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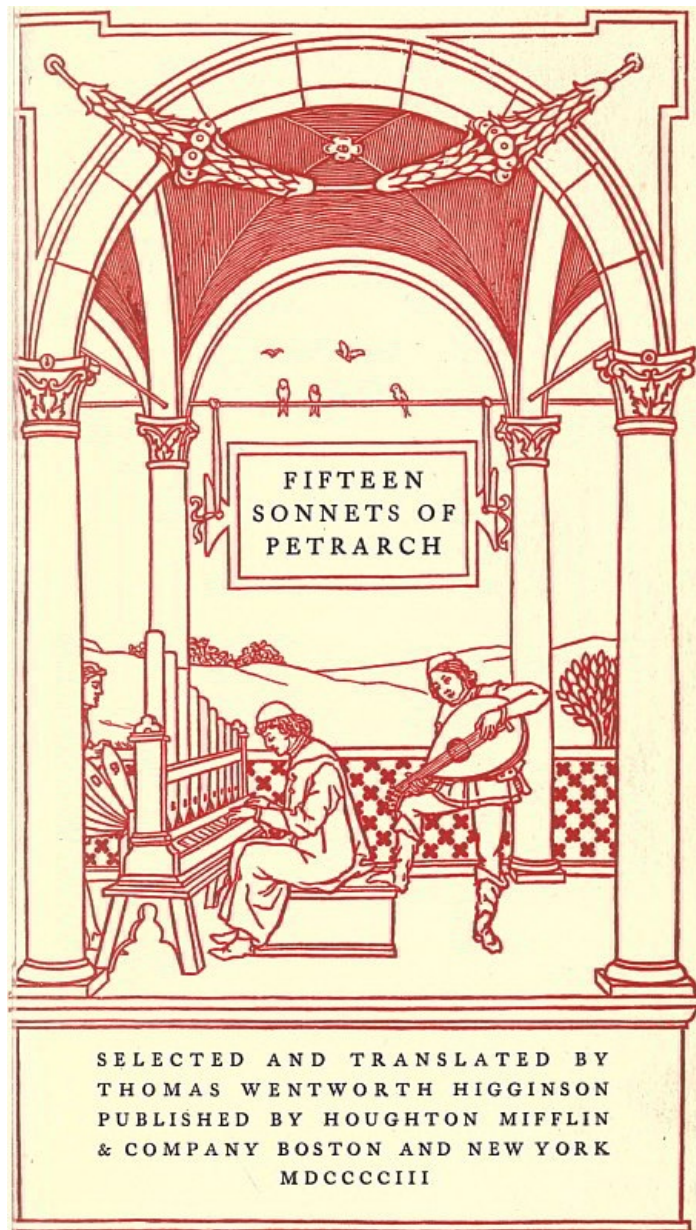
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIFTEEN SONNETS OF
PETRARCH ***

Transcriber's Note: Printer errors in the Italian sonnets are noted in the [Transcriber's Note](#) at the end of this file, along with a list of the corresponding sonnet numbers in *Il Canzoniere*.

INTRODUCTION **SONNETS**



FIFTEEN SONNETS OF PETRARCH

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED BY
THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON
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INTRODUCTION

NOTE

THIS [introduction](#) is based essentially upon a paper 'Sunshine and Petrarch' which originally included most of the sonnets in this volume. It was written at Newport, R.I., where the translator was then residing.

INTRODUCTION



EAR my summer home there is a little cove or landing by the bay, where nothing larger than a boat can ever anchor. I sit above it now, upon the steep bank, knee-deep in buttercups, and amid grass so lush and green that it seems to ripple and flow instead of waving. Below lies a tiny beach, strewn with a few bits of driftwood and some purple shells, and so sheltered by projecting walls that its wavelets splash but lightly. A little farther out the sea breaks more roughly over submerged rocks, and the waves lift themselves, before breaking, in an indescribable way, as if each gave a glimpse through a translucent window, beyond which all ocean's depths might be clearly seen, could one but hit the proper angle of vision. On the right side of my retreat a high wall limits the view, while close upon the left the crumbling parapet of Fort Greene stands out into the foreground, its verdant scarp so relieved against the blue water that each inward bound schooner seems to sail into a cave of grass. In the middle distance is a white lighthouse, and beyond lie the round tower of old Fort Louis, and the soft low walls of Conanicut.

Behind me an oriole chirrups in triumph amid the birch-trees which wave around the house of the haunted window; before me a kingfisher pauses and waits, and a darting blackbird shows the scarlet on his wings. Sloops and schooners constantly come and go, careening in the wind, their white sails taking, if remote enough, a vague blue mantle from the delicate air. Sailboats glide in the distance,—each a mere white wing of canvas,—or coming nearer, and glancing suddenly into the cove, are put as suddenly on the other tack, and almost in an instant seem far away. There is to-day such a live sparkle on the water, such a luminous freshness on the grass, that it seems, as is often the case in early June, as if all history were a dream, and the whole earth were but the creation of a summer's day.

If Petrarch still knows and feels the consummate beauty of these earthly things, it may seem to him some repayment for the sorrows of a lifetime that one reader, after all this lapse of years, should choose his sonnets to match this grass, these blossoms, and the soft lapse of these blue waves. Yet any longer or more continuous poem would be out of place to-day. I fancy that this narrow cove prescribes the proper limits of a sonnet; and when I count the lines of ripple within yonder projecting wall, there proves to be room for just fourteen. Nature meets our whims with such little fitnesses. The words which build these delicate structures of Petrarch's are as soft and fine and close-textured as the sands upon this tiny beach, and their monotone, if such it be, is the monotone of the neighboring ocean. Is it not possible, by bringing such a book into the open air, to separate it from the grimness of commentators, and bring it back to life and light and Italy? The beautiful earth is the same as when this poetry and passion were new; there is the same sunlight, the same blue water and green grass; yonder pleasure-boat might bear, for aught we know, the friends and lovers of five centuries ago; Petrarch and Laura might be there, with Boccaccio and Fiammetta as comrades, and with Chaucer as their stranger guest. It bears, at any rate, if I know its voyagers, eyes as lustrous, voices as sweet. With the world thus young, beauty eternal, fancy free, why should these delicious Italian pages exist but to be tortured into grammatical examples? Is there no reward to be imagined for a delightful book that can match Browning's fantastic burial of a tedious one? When it has sufficiently basked in sunshine, and been cooled in pure salt air, when it has bathed in heaped clover, and been scented, page by page, with melilot, cannot its beauty once more blossom, and its buried loves revive?

Emboldened by such influences, at least let me translate a sonnet ([Lieti fiori e felici](#)), and see if anything is left after the sweet Italian syllables are gone. Before this continent was discovered, before English literature existed, when Chaucer was a child these words were written. Yet they are to-day as fresh and perfect as these laburnum blossoms that droop above my head. And as the variable and uncertain air comes freighted with clover-scent from yonder field, so floats through these long centuries a breath of fragrance, the memory of Laura.

Goethe compared translators to carriers, who convey good wine to market, though it gets unaccountably watered by the way. The more one praises a poem, the more absurd becomes one's position, perhaps, in trying to translate it. If it is so admirable,—is the natural inquiry,—why not let it alone? It is a doubtful blessing to the human race, that the instinct of translation still prevails, stronger than reason; and after one

has once yielded to it, then each untranslated favorite is like the trees round a backwoodsman's clearing, each of which stands, a silent defiance, until he has cut it down. Let us try the axe again. This is to Laura singing ([Quando Amor](#)).

As I look across the bay, there is seen resting over all the hills, and even upon every distant sail, an enchanted veil of palest blue, that seems woven out of the very souls of happy days,—a bridal veil, with which the sunshine weds this soft landscape in summer. Such and so indescribable is the atmospheric film that hangs over these poems of Petrarch's; there is a delicate haze about the words, that vanishes when you touch them, and reappears as you recede. How it clings, for instance, round this sonnet ([Aura che quelle chiome](#))!

Consider also the pure and reverential tenderness of one like this ([Qual donna attende](#)). A companion sonnet, on the other hand ([O passi sparsi](#)), seems rather to be of the Shakespearean type; the successive phrases set sail, one by one, like a yacht squadron; each spreads its graceful wings and glides away. It is hard to handle this white canvas without soiling. Macgregor, in the only version of this sonnet which I have seen, abandons all attempt at rhyme; but to follow the strict order of the original in this respect is a part of the pleasant problem which one cannot bear to forgo. And there seems a kind of deity who presides over this union of languages, and who sometimes silently lays the words in order, after all one's poor attempts have failed.

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Yonder flies a kingfisher, and pauses, fluttering like a butterfly in the air, then dives toward a fish, and, failing, perches on the projecting wall. Doves from neighboring dove-cots alight on the parapet of the fort, fearless of the quiet cattle who find there a breezy pasture. These doves, in taking flight, do not rise from the ground at once, but, edging themselves closer to the brink, with a caution almost ludicrous in such airy things, thrust themselves upon the breeze with a shy little hop, and at the next moment are securely on the wing.

How the abundant sunlight inundates everything! The great clumps of grass and clover are imbedded in it to the roots; it flows in among their stalks, like water; the lilac-bushes bask in it eagerly; the topmost leaves of the birches are burnished. A vessel sails by with plash and roar, and all the white spray along her side is sparkling with sunlight. Yet there is sorrow in the world, and it reached Petrarch even before Laura died,—when it reached her. One exquisite sonnet ([I' vidi in terra](#)) shows this to have been true.

-xi-

These sonnets are in Petrarch's earlier manner; but the death of Laura brought a change. Look at yonder schooner coming down the bay straight toward us; she is hauled close to the wind, her jib is white in the sunlight, her larger sails are touched with the same snowy lustre, and all the swelling canvas is rounded into such lines of beauty as scarcely anything else in the world—hardly even the perfect outlines of the human form—can give. Now she comes up into the wind, and goes about with a strong flapping of her sails, smiting on the ear at a half-mile's distance; then she glides off on the other tack, showing the shadowed side of her sails, until she reaches the distant zone of haze. So change the sonnets after Laura's death, growing shadowy as they recede, until the very last ([Gli occhi di ch'io parlai](#)) seems to merge itself in the blue distance.

"And yet I live!" (Ed io pur vivo) What a pause is implied before these words with which the closing sestet of this sonnet begins! the drawing of a long breathy immeasurably long; like that vast interval of heart-beats which precedes Shakespeare's 'Since Cleopatra died.' I can think of no other passage in literature that has in it the same wide spaces of emotion. Another sonnet ([Soleasi nel mio cor](#)) which is still more retrospective, seems to me the most stately and concentrated in the whole volume. It is the sublimity of a despair not to be relieved by utterance. In a later strain ([Levommi il mio pensier](#)) he rises to that dream which is more than earth's realities.

-xii-

It vindicates the emphatic reality and personality of Petrarch's love, after all, that when from these heights of vision he surveys and resurveys his life's long dream, it becomes to him more and more definite, as well as more poetic, and is farther and farther from a merely vague sentimentalism. In his later sonnets, Laura grows more distinctly individual to us; her traits show themselves as more characteristic, her temperament more intelligible, her precise influence upon Petrarch clearer. What delicate accuracy of delineation is seen, for instance, in the sonnet ([Dolci durezza](#))! In the sonnet ([Gli angeli eletti](#)) visions multiply upon visions. Would that one could transfer into English the delicious way in which the sweet Italian rhymes recur and surround and seem to embrace each other, and are woven and unwoven and interwoven, like the heavenly hosts that gathered around Laura.

-xiii-

Petrarch's odes and sonnets are but parts of one symphony, leading us through a passion strengthened by years and only purified by death, until at last the graceful

lay becomes an anthem and a 'Nunc dimittis.' In the closing sonnets Petrarch withdraws from the world, and they seem like voices from a cloister, growing more and more solemn till the door is closed. This is one of the last ([Dicemi spesso](#)). How true is its concluding line! Who can wonder that women prize beauty, and are intoxicated by their own fascinations, when these fragile gifts are yet strong enough to outlast all the memories of statesmanship and war? Next to the immortality of genius is that which genius may confer upon the object of its love. Laura, while she lived, was simply one of a hundred or a thousand beautiful and gracious Italian women; she had her loves and aversions, joys and griefs; she cared dutifully for her household, and embroidered the veil which Petrarch loved; her memory appeared as fleeting and unsubstantial as that of woven tissue. After five centuries we find that no armor of that iron age was so enduring. The kings whom she honored, the popes whom she revered are dust, and their memory is dust, but literature is still fragrant with her name. An impression which has endured so long is ineffaceable; it is an earthly immortality.

-xiv-

"Time is the chariot of all ages to carry men away, and beauty cannot bribe this charioteer." Thus wrote Petrarch in his Latin essays; but his love had wealth that proved resistless, and for Laura the chariot stayed.

SONNETS

I

-2-

LIETI fiori e felici, e ben nate erbe,
Che Madonna, pensando, premer sole;
Piaggia ch'ascolti sue dolci parole,
E del bel piede alcun vestigio serbe;
Schietti arboscelli, e verdi frondi acerbe;
Amorosette e pallide viole;
Ombrose selve, ove percote il Sole,
Che vi fa co' suoi raggi alte e superbe;
O soave contrada, o puro fiume,
Che bagni 'l suo bel viso e gli occhi chiari,
E prendi qualità dal vivo lume;
Quanto v'invidia gli atti onesti e cari!
Non fia in voi scoglio omai che per costume
D'arder con la mia fiamma non impari.



I

-3-

O JOYOUS, blossoming, ever-blessed flowers!
'Mid which my pensive queen her footstep sets;
O plain, that hold'st her words for amulets
And keep'st her footsteps in thy leafy bowers!
O trees, with earliest green of springtime hours,
And all spring's pale and tender violets!
O grove, so dark the proud sun only lets
His blithe rays gild the outskirts of thy towers!
O pleasant country-side! O limpid stream,
That mirrorest her sweet face, her eyes so clear,
And of their living light canst catch the beam!
I envy thee her presence pure and dear.
There is no rock so senseless but I deem
It burns with passion that to mine is near.



II

-4-

QUANDO Amor i begli occhi a terra inchina
E i vaghi spirti in un sospiro accoglie
Con le sue mani, e poi in voce gli scioglie
Chiara, soave, angelica, divina;
Sento far del mio cor dolce rapina,

E sì dentro cangiar pensieri e voglie,
Ch'ì dico: or fien di me l'ultime spoglie,
Se 'l Ciel sì onesta morte mi destina.
Ma 'l suon, che di dolcezza i sensi lega,
Col gran desir d'udendo esser beata,
L'anima, al dipartir presta, raffrena.
Così mi vivo, e così avvolge e spiega
Lo stame della vita che m'è data,
Questa sola fra noi del ciel sirena.



II

-5-

WHEN Love doth those sweet eyes to earth incline,
And weaves those wandering notes into a sigh
With his own touch, and leads a minstrelsy
Clear-voiced and pure, angelic and divine,—
He makes sweet havoc in this heart of mine,
And to my thoughts brings transformation high,
So that I say, "My time has come to die,
If fate so blest a death for me design."
But to my soul, thus steeped in joy, the sound
Brings such a wish to keep that present heaven,
It holds my spirit back to earth as well.
And thus I live: and thus is loosed and wound
The thread of life which unto me was given
By this sole Siren who with us doth dwell.



III

-6-

AURA che quelle chiome bionde e cresse
Circondi e movi, e se' mossa da loro
Soavemente, e spargi quel dolce oro,
E poi 'l raccogli e 'n bei nodi 'l rincrespe;
Tu stai negli occhi ond' amorse vespe
Mi pungon sì, che 'nfin qua il sento e ploro;
E vacillando cerco il mio tesoro,
Com' animal che spesso adombre e 'ncespe:
Ch'or mel par ritrovar, ed or m'accorgo
Ch'ì ne son lunge; or mi sollevo, or caggio:
Ch'or quel ch'ì bramo, or quel ch'è vero, scorgo.
Aer felice, col bel vivo raggio
Rimanti. E tu, corrente e chiaro gorgo,
Ché non poss'io cangiar teco viaggio?



III

-7-

SWEET air, that circlest round those radiant tresses,
And floatest, mingled with them, fold on fold,
Deliciously, and scatterest that fine gold,
Then twinest it again, my heart's dear jesses;
Thou lingerest on those eyes, whose beauty presses
Stings in my heart that all its life exhaust,
Till I go wandering round my treasure lost,
Like some scared creature whom the night distresses.
I seem to find her now, and now perceive
How far away she is; now rise, now fall;
Now what I wish, now what is true, believe.
O happy air! since joys enrich thee all,
Rest thee; and thou, O stream too bright to grieve!
Why can I not float with thee at thy call?



IV

-8-

QUAL donna attende a gloriosa fama
Di senno, di valor, di cortesia,
Miri fiso negli occhi a quella mia
Nemica, che mia donna il mondo chiama.
Come s'acquista onor, come Dio s'ama,
Com'è giunta onestà con leggiadria,
Ivi s'impara, e qual è dritta via
Di gir al Ciel, che lei aspetta e brama.
Ivi 'l parlar che nullo stile agguaglia,
E 'l bel tacere, e quei santi costumi
Ch'ingegno uman non può spiegar in carte.
L'infinita bellezza, ch'altrui abbaglia,
Non vi s'impara; ché quei dolci lumi
S'acquistan per ventura e non per arte.



IV

-9-

DOETH any maiden seek the glorious fame
Of chastity, of strength, of courtesy?
Gaze in the eyes of that sweet enemy
Whom all the world doth as my lady name!
How honor grows, and pure devotion's flame,
How truth is joined with graceful dignity,
There thou mayst learn, and what the path may be
To that high heaven which doth her spirit claim;
There learn that speech, beyond all poet's skill,
And sacred silence, and those holy ways
Unutterable, untold by human heart.
But the infinite beauty that all eyes doth fill,
This none can learn! because its lovely rays
Are given by God's pure grace, and not by art.



V

-10-

O PASSI sparsi, o pensier vaghi e pronti,
O tenace memoria, o fero ardore,
O possente desire, o debil core,
O occhi miei, occhi non già, ma fonti;
O fronde, onor delle famose fronti,
O sola insegna al gemino valore;
O faticosa vita, o dolce errore,
Che mi fate ir cercando piagge e monti;
O bel viso, ov'Amor insieme pose
Gli sproni e 'l fren, ond'e' mi punge e volve
Com'a lui piace, e calcitrar non vale;
O anime gentili ed amorose,
S'alcuna ha 'l mondo; e voi nude ombre e polve;
Deh restate a veder qual è 'l mio male.



V

-11-

O WANDERING steps! O vague and busy dreams!
O changeless memory! O fierce desire!
O passion strong! heart weak with its own fire;
O eyes of mine! not eyes, but living streams;
O laurel boughs! whose lovely garland seems
The sole reward that glory's deeds require!
O haunted life! delusion sweet and dire,
That all my days from slothful rest redeems;
O beauteous face! where Love has treasured well
His whip and spur, the sluggish heart to move
At his least will; nor can it find relief.
O souls of love and passion! if ye dwell
Yet on this earth, and ye, great Shades of Love!
Linger, and see my passion and my grief.

I' VIDI in terra angelici costumi
 E celesti bellezze al mondo sole;
 Tal che di rimembrar mi giova e dole;
 Ché quant'io miro par sogni, ombre e fumi.
 E vidi lagrimar que' duo bei lumi,
 C'han fatto mille volle invidia al Sole;
 Ed udii sospirando dir parole
 Che farian gir i monti e stare i fiumi.
 Amor, senno, valor, pietate e doglia
 Facean piangendo un più dolce concento
 D'ogni altro che nel mondo udir si soglia:
 Ed era 'l cielo all'armonia sì 'ntento,
 Che non si vedea 'n ramo mover foglia;
 Tanta dolcezza avea pien l'aere e 'l vento.

I ONCE beheld on earth celestial graces
 And heavenly beauties scarce to mortals known,
 Whose memory yields nor joy nor grief alone,
 But all things else in cloud and dreams effaces.
 I saw how tears had left their weary traces
 Within those eyes that once the sun outshone,
 I heard those lips, in low and plaintive moan,
 Breathe words to stir the mountains from their places.
 Love, wisdom, courage, tenderness, and truth
 Made in their mourning strains more high and dear
 Than ever wove soft sounds for mortal ear;
 And heaven seemed listening in such saddest ruth
 The very leaves upon the bough to soothe,
 Such sweetness filled the blissful atmosphere.

GLI occhi di ch'io parlai sì caldamente,
 E le braccia e le mani e i piedi e 'l viso
 Che m'avean sì da me stesso diviso
 E fatto singular dall'altra gente;
 Le crespe chiome d'or puro lucente,
 E 'l lampeggiar dell'angelico riso
 Che solean far in terra un paradiso,
 Poca polvere son, che nulla sente.
 Ed io pur vivo; onde mi doglio e sdegno,
 Rimaso senza 'l lume ch'amai tanto,
 In gran fortuna e 'n disarmato legno.
 Or sia qui fine al mio amoroso canto:
 Secca è la vena dell'usato ingegno,
 E la cetera mia rivolta in pianto.

THOSE eyes, 'neath which my passionate rapture rose,
 The arms, hands, feet, the beauty that erewhile
 Could my own soul from its own self beguile,
 And in a separate world of dreams enclose,
 The hair's bright tresses, full of golden glows,
 And the soft lightning of the angelic smile
 That changed this earth to some celestial isle,—
 Are now but dust, poor dust, that nothing knows.
 And yet I live! Myself I grieve and scorn,

Left dark without the light I loved in vain,
Adrift in tempest on a bark forlorn;
Dead is the source of all my amorous strain,
Dry is the channel of my thoughts outworn,
And my sad harp can sound but notes of pain.



VIII

-16-

SOLEASI nel mio cor star bella e viva,
Com'alta donna in loco umile e basso:
Or son fatt'io per l'ultimo suo passo,
Non pur mortal ma morto; ed ella è diva.
L'alma d'ogni suo ben spogliata e priva,
Amor della sua luce ignudo e casso
Devrian della pietà romper un sasso:
Ma non è chi lor duol riconti o scriva;
Ché piangon dentro, ov'ogni orecchia è sorda,
Se non la mia, cui tanta doglia ingombra,
Ch'altro che sospirar, nulla m'avanza.
Veramente siam noi polvere ed ombra;
Veramente la voglia è cieca e 'ngorda;
Veramente fallace è la speranza.



VIII

-17-

SHE ruled in beauty o'er this heart of mine,
A noble lady in a humble home,
And now her time for heavenly bliss has come,
'Tis I am mortal proved, and she divine.
The soul that all its blessings must resign,
And love whose light no more on earth finds room
Might rend the rocks with pity for their doom,
Yet none their sorrows can in words enshrine;
They weep within my heart; no ears they find
Save mine alone, and I am crushed with care,
And naught remains to me save mournful breath.
Assuredly but dust and shade we are;
Assuredly desire is mad and blind;
Assuredly its hope but ends in death.



IX

-18-

LEVOMMI il mio pensier in parte ov'era
Quella ch'io cerco e non ritrovo in terra:
Ivi, fra lor che 'l terzo cerchio serra,
La rividi più bella e meno altera.
Per man mi prese e disse: in questa spera
Sarai ancor meco, se 'l desir non erra;
I' son colei che ti die' tanta guerra,
E compie' mia giornata innanzi sera.
Mio ben non cape in intelletto umano:
Te solo aspetto, e, quel che tanto amasti,
E laggioso è rimasto, il mio bel velo.
Deh perchè tacque ed allargò la mano?
Ch'al suon de' detti sì pietosi e casti
Poco mancò ch'io non rimasi in cielo.



IX

-19-

DREAMS bore my fancy to that region where
She dwells whom here I seek, but cannot see.
'Mid those who in the loftiest heaven be

I looked on her, less haughty and more fair.
She took my hand, she said, "Within this sphere,
If hope deceive not, thou shalt dwell with me:
I filled thy life with war's wild agony;
Mine own day closed ere evening could appear.
My bliss no human thought can understand;
I wait for thee alone, and that fair veil
Of beauty thou dost love shall yet retain."
Why was she silent then, why dropped my hand
Ere those delicious tones could quite avail
To bid my mortal soul in heaven remain?



X

-20-

DOLCI durezza e placide repulse,
Piene di casto amore e di pietate;
Leggiadri sdegni, che le mie infiammate
Voglie tempraro (or me n'accorgo) e 'nsulse;
Gentil parlar, in cui chiaro refulse
Con somma cortesia somma onestate;
Fior di virtù, fontana di beltate,
Ch'ogni basso pensier del cor m'avulse;
Divino sguardo, da far l'uom felice,
Or fiero in affrenar la mente ardita
A quel che giustamente si disdice,
Or presto a confortar mia frale vita;
Questo bel variar fu la radice
Di mia salute, che altramente era ita.



X

-21-

GENTLE severity, repulses mild,
Full of chaste love and pity sorrowing;
Graceful rebukes, that had the power to bring
Back to itself a heart by dreams beguiled;
A tender voice, whose accents undefiled
Held sweet restraints, all duty honoring;
The bloom of virtue; purity's clear spring
To cleanse away base thoughts and passions wild;
Divinest eyes to make a lover's bliss,
Whether to bridle in the wayward mind
Lest its wild wanderings should the pathway miss,
Or else its griefs to soothe, its wounds to bind;
This sweet completeness of thy life it is
Which saved my soul; no other peace I find.



XI

-22-

GLI angeli eletti e l'anime beate
Cittadine del cielo, il primo giorno
Che Madonna passò, le fur intorno
Piene di meraviglia e di pietate.
Che luce è questa, e qual nova beltate?
Dicean tra lor; perch'abito sì adorno
Dal mondo errante a quest'alto soggiorno
Non salì mai in tutta questa etate.
Ella contenta aver cangiato albergo,
Si paragona pur coi più perfetti;
E parte ad or ad or si volge a tergo
Mirando s'io la seguo, e par ch'aspetti:
Ond'io voglie e pensier tutti al ciel ergo;
Perch'io l'odo pregar pur ch'i' m'affretti.



THE holy angels and the spirits blest,
 Celestial bands, upon that day serene
 When first my love went by in heavenly sheen,
 Came thronging, wondering at the gracious guest.
 "What light is here, in what new beauty drest?"
 They said among themselves; "for none has seen
 Within this age arrive so fair a mien
 From changing earth unto immortal rest."
 And she, contented with her new-found bliss,
 Ranks with the perfect in that upper sphere,
 Yet ever and anon looks back on this,
 To watch for me, as if for me she stayed.
 So strive my thoughts, lest that high heaven I miss.
 I hear her call, and must not be delayed.



XII

DICEMI spesso il mio fidato specchio,
 L'animo stanco e la cangiata scorza
 E la scemata mia destrezza e forza;
 Non ti nasconder più; tu se' pur veglio.
 Obbedir a Natura in tutto è il meglio;
 Ch'a contender con lei il tempo ne sforza.
 Subito allor, com'acqua il foco ammorza,
 D'un lungo e grave sonno mi risveglio:
 E veggio ben che 'l nostro viver vola,
 E ch'esser non si può più d'una volta;
 E 'n mezzo 'l cor mi sona una parola
 Di lei ch'è or dal suo bel nodo sciolta,
 Ma ne' suoi giorni al mondo fu sì sola,
 Ch'a tutte, s'i' non erro, fama ha tolta.



XII

OFt by my faithful mirror I am told,
 And by my mind outworn and altered brow,
 My earthly powers impaired and weakened now,—
 "Deceive thyself no more, for thou art old!"
 Who strives with Nature's laws is over-bold,
 And Time to his commandment bids us bow.
 Like fire that waves have quenched, I calmly vow
 In life's long dream no more my sense to fold.
 And while I think, our swift existence flies,
 And none can live again earth's brief career,—
 Then in my deepest heart the voice replies
 Of one who now has left this mortal sphere,
 But walked alone through earthly destinies,
 And of all women is to fame most dear.



XIII

VAGo augelletto che cantando vai,
 Ovver piangendo il tuo tempo passato,
 Vedendoti la notte e 'l verno a lato,
 E 'l dì dopo le spalle e i mesi gai;
 Se come i tuoi gravosi affanni sai,
 Così sapessi il mio simile stato,
 Verresti in grembo a questo sconsolato
 A partir seco i dolorosi guai.
 I' non so se le parti sarian pari;
 Che quella cui tu piangi è forse in vita,
 Di ch'a me Morte e 'l Ciel son tanto avari:
 Ma la stagione e l'ora men gradita,

Col membrar de' dolci anni e degli amari,
A parlar teco con pietà m'invita.



XIII

-27-

SWEET wandering bird that singest on thy way,
Or mournest yet the time for ever past,
Watching night come and spring receding fast,
Day's bliss behind thee and the seasons gay,—
If thou my griefs against thine own couldst weigh,
Thou couldst not guess how long my sorrows last;
Yet thou mightst hide thee from the wintry blast
Within my breast, and thus my pains allay.
Yet may not all thy woes be named with mine,
Since she whom thou dost mourn may live, yet live,
But death and heaven still hold my spirit's bride;
And all those long past days of sad decline
With all the joys remembered years can give
Still bid me ask "Sweet bird! with me abide!"



XIV

-28-

LA gola e 'l sonno e l'oziose piume
Hanno del mondo ogni virtù sbandita,
Ond'è dal corso suo quasi smarrita
Nostra natura, vinta dal costume;
Ed è sì spento ogni benigno lume
Del ciel, per cui s'informa umana vita,
Che per cosa mirabile s'addita
Chi vuol far d'Elicon nascer fiume.
Qual vaghezza di lauro? qual di mirto?
Povera e nuda vai, filosofia,
Dice la turba al vil guadagno intesa.
Pochi compagni avrai per l'altra via:
Tanto ti prego più, gentile spirto,
Non lassar la magnanima tua impresa.



XIV

-29-

LUST and dull slumber and the lazy hours
Have well nigh banished virtue from mankind.
Hence have man's nature and his treacherous mind
Left their free course, enmeshed in sin's soft bowers.
The very light of heaven hath lost its powers
Mid fading ways our loftiest dreams to find;
Men jeer at him whose footsteps are inclined
Where Helicon from dewy fountains showers.
Who seeks the laurel? who the myrtle twines?
"Wisdom, thou goest a beggar and unclad,"
So scoffs the crowd, intent on worthless gain.
Few are the hearts that prize the poet's lines:
Yet, friend, the more I hail thy spirit glad!
Let not the glory of thy purpose wane!



XV

-30-

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
Di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva il core
In sul mio primo giovenile errore,
Quand' era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'ì sono;
Del vario stile, in ch'io piango e ragiono
Fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore,

Ove sia chi per prova intenda amore,
 Spero trovar pietà, non che perdono.
 Ma ben veggi' or, sì come al popol tutto
 Favola fui gran tempo: onde sovente
 Di me medesimo meco mi vergogno:
 E del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto,
 E 'l pentirsi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente
 Che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.

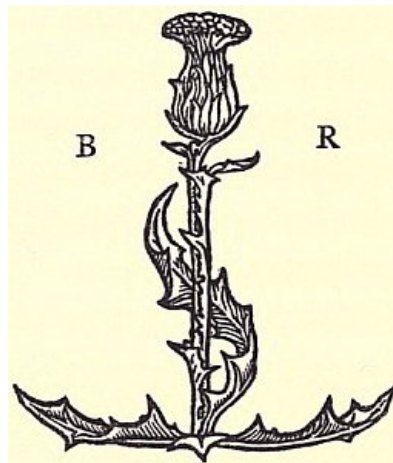


XV

O YE who trace through scattered verse the sound
 Of those long sighs wherewith I fed my heart
 Amid youth's errors, when in greater part
 That man unlike this present man was found;
 For the mixed strain which here I do compound
 Of empty hopes and pains that vainly start,
 Whatever soul hath truly felt love's smart,
 With pity and with pardon will abound.
 But now I see full well how long I earned
 All men's reproof; and oftentimes my soul
 Lies crushed by its own grief; and it doth seem
 For such misdeed shame is the fruitage whole,
 And wild repentance and the knowledge learned
 That worldly joy is still a short, short dream.



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Transcriber's Note: Below is a list of printer errors that have been corrected in the Italian sonnets, by reference to the 1964 critical edition of *Il Canzoniere* edited by Gianfranco Contini, available at [Liber Liber](#). The translator of this book probably used as his source an edition in which spelling and punctuation were somewhat modernized; these modernizations have not been altered in this e-book. Spacing of elisions (such as "ch'ascolti") has been normalized. The original book was printed almost entirely in italics, which are not marked as such in this e-text. Printer errors in the English introduction have been corrected without note.

Sonnet	Line	Error	Correction
II	10	a'udendo	d'udendo
III	14	Che	Ché

IV	13	che	ché
VI	4	Che	Ché
VI	12	si	sì
VII	9	doglia	doglio
VIII	9	Che	Ché

The sonnets in this book correspond to the following numbers in *II Canzoniere*:

This book	<i>II Canzoniere</i>
I	162 Lieti fiori
II	167 Quando Amor
III	227 Aura che quelle chiome
IV	261 Qual donna attende
V	161 O passi sparsi
VI	156 I' vidi in terra
VII	292 Gli occhi di ch'io parlai
VIII	294 Soleasi nel mio cor
IX	302 Levommi il mio pensier
X	351 Dolci durezza
XI	346 Gli angeli eletti
XII	361 Dicemi spesso
XIII	353 Vago augelletto
XIV	7 La gola e 'l sonno
XV	1 Voi ch'ascoltate

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