genius and fixt solitude,
Of the resounding lyre and every muse.
Weak you will find it in one only part,
Now pierc'd by Love's immedicable dart.

Milton was three times married. The relations of his first wife, (Mary Powell,) who were violent Royalists, and ashamed or afraid of their connection with a republican, persuaded her to leave him. She absolutely forsook her husband for nearly three years, and resided with her family at Oxford, when that city was the head-quarters of the King's party. "I have so much charity for her," says Aubrey, "that she might not wrong his bed; but what man (especially contemplative,) would like to have a young wife environed and stormed by the sons of Mars, and those of the ennemie partie?"

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Milton, though a suspicion of the nature hinted at by Aubrey never rose in his mind, was justly incensed at this dereliction. He was on the point of divorcing this contumacious bride, and had already made choice of another^[147] to succeed her, when she threw herself, impromptu, at his feet and implored his forgiveness. He forgave her; and when the republican party triumphed, the family who had so cruelly wronged him found a refuge in his house. This woman embittered his life for fourteen or fifteen years.

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A remembrance of the reconciliation with his wife, and of his own feelings on that occasion, are said to have suggested to Milton's mind the beautiful scene between Adam and Eve, in the tenth

She ended weeping; and her lowly plight,
Immoveable, till peace obtained for faults
Acknowledged and deplored, in Adam wrought
Commiseration; soon his heart relented
Tow'rds her, his life so late and sole delight,
Now at his feet submissive in distress,
Creature so fair, his reconcilment seeking;
As one disarmed, his anger all he lost, &c.

Milton's second and most beloved wife (Catherine Woodcock) died in child-bed, within a year after their marriage. He honoured her memory with what Johnson (out upon him!) calls a *poor* sonnet; it is the one beginning [Pg 347]

Methought I saw my late espoused saint
Brought to me, like Alcestis from the grave;

which, in its solemn and tender strain of feeling and modulated harmony, reminds us of Dante. He never ceased to lament her, and to cherish her memory with a fond regret:—she must have been full in his heart and mind when he wrote those touching lines in the Paradise Lost—

How can I live without thee? how forego
Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined,
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
Should God create another Eve, and I
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart!

After her death,—blind, disconsolate, and helpless—he was abandoned to petty wrongs and domestic discord; and suffered from the disobedience and unkindness of his two elder daughters, like another Lear.^[148] His youngest daughter, Deborah, was the only one who acted as his amanuensis, and she always spoke of him with extreme affection:—on being suddenly shown his picture, twenty years after his death, she burst into tears.^[149] [Pg 348]

These three daughters were grown up, and the youngest about fifteen, when Milton married his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull. She was a gentle, kind-hearted woman,^[150] without pretensions of any kind, who watched over his declining years with affectionate care. One biographer has not scrupled to assert, that to her,—or rather to her tender reverence for his studious habits, and to the peace and comfort she brought to his heart and home,—we owe the Paradise Lost: if true, what a debt immense of endless gratitude is due to the memory of this unobtrusive and amiable woman! [Pg 349]

FOOTNOTES:

[137] What Dr. Johnson *wrote* is known;—he was accustomed to *say* that the admiration expressed for Milton was all *cant*.

[138] I have before me the pamphlet, entitled "A Narrative of the disinterment of Milton's coffin, on Wednesday the 4th of August, 1790, and of the treatment of the Corpse during that and the following day." The circumstances are too revolting to be dwelt upon.

[139] Si les Anges, (said Madame de Staël) n'ont pas été représentés sous les traits de femme, c'est parceque l'union de la force avec la pureté, est plus belle et plus celeste encore que la modestie même la plus parfaite dans un être faible.

[140] See his life by Dr. Symmons, Dr. Todd, Newton, Hayley, Aubrey, Richardson, Warton.

"She (his daughter Deborah) spoke of him with great tenderness; she said he was delightful company, the life of the conversation, and that on account of a flow of subject, and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility," &c.—RICHARDSON.

[141] She was Catherine Boyle, the daughter of the Great Earl of Cork, one of the most excellent and most distinguished women of that time.—See *Hayley's Life of Milton*.

[142] Miss Letitia Hawkins.

[143] Otherwise Amphiarus: his story is told by Ovid. Met. B. 9.

[144] As Milton felt when he wrote—

And ever against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs.

[145] Milton alludes to his father's talent for music:

Thyself
Art skilful to associate verse with airs
Harmonious, and to give the human voice
A thousand modulations.—
Such distribution of himself to us

Was Phoebus' choice; *thou* hast thy gift, and I
Mine also; and between us we receive,
Father and Son, the whole inspiring God!

AD PATREM.

- [146] There is extant a prose letter from Milton to Holstentius, the librarian of the Vatican, in which he accounts as one of his greatest pleasures at Rome, that of having known and heard Leonora.
- [147] A Miss Davies. "The father (says Hayley) seems to have been a convert to Milton's arguments; but the lady had scruples. She possessed (according to Philips) both wit and beauty. A novelist could hardly imagine circumstances more singularly distressing to sensibility than the situation of the poet, if, as we may reasonably conjecture, he was deeply enamoured of this lady; if her father was inclined to accept him as a son-in-law, and the object of his love had no inclination to reject his suit, but what arose from a dread of his being indissolubly mated to another."—*Life of Milton*, p. 90.
- [148] —I, dark in light, exposed
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,
Within doors or without, still as a fool
In power of others, never in my own, &c.
SAMSON AGONISTES.
- [149] Todd's *Life of Milton*—See also Milton's Will, which has been lately recovered, and published by Warton.
- [150] Aubrey's Letters.

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