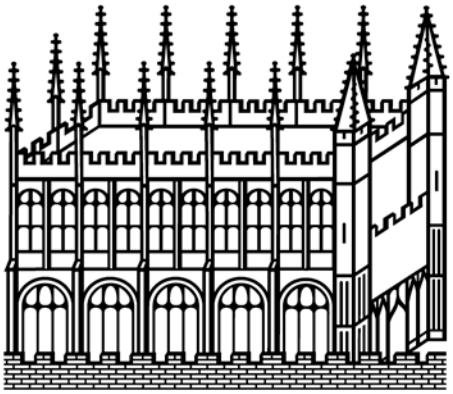

W. Hawkes Smith.

To the Bodleian Library,
June 20, 1912, C. S. Dodgson

Vittorio Alfieri.

Published by C. & H. Baldwyn, Newgate Street.

MEMOIRS

OF THE

LIFE AND WRITINGS

OF

VITTORIO ALFIERI.

"ALFIERI IS THE GREAT NAME OF THIS AGE."

LORD BYRON.

LONDON:

CHARLES AND HENRY BALDWYN, NEWGATE-STREET.

1821.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It was at first the intention of the writer of this SKETCH *to have presented the public with a translation of Alfieri's own* MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, *and to have supplied additional facts and explanatory observations in the notes. A careful re-perusal of the original narrative convinced him, that a much smaller work might be made to embrace every topic of interest or information in the Life of Alfieri. There is a strong and a natural prejudice in favour of auto-biography; but the narrative in question possesses none of the graces and interest peculiar to that species of composition. It has none of the passionate earnestness of Rousseau, or of the vivacious garrulity of Marmontel and Goldoni;*

it is a dry, unimpressive detail of facts and opinions, neither enlivened by anecdote or ennobled by feeling. The Author never descends from his tragic elevation, to converse on equal terms with the reader: he registers the follies of his youth and the passions of his manhood with stoical coldness and patrician dignity. The strict veracity of Alfieri has never been called in question, but his personal and political feelings give a colouring to his narration, at once fallacious and repulsive. It is presumed, that the present publication will be found to possess all the information, without the diffuseness of the original work, and to comprise, in a readable form, every incident and trait in the life and character of Alfieri, which can assist the English Reader in forming a correct estimate of the talents and eccentricities of the greatest of Italian Dramatists.

MEMOIRS OF ALFIERI.

CHAPTER THE FIRST. 1749-1758.

Infancy.

VITTORIO ALFIERI was born on the 17th of January, 1749, at Asti, in Piedmont, of noble and wealthy parents. His father, Antonio Alfieri, was a man of strict morals and great simplicity of manners. After remaining unmarried until upwards of fifty, he became enamoured of the young widow of the Marquis of Cacherano, a nobleman of Asti. The fruit of this union was a daughter; and, two years after, a son, whose birth was a source of infinite joy to his father, who was anxious to have his name perpetuated. The young Vittorio was sent to nurse in the village of Rovigliasco, two miles from Asti,

where his father, who was still hearty and robust, came to see him almost every day, in defiance of the weather. In one of these excursions he over-heated himself, and was attacked by an inflammation in his lungs, which in a few days carried him off. His widow was left pregnant with another boy, who died in his infancy; and, besides her children by Alfieri, had two daughters and a son, by her first husband, living. She was still young and handsome, and espoused for her third husband the Chevalier Hyacinth de Magliano, the representative of a different branch of the Alfieri family, who had succeeded to an immense property by the death of his elder brother. Vittorio and his sister Julia experienced the utmost kindness from their new parent.

The signora's eldest son and daughter were successively sent to Turin; the one to the College of Jesuits, the other to a convent. Shortly after, Julia was placed in a convent at Asti, to the great grief of Vittorio, between whom and his sister the strongest affection existed. A

worthy priest, named Ivaldi, was taken into the family as the preceptor of Vittorio, now in his seventh year, from whom he learned writing and the first rules of arithmetic : Ivaldi, also, taught him to read Cornelius Nepos and Phædrus's Fables; but, being himself extremely illiterate, the education of his pupil, while under his care, was confined to these moderate acquirements. His parents had no taste for, or knowledge of literature, and were unable to discern and remedy the incompetence of his preceptor. Vittorio had naturally a turn for study; and the solitude in which he lived with his tutor, generated a habit of melancholy and abstraction, deepened and embittered by his separation from his beloved sister. His visits to her, which had, at first, been daily, were made less and less frequent, that he might bestow undivided attention on his important studies. The greatest pleasure he experienced at this period of his life, was in frequenting a Carmelite Church, adjoining his paternal mansion. The music, the ceremonies of high mass, the processions, and

other imposing spectacles of the Catholic ritual, made a deep impression on the ardent mind of Vittorio. The youthful and innocent countenances of the Carmelite novices, who assisted at the different festivals, in the white robes of their order, inspired him with veneration and love. Their features and gestures were unceasingly present to his imagination, and his childish enthusiasm arrayed them with the beauty and attributes of heavenly beings. These contemplations rather increased than alleviated that habitual melancholy, which, even at this early period, began to prey on the mind of Alfieri. His studies were neglected; employment and society were alike irksome to him:—and the juvenile recluse, with a precocity of desperation unexampled in the annals of suicide, made a serious attempt to free himself from the burthen of existence. In one of his melancholy fits, recollecting that hemlock was destructive of life, he devoured by handfuls such weeds as he could find, in hopes that the deadly plant might be amongst them. The sickness which followed

this exploit discovered the project of the desperate boy, and proper medicines being administered, he escaped without any other punishment than a few days' confinement to his chamber. Alternately taciturn and petulant, reserved and talkative, his spirits fluctuated from one extreme to the other. Dreading a reprimand, he was insensible to any other method of restraint; timid, but inflexible, when coercion was attempted. The punishment which most bitterly afflicted Vittorio, was the being sent to mass with a net on his head, in the shape of a night-cap, which almost concealed his hair; and, on one occasion, his horror at being exposed in this equipment, made him violently ill for some days, and saved him from any future infliction of the same kind.

When scarcely eight years of age, he was ordered to make his *confession* to a priest, and his worthy preceptor, Ivaldi, prepared him for the ceremony, by suggesting all the crimes of which he conceived his pupil might have been guilty, though he was scarcely acquainted with

their names. On the appointed day he prostrated himself at the feet of Father Ange, his mother's confessor, but pride and obstinacy kept him silent. The holy Father, however, declared himself satisfied, and granted absolution to the impenitent youth, enjoining him, as a penance, to throw himself at his mother's feet, before sitting down to dinner, and publicly to solicit pardon for his past offences. Vittorio felt no repugnance to asking pardon of his mother, but his proud spirit could not submit to kneel before those who might happen to be present. On his return, he found a large party assembled in the dining-room, and advanced irresolutely to seat himself with the others. His mother, who had concerted his penance with the Confessor, with a stern look, asked him, if he had a right to place himself at the table; if he had fulfilled his duty, and had nothing to reproach himself with? Though overcome with confusion and grief, Vittorio remained obstinately silent; and there being no way of enforcing his penance, without discovering the juggling of the Con-

fessor, he escaped with the loss of his dinner, and was enjoined no public penance in future.

His half-brother, the Marquis of Cacherano, who had been for some time past receiving his education at Turin, came to pass the vacation at Asti, in the summer of 1757. He had seen something of the world, and could construe Virgil; and his superior knowledge, as well as the possession of money and freedom from controul, impressed the mind of Vittorio with a painful sense of inferiority, which prevented any cordial friendship from existing between them. The company of the Marquis, however, made the time pass more pleasantly than it had hitherto done. In one of their sports, while the Marquis was teaching Vittorio the Prussian exercise, the latter, in making a quick turn, fell down, and his head coming in contact with the andiron, he received a severe wound. When sufficiently recovered to go abroad, Vittorio felt proud of his bandages; and when his Tutor, in reply to any inquiries, answered, that he had had a fall,

the young hero took care to add, *in performing my exercise.*

In the following year his paternal uncle, the Chevalier Pellegrino Alfieri, to whom the care of his fortune had been confided, returning from his travels in France, Holland, and England, arrived at Asti. Finding his nephew's education had been entirely neglected, he determined on placing him in the Academy at Turin, to the great grief of his mother, who had recently lost her eldest son, the Marquis, by a pulmonary complaint. Vittorio, who had hardly ever been a dozen miles from home, was delighted with the prospect before him; but when the day of parting arrived, his courage failed him, and he was placed almost by force in the carriage. The rapidity of their journey, and the succession of new and striking objects, soon dispelled his regrets, and he entered Turin with rapturous anticipations. After remaining a short time at the house of his uncle, to the great annoyance of the latter, he was placed in the Academy,

and abandoned, in his tenth year, in a great measure to his own discretion, or rather to his fortune. He was attended by a domestic, named André, a young man of good natural parts, who had received a better education than the generality of his rank in life, but who took advantage of his young master's unprotected situation, to neglect and ill treat him.

CHAPTER THE SECOND. 1758-1763.

His Academical Education.

THE Academy was a spacious quadrangular building, with a large court in the middle. Two sides of the quadrangle were occupied by the students; the other sides were formed by the Theatre Royal and the Royal Archives. That part of the building which was allotted to the students, was divided into the *first, second,* and *third apartments.* The *third apartment,* to which Alfieri belonged, was devoted to the juvenile academicians: the *second,* to adults: the *first* was almost solely occupied by foreigners, (of whom a great proportion were English, Russians, and Germans), and by the Pages of the King, whose gay and idle life afforded no very edifying example to the other inmates. The foreigners,

too, by their extravagance and freedom from controul, excited the envy and dislike of the rest of the students. The Professors took no care to form the minds and morals of their pupils; and while they complied, in appearance, with the regulations of the Academy, which were partial, arbitrary, and inefficient, exercised no further attention towards them. In the Academy, Vittorio improved his Latin rather by the force of emulation than from the instructions of his tutor, a priest, who possessed all the ignorance of Ivaldi, without his kindness and attention. The scholars learned to translate the lives of Cornelius Nepos; but none of them, nor even their masters, knew any thing of the individuals commemorated. At the end of the first year of his abode at the Academy, a copy of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* fell in his way, which he purchased of one of his fellow-students, volume by volume, in exchange for the half of the chicken which each scholar was allowed for his Sunday's dinner. This work he perused unceasingly, though he understood it very imperfectly. So

much had the most important part of his education been neglected, that, though he could translate Virgil's *Georgics*, he was unable to comprehend the most easy of Italian poets. His secret studies were, however, soon put an end to, by his Ariosto being discovered, and taken from him by the Sub-Prior.

At the end of two years, Alfieri was little improved in learning, and much deteriorated in health. The scanty and bad diet, and the absurdly short time allowed the students for sleep, checked his growth, and rendered him sickly and emaciated. He was afflicted with an eruptive disorder, resembling leprosy; his body was covered with ulcers, and he became the sport of his companions, who bestowed on him significant and opprobrious nicknames.

His uncle had been appointed Governor of Coni, where he resided eight months in the year. The only relative who took any notice of Vittorio, was a cousin of his father's, Count Benedict Alfieri, who resided at Turin, and whom he visited as often as his capricious valet would

permit. Count Benedict was first architect to the King, and of great skill and celebrity in his profession, for which he entertained the most enthusiastic reverence. He never pronounced the name of Michael Angelo without bowing his head, or taking off his hat, and frequently expatiated to his youthful relative on the sublime genius of that great man. He always treated Vittorio with much kindness, and the latter was sincerely attached to him, in spite of his fondness for architecture and Michael Angelo.

Notwithstanding the incompetence and inattention of his preceptors, Alfieri, by the help of a good memory, managed to get through his tasks with some degree of credit, and was successively admitted into the rhetorical and philosophical classes. In consequence of this promotion, he was removed into the *second apartment,* the inmates of which were all older and stronger than himself; but this circumstance rather increased than diminished his spirit and confidence, and served as a strong incentive to

exertion. He recovered his Ariosto by stealth from the shelves of the Sub-Prior; but being imperfectly acquainted with his language, and bewildered in his labyrinth of tales, he laid aside the book in despair. The *Æneid* of Annibal Caro falling into his hands, he read it more than once with great avidity. These two works, with a few of the dramas of Metastasio and Goldoni, constituted his whole stock of Italian literature.

His uncle, the Governor, returned for a few months to Turin, in the winter of 1762, and observing the bad health of Vittorio, obtained for him some indulgences in his diet and repose. His sister Julia, whose education had been as injudicious as his own, was now in her fifteenth year. She had formed an attachment, of which her uncle disapproved, though the object of it was in every respect her equal, and he caused her to be removed from the convent at Asti to one at Turin. Her removal was a fortunate circumstance for her brother, who had now some one to sympathise with his real or imaginary

griefs: he spent all the time of absence allowed him by the regulations of the Academy, in conversing or weeping with her at the grate, and her society tranquilized his mind, and sensibly ameliorated his health. His cousin, the Architect, took him during the vacation to the Theatre Carignano, where he saw the opera-buffa of *Il Mercato di Malmantile*. The music, lively, impassioned, and diversified, made a deep and lasting impression on the mind of Alfieri. He felt himself overpowered by feelings, which he could neither define nor describe, and for several days remained in a profound, but not unpleasing, melancholy. The tumult and confusion of ideas which this emotion occasioned, produced a disrelish and incapacity for his studies, which he was a considerable time in overcoming.*

The first year of his studies in the philoso-

* In his riper years music continued to excite emotions in his mind approaching to inspiration. The plans of almost all his tragedies were conceived while listening to music, or soon after having heard it.

phical class being ended, his tutors took care to inform his uncle, that he had laboured with assiduity and success, and he was in consequence invited to pass some days with his relative at Coni. During his stay there he composed, or rather pilfered his first sonnet, from Ariosto and Metastasio: it was, as might be expected, lamentably deficient in rhyme and measure; for though he could string together Latin hexametres and pentametres, he was completely ignorant of the principles of Italian versification. This effusion was in praise of a lady, whom his uncle courted, and was infinitely admired by her, and by others who did not understand it. His uncle, unfortunately, was more attached to history and politics than to poetry, and so successfully ridiculed this juvenile composition, that Vittorio was effectually cured, for that time, of his poetical propensities.

The following year was spent in the study of natural and moral philosophy, under the celebrated Father Beccaria; but at the end of twelve months he was unable to retain a single defini-

tion in his head. This unprofitable study was then exchanged for the canon and civil law—a pursuit which, at the end of four years, exalts the student to the height of academical glory—a doctor's degree. After some weeks' application, he was afflicted with a return of his old disorder, an eruption on the head, with increased virulence. He was obliged to surrender his hair to the hated scissars, and to assume a peruke, which attracted the derision of all his fellow-students, till he parried their jokes by being the first to laugh at and maltreat the disagreeable appendage. In the same year (1763) he had masters assigned him in music and geography. For the latter study he had a strong inclination, especially when blended with history. Though he felt a growing passion for music, he attained little proficiency in the art, which he attributed principally to his taking lessons immediately after dinner. He made as little progress in the use of arms and in dancing: for the first, his bodily weakness almost disqualified him; and for the latter, he always entertained an aversion,

which was increased by his dislike of his teacher, a perfect Parisian *petit maître*, whose foppery and polite impertinence first excited that antipathy to the French character, which continued through life a predominant feeling in the mind of Alfieri. His geographical master lent him occasionally some French books, and, among others, *Gil Blas*, with which he was highly delighted. This was the first book he had read from the beginning to the end, except the *Æneid* of Annibal Caro. He read, besides, many romances, such as *Cassandra*, *Almachilde*, &c. but the book which interested him beyond all others was the *Memoires d'un Homme de Qualité*, of the Abbé Prevôt.

During the summer of 1762, his uncle had been appointed Viceroy of Sardinia, and, on leaving Piedmont, had transferred the management of Vittorio's pecuniary concerns to one of his friends. This new guardian assigned him a monthly stipend, which his uncle had always refused him, through the representations, he suspected, of his faithful André, who, for obvious

reasons, chose to have the control of his master's funds. This fellow had abandoned himself to drunkenness and debauchery, and treated Vittorio in the most insolent and brutal manner: when intoxicated, which frequently happened four or five times a week, he sometimes went so far as to beat him. During Vittorio's frequent illnesses, he would often go out and leave him locked up in his chamber from dinner to supper-time. The infamous conduct of this domestic tyrant was discovered by the new guardian, and he was immediately dismissed. His removal, however, greatly afflicted Vittorio, who had become from habit involuntarily attached to him. As André was forbidden to enter the Academy, he went to see him as often as he could get out, and gave him all his spare money. André at length got another situation, and time, and the change which took place in his circumstances, soon effaced from Vittorio's mind the remembrance of his unworthy domestic.

CHAPTER THE THIRD. 1763-1766.

He becomes his own Master.

AFTER six months' residence at Cagliari, the Viceroy died; little regretted by his nephew, to whom he had been a stern and severe, though a faithful, guardian, His death put Vittorio in possession of his father's property, increased by a considerable legacy. The authority of the guardian ceases in Piedmont at the age of fourteen, but the law appoints another guardian, who, leaving to the minor the disposal of his annual revenues, can only prevent him from alienating his estates. The first and most valued advantage which Alfieri derived from the death of his uncle was the privilege of attending the Riding School, which had hitherto been denied him. The Prior of the Academy made his

attaining the rank of a Master of Arts the price of this indulgence. Impelled by this stimulus, he revived his recollections of logic, physics, and geometry, and in fifteen or twenty days was able to go through a negligent public examination: became, he hardly knew how, a Master of Arts, and, what was of much more importance, took his first lesson in horsemanship. Though puny, sickly, and weak, his enthusiasm overcame every obstacle, and he soon became an expert horseman. Emancipated from the yoke of his uncle, and of his valet—master of his property, and of a horse—he felt his pride and confidence daily increase. He boldly told the Prior and his guardian that he was tired of the study of the law, and was determined to pursue it no longer; and, finding him resolute, they removed him to the *first apartment*, the inmates of which were subject to no sort of restraint.

He took possession of his new quarters in May, 1763, and remained there almost solitarily during the summer, but with the winter arrived a crowd of foreigners, principally English. A

well supplied table, abundance of amusement and repose, little study, daily exercise on horseback, and, above all, the power of doing as he pleased, speedily re-established his health and vigour, and inspired him with spirit and vivacity. His hair having grown afresh, he threw aside his peruke, as well as the black habiliments which he had been condemned, by the rules of the Academy, to wear for the last five years, and indulged his vanity in the most costly dresses. Along with his liberty and fortune, Alfieri acquired the usual accompaniments of wealth—friends, companions, and parasites. He did not, however, so completely abandon himself to pleasure as to forego his studies altogether. He felt uneasy and ashamed in reflecting on the little progress he had made in the pursuit of knowledge ; but having no friend whose taste and judgement might direct him, and being master of no language, he found himself at a loss how and where to begin. The continued perusal of French books, the society of foreigners, and the absence of opportunities of con-

versing in pure Italian, made him insensibly forget what little he had previously known of that language. With the French language he was so much more conversant, that in a fit of study, which lasted for two or three months, he attacked the thirty-six volumes of the *Histoire Ecclesiastique* of Fleuri, and read through nearly the whole of them, with great perseverance, and some degree of pleasure. Wearied, at length, with this dry and unprofitable study, he returned with increased avidity to his romances and *Les Milles et une Nuits.* Having contracted an intimacy with several young gentlemen of the city, they frequently sallied out on hired hacks, and performed abundance of pranks at the hazard of their necks; leaping over hedges and ditches, galloping down dangerous declivities, or fording the Doria at its confluence with the Po, and became so notorious for their temerity and excesses that no one would lend them horses on any terms.

Alfieri had no person who interfered with his pursuits except the new valet whom his guar-

dian had appointed, and who attended him wherever he went. This fellow was docile and good tempered, and was easily bribed into any of his master's schemes; but his continual attendance was a visible check which Alfieri could not endure, and appeared to him peculiarly oppressive, as no other inmate of the *first apartment* was troubled with such a monitor. In reply to his remonstrances, his extreme youth was objected, for he was not yet fifteen; but, unsatisfied with this reason, he determined in future to go out as he pleased, without consulting his valet or any other person. This conduct produced a reprimand, and on his repetition of the offence, he was confined to his chamber. As soon as he was set at liberty he went out as before, and was visited with a confinement of increased duration. He however continued obstinate, and the punishment increasing with every repetition of his offence, he was at last confined to his chamber for three months together. During this period he remained in bed the greater part of the day, neglected his dress, and degenerated

in his appearance and manners into a mere savage. The marriage of his sister, Julia, with the Count Hyacinth de Cumiana put an end to his afflictions. His new brother-in-law obtained the remission of his punishment, and the same privileges which were enjoyed by his fellows. Alfieri accompanied the new-married couple to Cumiana, where he spent a month in gaiety and enjoyment, enhanced by his late privations. He had obtained an increased allowance from his guardian, and he now purchased a beautiful and spirited horse, of which he became dotingly fond. His passion for these animals increasing by indulgence, he purchased seven more horses in the course of the year. A spirit of rivalry between Alfieri and the academicians (particularly the English) led him into great expenses in his dress and manner of living. He had many acquaintances in the city, who, though of respectable families, were not in affluent circumstances, and he always felt reluctant to hurt their feelings by a display of superior profusion. After dining with his comrades in the academy, he would lay

aside his splendid dress, and assume a more sober exterior, to visit his friends in the city. After having purchased (in spite of the remonstrances of his guardian) an elegant carriage, he never rode out in it, and contented himself with riding on horseback; an exercise in which his less wealthy friends could join him.

Going with two of his riding companions to pass a month with them in the country, the charms of their sister-in-law, a young and lively brunette, made Alfieri feel, for the first time, the passion of love. He became melancholy—was embarrassed in her presence, and restless in her absence. On his being separated from her by the termination of his visit, he would waste whole days in traversing the public walks, in hopes of catching a glimpse of her. This passion never proceeded any farther; but for several years it haunted the imagination of Alfieri, and acted as an incentive to distinction, in the hope that, should circumstances change, he might render himself worthy of her. In the autumn of 1765, he accompanied his guardian

to Genoa; and, in his way to that city, revisited his mother and his native city for the first time since his separation from them. This excursion and the sight of the sea inspired him with an unconquerable desire for travelling, which he soon found an opportunity of indulging.

On entering the *first apartment*, he had inscribed his name among those who wished to serve in the army. Three years after, to his great mortification, his desire was complied with, and he reluctantly accepted a commission in the provincial regiment of Asti. This appointment obliged him to leave the academy, of which he had now been an inmate nearly eight years, and to which from habit he was sincerely attached. The regiment to which he belonged was called out only twice a year, for a few days; but Alfieri had too inveterate a dislike for military subordination to submit even to this transient duty with patience. After leaving the academy, Alfieri resided in the house of his sister, the Countess of Cumiana, and amused himself with squandering money in the purchase

of horses, and the entertainment of his juvenile friends. Impatient to commence his intended travels, he embraced an opportunity which occurred of accompanying two young Dutchmen, who, with their preceptor, an English Catholic, were proceeding to Rome and Naples. He had to encounter and overcome the opposition of his brother-in-law, of his avaricious guardian, and of the king, (who did not encourage a taste for travelling among his nobility;) but his ardour and perseverance succeeded, and he set out on the 4th of October, 1766, on his much wished-for journey.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH. 1766-1767.

He commences his Travels.

He was attended in this journey by a domestic who had been in the service of his late uncle, named Francis Elias. This person, who possessed a large share of acuteness and activity, had much more of the direction of the journey than the young gentlemen or their preceptor. He retained his authority in the subsequent wanderings of Alfieri, who always placed the most implicit confidence in his judgment and integrity. The greatest pleasure which Alfieri experienced in this excursion was from the rapidity with which they proceeded. They visited Milan, Bologna, Placentia, Parma, Modena, Florence, Lucca, Pisa, Leghorn, and Sienna. The only language which Alfieri spoke or wrote in

this excursion was French, and he could scarcely *think* in any other. Even during their stay at Florence, he did not learn to appreciate the beauty of the Tuscan dialect. Despising the people, he had no wish to resemble them even in speech, and began to study English under a very indifferent master, though he disliked the language as much as he admired the national character. He had, at this time, very little taste for sculpture, and none for painting. For architecture, he had an indistinct feeling of admiration, from its being associated in his recollections with his relative, Count Benedict, and the tomb of Michael Angelo called forth his warmest enthusiasm. The party, at length, proceeded to Rome, which they reached in December. Alfieri felt all the emotions natural to a young and ardent mind, on beholding the former capital of the world. The eight days which they passed in this city were occupied in unremitting researches; but the object which eclipsed every other in the mind of Alfieri was St. Peter's, which he visited twice every day during their residence at Rome.

On the approach of winter they proceeded to Naples. In their way thither, Elias broke his arm by a fall from his horse, but he contrived to set it himself, and continued the journey without appearing sensible of the pain of his accident: the coolness and presence of mind which he displayed on this occasion won his master's esteem and admiration. The splendour of Naples and the beauty of its scenery did not compensate the juvenile travellers for the badness of the house and the gloominess of the street in which they were obliged to lodge, owing to the crowded state of the more convenient hotels. Alfieri was introduced into society by the Sardinian ambassador, who presented him to the reigning King, Ferdinand IV. then in his sixteenth year. The carnival was much superior in gaiety and splendour to what he had seen at Turin, and the fêtes and public spectacles presented an unremitting succession of amusements. But Alfieri was resolved not to be pleased: master of himself and his actions at eighteen—with an ample revenue and a pre-

possessing figure—he felt only satiety and disgust. His greatest pleasure was in attending the opera-buffa, though its lively music rather increased than alleviated his melancholy, and in solitary rambles on the sea-shore. He had made some acquaintances among the Neapolitan gentry, but the natural reserve and hauteur of his character precluded any intimate friendship from existing between them. He felt all the misery of living without an object or pursuit, and hurried from place to place without wishing to see any thing, and anxious only to escape from the repose which was now insupportable to him. During his stay at Naples, he began to intrigue to get rid of his travelling preceptor, who, though easy and indulgent, was tedious and irresolute. The Sardinian ambassador wrote in his behalf to Turin, and gave so good an account of his regularity and discretion, that his request of emancipation was complied with. The ambassador, pitying his irksome and unprofitable life, advised him to study politics, to qualify him for a diplomatic career. Alfieri was

infinitely pleased with this idea, thinking a grave and sober exterior was all that was required to constitute a statesman; but it produced no other effect on him than to increase his natural taciturnity.

Impatient to enjoy his complete liberty, he bade adieu to his imbecile Mentor and his fellow-travellers, and left Naples for Rome, from whence he intended to proceed to Venice. Elias, who had preceded his arrival at Rome, had prepared for him splendid apartments, which consoled him for the inferior accommodations at Naples. The most sublime objects in Rome soon lost their interest with Alfieri: his previous enthusiasm had subsided into an indifference of which he felt ashamed. While at Rome, he was presented to the Pope, Clement XIII.: the dignified and venerable aspect of the Pontiff, and the splendour by which he was surrounded, reconciled the proud spirit of Alfieri to the ceremony of prostration, though his perusal of the *Ecclesiastical History* had not increased his respect for priestly supremacy.

He had applied for, and obtained leave of the Piedmontese government to travel in France, England, and Holland; but the joy which this permission excited was much abated by the receipt of a letter from his guardian, refusing to allow him more than fifteen hundred sequins a year during his travels. This limitation of his expenditure greatly mortified Alfieri, who had received twelve hundred the preceding year, and calculated on the comparative dearness of the countries he was about to visit. He was, however, obliged to submit, for fear his guardian should appeal to the king, and describe him as a spendthrift or a libertine. This sovereign took such a lively interest in his subjects' welfare, that he was perpetually meddling in their private affairs, and Alfieri had no wish for such a guardian. He resolved to economise his resources, that the savings of the present year's allowance might increase his promised stipend; and, passing from one extreme to the other, he became on a sudden as avaricious as he had been formerly profuse. He neglected seeing

many of the curiosities of Rome, to avoid the trifling expense attending them, and became so niggardly in his allowance to his valet, that Elias was nearly starved out of his service; but his remonstrances, at length, produced a more liberal supply. Setting out for Venice, in the beginning of May, 1767, his new passion for economy induced Alfieri to hire mules, whose slowness he detested, in order to avoid the expense of travelling post. Unable to tolerate the continual stumbling of these sluggish animals, he travelled the greater part of the way on foot, calculating how much he should save during his journey and his abode in Venice. He had engaged the muleteer as far as Bologna, but by the time he arrived at Loretto, he was so overcome with ennui and disgust, that he paid the muleteer his whole demand, and posted the remainder of the journey. Having got the better of this violent fit of avarice, he was never troubled with a relapse.

Arriving at Venice, Alfieri was surprised and delighted with the singular position of that city.

The influx of strangers, the number and gaiety of the fêtes, added to the Feast of the Ascension, detained him till the middle of June, and alleviated, for a time, the pressure of ennui. His disorder, however, soon returned, and he spent the latter part of his stay at Venice in solitude and inactivity; restless, yet incapable of exertion, and frequently bursting into tears without being able even to imagine a cause. Leaving Venice with more eagerness than he entered it, he passed through Padua, without thinking of Petrarch who lay buried so near it, and proceeded, through Vicenza, Verona, Mantua, and Milan, to Genoa, of which he had just seen enough in his former excursion to make him wish to revisit it. He had many letters of introduction, but he either neglected to deliver them, or shunned the acquaintances they procured him. Without resources in himself, which might make solitude supportable, his haughty reserve kept him aloof from society. Almost the only person with whom he was acquainted at Genoa was his banker, who, pitying

the manner in which he idled away his life, introduced him to the Chevalier Negroni, an accomplished man, and an experienced traveller. Introduced by the latter into the first families in Genoa, Alfieri became deeply enamoured of an amiable female, who seemed far from averse to his attentions; but his passion for travelling, and his desire to escape from Italy, prevented any permanent attachment. The description which Negroni had given him of Paris inflamed his desire of visiting it, and he determined to proceed thither without farther loss of time. He embarked in a small felucca for Antibes, and, on landing in France, found every thing new and delightful.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH. 1767-1768.

He visits France, England, and Holland.

FROM Antibes, he hastened to Toulon and Marseilles: he remained a month at the latter city, attracted by the beauty of its situation, its fine port, its straight and handsome streets, and especially the grace and liveliness of its female inhabitants. He frequented a *table d'hôte* every day, and had the satisfaction of being in society without the labour of contributing to support a conversation. The company consisted chiefly of officers and merchants, whose incessant chattering amused him, though he never ventured to take a part in it. The French theatre was the principal object of interest with Alfieri, who had fallen in with a company of French comedians two years before, and was struck

with the superiority of their performances to those of his own country. Their drama, however, wearied him by its cold and artificial tone, and the interruption of the interest of the piece by the introduction of whole scenes, and even acts, occupied by inferior characters. He began to feel the beauty of the Italian language, contrasted with the poverty of the French, and the insipid uniformity of French versification. The tragedies which pleased him most were the *Phèdre* of Racine, and the *Alzire* and *Mahomet* of Voltaire. Next to the theatre, his favourite amusement was bathing in the sea or sitting on the sea-shore, under a rock, from whence he could see only sea and sky, and ruminating with an indistinct feeling of poetical delight. The great heats, which had detained him at Marseilles longer than he wished, being abated, he set off for Paris, more like a fugitive flying for life, than a traveller in pursuit of pleasure; he posted day and night, without stopping, to Lyons, where fatigue detained him for forty-eight hours, and from thence, in less than three

days, to Paris. He entered that city in the middle of August, on a cloudy, cold, and rainy day, by the fauxbourg St. Marceau. Accustomed to the clear sky of Italy, the fog in which Paris was enveloped surprised and alarmed him. Proceeding to the fetid and miry fauxbourg St. Germain, where he was to lodge, his heart sunk within him, and he felt so chagrined at having been led into such a sink of filth, that he would instantly have set out on his return, had not fatigue and the fear of ridicule opposed his retreat. The tasteless architecture of the Parisians, their paltry houses dignified with the titles of palaces, and, above all, the painted faces of the women, added to his disgust, and more than counterbalanced the beauty of their numerous gardens, the elegance of their well-frequented promenades, their splendid equipages, and the excellence of their theatrical performances. The French court was passing the autumn at Compeigne, and the Sardinian ambassador, for whom Alfieri had letters, was absent from the capital. Unacquainted with

any person at Paris, except a few foreigners whom he had known in Italy, and who were as much strangers in France as himself, Alfieri spent his time little to his satisfaction, at the theatres and promenades, till the return of the Sardinian ambassador, at the end of November, who introduced him into Parisian society. He began now to think of proceeding to England, rather as a variation of wretchedness than as a pleasurable excursion; for the disappointment he had experienced at Paris had clouded and saddened his anticipations. He began tardily to appreciate his own noble country, and his future wanderings confirmed his attachment to it.

Before his departure for England, the Sardinian ambassador proposed to present him to the king, and curiosity to see so celebrated a court induced him to acquiesce. The supercilious hauteur of the king (Louis XV.) disconcerted and stung Alfieri, but he was consoled by seeing foreigners of much higher rank than himself received with the same contemptuous indiffer-

ence. Alfieri set out from Paris in the middle of January, 1768, accompanied by a young Italian, the nephew of Prince Masserano, the ambassador from Spain to the British court. This gentleman was handsome, gay, and loquacious: he was a great favourite with the ladies, and delighted in recounting his love-adventures to his taciturn companion. Alfieri was agreeably disappointed on his first arrival in England: the excellence of the roads and inns, the beauty of the horses and the women, the neatness and conveniency of the houses, the absence of mendicity, and the activity and bustle observable in the capital and the provincial towns, surprised and delighted him. At London, the persuasions and example of his gay friend drew him into the circle of fashionable dissipation. In a few months, however, he began to tire of balls, suppers, and assemblies, and changed his sphere of action from the drawing-room to the coach-box. He often displayed his skill in driving at Ranelagh and the Theatres, and prided himself on his successful dexterity in the

shock of coaches so frequent at those places. He passed five or six hours on horseback every morning, and two or three on the box every evening, regardless of the weather. In the spring, he made an excursion with his Italian friend through the southern counties of England. They visited Portsmouth, Salisbury, Bath, and Bristol, and returned through Oxford to London. Pleased with the beauty of the country, the unaffected morality of the inhabitants, the charms and modesty of the females, and, above all, with the freedom of thought and action every where apparent, Alfieri was almost inclined to forgive the fickleness of the climate, and the melancholy which it engendered.

Returning from this journey, which rekindled his ardour for travelling, he left London in June for Holland, and embarking at Harwich, with a brisk wind, arrived in twelve hours at Helvoetsluys. Holland, at this time of the year, presented a pleasant and smiling aspect, and would have pleased Alfieri had he not been previously in England, where every thing that can be ad-

mired in this country is found in greater perfection and on a more extensive scale. During his stay at the Hague, he contrived to fall in love with a young, beautiful, and ingenuous female, who had been married nearly a year to a wealthy Hollander, the son of the Governor of Batavia. The limited society and the scantiness of amusements brought him into her company oftener than he wished, till at last he could not see her often enough. He was so fortunate as to meet with a constant and worthy friend at the Hague, Joseph D'Acunha, the Portuguese envoy, a man of a liberal and original mind, and a warm and generous heart. Happy in having some object to occupy his mind, Alfieri enjoyed for a time uninterrupted felicity in the society of his mistress and his friend. D'Acunha, perceiving the imperfect manner in which his friend's mind had been cultivated, endeavoured to turn his attention to the study of the best Italian writers in prose and verse, but without immediate success, though his labours were not ultimately fruitless. Alfieri's happiness was soon inter-

rupted: the lady's husband had purchased an estate in Switzerland, where he was going to pass the autumn, after making an excursion to Spa with his wife. As the husband was not jealous, Alfieri followed them to Spa, and accompanied them on their return as far as Maestricht, where he was obliged to take his leave; the lady going with her mother into the country, and the husband to Switzerland. Alfieri returned disconsolate to the Hague, where, however, he was soon agreeably surprised by the return of the lady, who, during her absence from her husband, had found a pretext for revisiting that town for a few days. When the time of departure arrived, the lady dared not trust herself to take leave of Alfieri, but set off without his knowledge, leaving a letter for him with D'Acunha, containing an affectionate farewell, and explaining the necessity she was under of immediately rejoining her husband, which could no longer be deferred with propriety. Alfieri, on receiving this letter, gave way to all the extravagances of despair and madness, in spite of

the consolations and remonstrances of D'Acunha. Giving out that he was ill, he sent for a surgeon, and, after being bled, dismissed his attendants, pretending to go to sleep. As soon as the curtains were drawn he tore off the ligatures, with the intention of bleeding to death; but his faithful Elias, suspecting some desperate resolution, suddenly withdrew the curtains, affecting to think his master had called him. Ashamed of his folly, Alfieri told him his ligatures had fallen off, and Elias, without showing any disbelief, replaced them, but would not again go out of sight. D'Acunha, informed of this attempt, removed Alfieri to his own house, and applied every remedy of soothing and remonstrance, but for some time without effect. Time, however, which cures deeper wounds and more reasonable griefs than Alfieri's, silently and imperceptibly weaned him from his desperate resolutions. Desirous of quitting a country where every object reminded him of his mistress, he resolved to return immediately to Italy. D'Acunha acquiesced in the propriety of his

departure, and, after taking an affectionate farewell of this faithful friend, Alfieri set out in the middle of September to return to his native country.

Proceeding through Brussels, he traversed Lorraine, Alsace, Switzerland, and Savoy, stopping only to sleep, and perfectly indifferent to the scenes through which he passed. During the whole of this journey he scarcely opened his lips, explaining his wants by signs to Elias, who accommodated himself to all his master's humours, and answered him in the same way. After remaining six weeks with his sister at Cumiana, he accompanied her to Turin, where his acquaintances could with difficulty recognize him, so much had he increased in size and vigour during his two years' travels.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH. 1769-1770.

His short stay at Turin. His Travels in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Russia. He re-visits England.

In passing through Geneva, Alfieri had purchased a considerable number of publications, amongst which were the works of Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Helvetius: melancholy, and a distaste for society compelled him to have recourse to books, and he commenced his reading with the *Heloise* of Rousseau; but after repeated attacks, he laid it down without being able to get through the first volume. He was disgusted with the systematic affectation—the warmth of the head and the coldness of the heart—so apparent in every part of that celebrated work. Voltaire's prose works pleased, and his verse wearied him. Montesquieu he read through

twice with pleasure and profit. *Helvetius de l'Esprit* made a strong but disagreeable impression on his mind. But the book which charmed him beyond all others was the *Lives of Plutarch*, which he read over and over in a transport of delight, particularly the lives of Timoleon, Cæsar, Brutus, and Pelopidas. He shed tears of rage and sorrow over its pages when he recollected he was born in Piedmont, in an age which offered no scope for great deeds, and when he could only think and feel.

Alfieri's brother-in-law frequently pressed him to marry, to which he had no great aversion; but having visited England at nineteen, and read Plutarch, he disdained to settle at Turin, and beget subjects for a petty despot. He was, however, over persuaded, and suffered the Count de Cumiana to treat for a marriage betwixt him and a rich heiress of a respectable family. The lady was not averse to the match, but some of her relations objected to her union with a man of such an eccentric and ungovernable character, and his proposals, fortunately for both par-

ties, were rejected. The lady afterwards married a gentleman of excellent character, the favourite of the Duke of Savoy, and Alfieri was, at least, as much pleased as piqued, at the disappointment of his matrimonial arrangements.

The termination of this negociation leaving him at liberty to indulge his travelling propensities, he set out, with the king's indispensable permission, on his second journey in May, 1769, and proceeded towards Venice. He left the care of his expenditure wholly to Elias, and resolved to *think* and *observe*. *Montaigne* was his constant companion in this journey: he would frequently peruse a page or two of his *Essays*, and then meditate for hours together upon what he had read. The Latin passages, which he could not construe, frequently interrupted his reading, and even the extracts from the Italian poets were scarcely intelligible. He passed through Milan, Venice (which he had previously visited,) Trent, Inspruck, Augsburg, and Munich, almost without stopping, to Vienna. While at this city, the Sardinian Ambassador

offered to introduce him to Metastasio, but Alfieri disliked the courtly character of the poet, and declined the honour of his acquaintance. After making a tour in Hungary, as far as Buda, he proceeded through Prague, to Dresden, where he remained a month, and from thence to pass another month at Berlin. The military despotism of Prussia was abhorrent to the fiery reader of Plutarch, and after being presented to the *great* Frederick, whom he heartily hated, he hastened to escape from these immense barracks. Denmark pleased him by the contrast it presented to the country he had just left, and from the resemblance he fancied he perceived between it and Holland. He reached Copenhagen in December, and remained there till March, spending his time principally with some Italian noblemen, whose pure Tuscan dialect delighted him, contrasted with the uncouth Danish. A temporary illness, the result of some irregularities, confining him to his chamber for some time, made him renew his devotions to *Plutarch* and *Montaigne*. He took great delight, when his

health permitted, in driving a sledge, the velocity of its motion gratifying his craving for excitement. At the end of March he set out for Sweden, and experienced all the severity of winter as he approached Stockholm. The novelty and grandeur of the scenery, the savage and majestic forests, the frozen lakes, the dreadfully picturesque precipices—filled him with awe and admiration. He was not, at that time, acquainted with *Ossian*, but some years after perusing Cesarotti's fine translation of his poems, they recalled to his memory the scenery of Sweden in all its wild and desolate sublimity. He continued to amuse himself with gliding in a sledge over the frozen lakes and plains till the middle of April, when a sudden thaw took place, and in four days every vestige of winter had disappeared.

Quitting Stockholm in the middle of May, he visited the university of Upsal and the iron-mines, in his way to the coast. On his arrival at Grisselhamn, a little port on the Gulf of Bothnia, he found the sea partially frozen, and so

dangerous from the loose pieces of floating ice, that no vessel could be got to carry him to Finland. The next day, however, a fisherman arrived from the Isle of Aland, who offered to convey Alfieri across the Gulf, if he was willing to encounter the hazard. Impatient of delay he eagerly consented, and after a dangerous and difficult voyage amidst floating masses of ice which frequently closed upon them, and obliged them to hew a passage with hatchets, he was safely landed at Abo, the capital of Swedish Finland. From thence he hastened on good roads and with excellent horses to Petersburgh, which he reached by the end of May, wearied, harrassed, and bewildered by the perpetual day of the boreal regions.

Alfieri had taken his ideas of Russia from Voltaire's *Histoire de Pierre le Grand,* and he was of course disappointed. Compared with the cities he had seen, Petersburgh appeared rather the camp of a barbarous horde, than the capital of a powerful empire. Disgusted with every thing belonging to these semi-barbarians,

except their beards and horses, he left Russia at the end of June, without proceeding to Moscow as he intended, and without being presented to the "philosophical Clytemnestra," Catherine the Second.

He travelled by way of Riga and Revel, over dreary wastes, to Koningsberg and Dantzic. Cross-examined on entering and leaving every village by a military inquisitor, respecting his name, age, character, and pursuits, Alfieri was impatient to escape from this perpetual guard-house: fatigue obliged him to remain three days at Berlin: from thence he hastened through Magdebourg, Brunswick, Gottingen, and Frankfort, to Mayence, where he embarked on the Rhine, and descended that beautiful river to Cologne. From Cologne he proceeded to Spa: this town pleased him by its union of bustle and solitude, affording him the pleasure of being unknown and unnoticed amidst crowds, and fêtes, and assemblies. He spent his mornings in riding a beautiful horse which he had purchased of an Irishman, dined with ten or a dozen strangers,

at an ordinary, and went in the evening to see the performances of some female dancers. He continued at Spa from the middle of August till the end of September, when the season being over and the place nearly deserted, he set out for Holland, to revisit the Hague and his friend D'Acunha. D'Acunha received him with open arms, and was rejoiced to find his friend a more rational being than when he parted with him. The lady of whom Alfieri had been enamoured, was gone with her husband to settle at Paris. After passing two months with his friend, he left Holland, at the end of November, for England, which country he had an ardent desire to revisit. Arriving at London, he was welcomed by the friends he had acquired during his first visit, particularly the Prince Masserano and the Marquis Caraccioli, the Spanish and Portuguese Ambassadors. Of the friendship and advice of these noblemen he had the utmost need to conduct him safely through the unfortunate events which took place during his second residence in England.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH. 1771.

His intrigue with Lady L ——.

On his first visit to London, Alfieri had been attracted by the charms of Penelope, the lady of Viscount L——, and a lurking affection for her had perhaps hastened his return to England. In spite of the pangs he had suffered from his attachment to the fair Hollander, he gave way to this rekindled passion with all the devotedness which might be expected from his ardent temperament. He had frequent opportunities of seeing Lady L—— through his intimacy with Prince Masserano, with whose lady she shared a box at the Opera House. Lady L—— encouraged his advances, and frequently admitted him to see her at home during her Lord's absence. In the spring Lord and Lady L— — went to re-

side for a short time at a house which his lordship had recently taken near Cobham, in Surry. Alfieri soon after received an intimation from the lady he might visit her on a particular day, when her husband would be obliged to attend a review, and to sleep in town. Alfieri set out in the evening on horseback, unattended, and arrived in the neighbourhood of Lord L——'s residence after nightfall. He left his horse at a small public house, between Cobham and Kingston, proceeded on foot to his assignation, and returned in the morning in the same manner. It was agreed that he should visit her again in two days' time with the same precautions. During this interval, Alfieri's passion was wrought up to frenzy by impatient expectation, and bewildering uncertainty, added to an irrepressible presentiment of their approaching and final separation. He spent his time in weeping and raving in his chamber, or in galloping furiously from place to place, and leaping over hedges and ditches at the imminent hazard of his neck. Riding out with the Marquis Caraccioli, he observed

a very high gate, and set out at full speed to leap over it : through the bad guidance of his bewildered and impetuous rider, the horse failed in clearing the gate, and they both came to the ground. Springing up immediately without feeling any hurt, Alfieri remounted his horse, who, being again impelled to the fatal gate, cleared it in a moment and retrieved his own and his rider's character. But his exultation was short-lived : in a few moments he felt an excruciating pain in his left shoulder, and, on examination, it was found to be broken, and his collar-bone dislocated Surgical assistance was immediately procured, the bones were re-set, and the patient ordered to remain in bed. This accident occurred the day before that he appointed for his assignation, and his rage and anguish were boundless. He got up at six on the appointed day, in spite of the remonstrances of Elias, and set out alone in a post-chaise, his ligatures, and the pain which he suffered, rendering him unable to ride on horseback. He left the chaise at the public house he had stopped at before, and proceeded on foot to

his rendezvous, with one arm in a sling, and holding his sword in the other. The motion of the chaise had deranged his bandages, and renewed the pain of his dislocation, but this did not prevent him from thinking himself the happiest man in the world. The small gate of the park, through which he had entered on his former visit, he found locked, and was obliged to clamber over the pales, with great pain and difficulty. He reached the house without further interruption, and found the lady expecting him in her apartment. He got back to London by seven in the morning, and having had his ligatures replaced, repaired in the evening to the Opera, to the surprise of Prince Masserano and his friends, who little expected to see him abroad so soon after his accident. While listening to the music with affected composure, Alfieri heard his name pronounced in a peremptory tone at the door of the box: rising mechanically, he opened the door and shut it after him: the first person he saw was Lord L——. The object of his lordship's inquiry, which immediately occurred

to him, neither surprised nor grieved Alfieri. "I am here," he exclaimed, "who asks for me?" "It is I," said his lordship, "I wish to speak with you,—let us walk out." "I am ready to attend you," replied Alfieri. They left the house without further conversation, and proceeded towards the Green Park. In walking along Pall Mall, Lord L—— reproached Alfieri with having entered his house clandestinely, and demanded the reason of such conduct. Alfieri denied the charge, but added, that if his lordship believed it, he was perfectly ready to give him satisfaction. Lord L—— repeated his assertion, and detailed the particulars of the Count's last visit with such accuracy, that the latter could no longer doubt of his intrigue being fully discovered: his lordship added, that it was quite useless to deny the fact, as his wife had confessed all. "If she confesses it," replied Alfieri hastily, "why should I deny it," and the conversation ended. Arriving at an unfrequented part of the Green Park, they drew their swords and prepared for action. Lord L. observing his adversary's left

arm in a sling, offered to defer their encounter till they could meet on more equal terms. Alfieri, thanking him for his courtesy, declared his accident was trifling, and declined any delay. The combat was commenced with great fury by Alfieri, whose impetuosity and want of skill must have rendered him a certain, if not an easy victim, had his cooler opponent been actuated by any very implacable revenge. After ten minutes' fighting, Alfieri received a thrust in his right arm, between the wrist and elbow, which he did not feel at the time. Lord L——, dropping his point immediately, declared he was content with the satisfaction he had received, and, if the Count was equally satisfied, there was an end of the affair. The Count replying in the affirmative, his lordship sheathed his sword, and walked off. Alfieri on examining his wound found it to be very slight, and, there being no marks of blood on his clothes, he returned immediately to the company he had quitted at the Opera. After staying there a quarter of an hour, being unable any longer to

conceal his agitation, he left the theatre, and hastened to the house of Lady Frances L——, the sister-in-law of Lady L——, in hopes of gaining some intelligence of his mistress. To his great surprize and joy, he there found Lady L—— herself. After the first transports and inquiries of meeting were over, Lady L—— recounted the details of the discovery of their connexion. Lord L—— had learned that some person had been clandestinely admitted into the house during his absence, and, on his return to town, had instructed some of his domestics to watch for this intruder. These servants had seen the Count climb over the pales into the Park, and return in the morning in the same manner, but, seeing him armed, they did not think fit to interrupt him. Lord L——, in returning from town, happened to be driven by the same postilion who had accompanied the Count: this fellow informed him where and what time he had waited for Alfieri, and described his person so exactly as to leave no doubt of his identity. Convinced of his wife's

dishonour, which she could scarcely persist in denying, he declared their union at an end, and set off immediately for London, to take vengeance on her paramour. Lady L—— immediately despatched a messenger, to inform the Count of what had happened, who used such expedition, that he arrived in town an hour before his lordship, but Alfieri was not to be found. Lady L——, immediately after her husband's departure, set out for London, and proceeded to the house of her sister-in-law. In the course of the evening, she received intelligence that Lord L—— had returned to his house in a hackney-coach, and, in a disordered manner, had shut himself up in his apartment. She concluded her lover had fallen by his hand, but, in the midst of her lamentations, Alfieri made his appearance, as already related.

Alfieri rejoiced at this eclaircissement, as the prelude of a divorce which would enable him to unite himself with his mistress. Lady L——, however, instead of sharing the joy of her lover, appeared overwhelmed with grief. She wept

without ceasing; protesting repeatedly to Alfieri that she loved him beyond expression, and that the dishonour and ridicule to which she was exposed would be amply compensated by an union with her lover—but she was sure he would never espouse her. These exclamations, which she continually repeated, almost distracted Alfieri; till, at length, after being repeatedly conjured to explain herself—after a long preamble, accompanied with sighs and tears—she confessed that she was unworthy of his affection—that he would not, could not, ought not to marry her—that before she had loved him, she had loved—"Who, then?" inquired Alfieri, with breathless vehemence—her husband's groom! The agonies of a lover, and *such* a lover as Alfieri, at this humiliating confession, may be more easily conceived than described. Maddening at one moment with the wildest rage, and at the next overcome with grief, he wept, stormed, and raved alternately. When the first transports of his passion had abated, he told her she had done well to con-

fess her shame: that had he married and discovered it afterwards, he would have killed her with his own hand. Her frankness, he added, had somewhat extenuated her offence, and he would still love her—that he would accompany her to some obscure part of Europe and America, where they might live unknown and unnoticed, but that she must never hope to be, nor to pass for, his wife. Returning home, he threw himself on his bed, but the tumult in his mind prevented him from closing his eyes. Getting up, as soon as it was light, he accidentally took up the newspaper of the preceding day, and, looking carelessly over it, his eye caught his name; reading on, he found a long and circumstantial account of his amour. The jealousy of his plebeian rival, he now found, was the means of discovering his intrigue with Lady L——, and that this fellow was the person who revealed it to her husband. After the discovery and duel had taken place, the groom, in order to convince his afflicted master how little cause he had to regret the loss of such a wife, or actuated by an

unsatisfied spirit of revenge, informed him of her previous infidelity. Alfieri too plainly perceived that his faithless mistress had only confessed to him in the evening what the newspapers had published to the world in the morning. Transported with rage, he hurried to her residence, upbraided her in the most violent manner with her depravity and duplicity, bade her an eternal farewell—and in less than an hour returned to console her. He continued to visit her day after day, until Lady L——, finding herself the talk and ridicule of the whole town, resolved to leave London and retire to a convent in France. Alfieri accompanied her in a tour through England, which he suggested in order to defer the dreaded time of separation. When this excursion was ended, he continued to linger with her, angry and ashamed of his weakness, in still attaching himself to an unworthy object, but unable to escape from her influence. At length, in a fit of resolution, he bade her adieu at Rochester, from whence she proceeded with her sister-in-law to France, and the Count returned to London.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH. 1771-1772.

He visits Spain—Returns to Italy.

LORD L—— being satisfied with obtaining a divorce from his unworthy spouse, without exacting any pecuniary compensation from her lover, there remained no obstacle to prevent Alfieri from leaving England, and he determined to quit a country where every place and every person reminded him of his folly. He embarked for Holland at the end of June, and proceeded to the Hague to join his old friend D'Acunha, with whom he remained several weeks. The necessity of volition and excitement, to dissipate the feelings which oppressed him, impelled him to re-commence his travels, and he determined to set out for Spain, the only country in Europe which he had not yet visited. Proceeding

through France, he was compelled to remain a month at Paris to avoid travelling during the great heats. While at Paris, an Italian acquaintance offered to introduce him to Rousseau, whose originality and independence of character he admired, though his works fatigued and displeased him: with his usual waywardness, he declined any communication with an individual as strange and unmanageable as himself. He purchased at Paris a collection of the best Italian writers, and in the intervals of his idle fits began to study and appreciate them. Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, Boccaccio, and Machiavel, engrossed what little attention he bestowed on literature. Passing through France with the utmost expedition, he entered Spain by Perpignan, and made his first halt at Barcelona. He had recourse to his old favourite Montaigne for consolation on the road; but he was much more cheered by the purchase of two beautiful Spanish horses, an acquisition he had long sighed for. Being detained some time at Barcelona by indisposition, he set about learning Spanish,

(an easy task to an Italian), and was soon able to understand and relish Cervantes. He proceeded by the way of Saragossa to Madrid, travelling the greater part of the way on foot by the side of his favourite Andalusian steed. The novelty and grandeur of the scenery almost consoled him for the badness of the inns and the slowness of his journey. He was preceded by Elias, on a mule, who, with his fowling-piece, shot hares, rabbits, and birds, which he cooked for his master's repast at their mid-day halt, or their place of repose for the night. Alfieri remained a month at Madrid without forming any acquaintance except with a young watchmaker, who was just returned from Holland, where he had been to learn his trade. This young man possessed good natural parts, and a more liberal and cultivated mind than the generality of his countrymen.

One evening when this individual had been supping with Alfieri, while they were yet sitting at table, Elias began to arrange the Count's hair, according to his custom, before going to

bed. In this operation, the valet happening to pull one hair rather harder than the rest, his irascible master started up, and seizing a candlestick, hurled it at his head: it struck him on the right temple with such violence, that the blood gushed out in a torrent, and covered the watchmaker who sat on the other side of the table. Elias rushed upon his master to take vengeance for this outrage, but Alfieri sprang from him, and seized his sword to defend himself. He would, however, have had little chance of success in coping with his valet, who was of extraordinary size and courage, but the watchmaker recovering from his surprise, threw himself between them, and the noise of the scuffle having alarmed the house, the enraged combatants were quickly parted. When the fury of the moment had subsided, Alfieri felt deeply ashamed and humiliated at this outrage. The wound he had inflicted was not deep, but it bled profusely; had it been a little higher it would have been fatal, and Alfieri shuddered when he reflected that he had been so near murdering a

faithful servant for pulling a hair too hard. Two hours after this affray, when Elias's wound had been dressed and order restored, Alfieri went to bed, leaving the door open as usual, which led from his chamber to that of his valet, in opposition to the advice of the Spaniard, who remonstrated with him on the folly of putting his life into the power of a justly irritated servant: to this, Alfieri replied, in a tone loud enough for Elias to hear him, that Elias might kill him if he pleased during the night, as he well deserved it. The valet, however, (though an Italian) took no other revenge than to preserve the handkerchiefs which had been bound round his head, and sometimes to display to his passionate master these bloody tokens of his ungoverned temper.

Alfieri quitted Madrid in the beginning of December, without having seen the Escurial, or Aranjuez, or the king's palace, or the king himself. His natural indolence, and the circumstance of his being on indifferent terms with the Sardinian envoy, whom he had known in

England, entirely repressed his curiosity. From Madrid, he proceeded through Toledo and Badajoz to Lisbon, where he arrived on Christmas eve. In approaching this city from the Tagus, he was struck by its picturesque and magnificent appearance, but the illusion was dissipated on a nearer inspection. Streets choked with rubbish, tottering walls and houses in ruins, bore witness to the ravage of the earthquake, the traces of which the indolent Portuguese had not suceeeded in obliterating in a lapse of fifteen years. During his stay of five weeks at Lisbon, Alfieri became acquainted with the Abbé Caluso, the younger brother of the Count Valperga di Masino, the Sardinian ambassador. With this accomplished and estimable individual, he spent the greater part of his time: from him, he learned to be ashamed of the ignorance in which he had hitherto spent his life, and which appeared more glaring and humiliating, contrasted with the extensive erudition of his companion. The poetry which Caluso read to him had a strong, but transient,

effect on his mind. The recitation of the Ode to Fortune, by Guidò, (a poet, of whose existence he was till then ignorant,) excited his enthusiasm so powerfully, that the Abbé, delighted with his ardour, felt convinced that he was born to be a poet, and exhorted him to turn his attention to a pursuit for which nature had destined him. But this sudden enthusiasm soon evaporated, and Alfieri subsided into his accustomed listlessness. The society of the Abbé, however, was not unproductive of improvement: he became more equable in temper and polished in manners, and began to apply himself, at intervals, to read, and to reflect on what he read. Consoled, at parting, with a promise from Caluso to meet him at Turin, he set out at the beginning of February for Seville and Cadiz. He was highly pleased with the climate of Seville and the physiognomy of the inhabitants, who have preserved more of the original Spanish character than is seen in any other city. After a short stay at Cadiz and at Cordova, he traversed Valencia, delighted with

the pure atmosphere, the charms of the females, and the luxuriant beauty of the country, which seemed to realise all the fables of poetry. Arriving, for the second time, at Barcelona, he resolved to get rid of his horses, which had trotted behind his carriage the whole of the journey, and prevented his travelling with the rapidity he desired. His favourite Andalusian, he presented to a French banker at Barcelona: to this person, he afterwards applied for a letter of credit, payable at Montpellier, in exchange for three hundred Spanish doubloons, which the regulations of the custom-house rendered it difficult for him to take with him. The banker took his doubloons, and gave him a letter of credit, calculating the interest to a day; and, on his arrival at Montpellier, Alfieri found he had lost seven per cent. by this accommodation. He had never felt much respect for the mercantile character, and this trait confirmed his aversion and contempt for men of business. Posting on without stopping to Antibes, he embarked at that port for Genoa, from whence he proceeded

to Asti, remained a few days with his mother, and arrived at Turin on the 5th of May, 1772, after three years of absence.

CHAPTER THE NINTH. 1772-1775.

His residence in Turin—An intrigue, and its fortunate termination—He commences Author.

A DISORDER which he had contracted by some irregularities at Cadiz, and which had been aggravated by two months of hard travelling, obliged Alfieri to treat himself as an invalid during the whole of the summer. If he had not improved his morals or his health by his last journey, or studied the character and institutions of the countries through which he had passed, yet his mind had expanded and acquired something of a more vigourous and healthy tone. He was now in his twenty-third year, rich for an inhabitant of Piedmont, vain of having seen almost every civilized country, half-informed, overbearing, and arrogant. He had

not yet run through his long labyrinth of passion and extravagance, nor had an adequate object presented itself to his ardent and ambitious mind. His brother-in-law vainly endeavoured to turn his attention to diplomacy: Alfieri told him, that he had seen enough of kings and their deputies; that he did not care to represent the Great Mogul, much less the King of Sardinia; and that an individual, who had the misfortune to be born in such a country as Piedmont, should be contented to live on his fortune—if he had one—and to amuse himself in a more honest manner than in soliciting a paltry employment. This discourse visibly lengthened the visage of the Count de Cumiana, who was a gentleman of the bed-chamber to the king: he said no more about diplomacy, and Alfieri enjoyed his humour unmolested.

At the end of 1773, he hired a splendid house in Turin, and began to live in a more luxurious, as well as a more sociable manner than hitherto, though with a certain singularity which distinguished him from the fashionable world. He

had renewed his acquaintance with ten or a dozen of his old companions in mirth and mischief at the academy, and they established a society, which was intended to be permanent, with rules, oaths, and other mummeries. Their meetings, of which the sole object was amusement, were held twice a week, and generally at the house of Alfieri, which was more spacious and commodious than those of his comrades. The members were all of good families, but of various degrees of wealth and talent. A throne was erected in their place of meeting, through an opening in which the members threw occasional compositions. The key of this depository was kept by the president, who examined the contents every week, and read them to the society. These effusions, which were principally *jeux d'esprit*, were in the French language, and were all anonymous. Alfieri occasionally threw in some trifling contributions, which generally succeeded in exciting the mirth and applause of the company. Among these pieces was a fragment descriptive of the last judge-

ment, in which the assembled souls gave an account of their actions on earth. Several contemporary characters were introduced which were recognised as likenesses by the audience, and the composition was allowed to possess considerable truth and strength of colouring. This essay gave Alfieri some confidence in his powers, and inspired him with the hope of achieving some more durable work, but a confirmed habit of indolence and self-indulgence was not to be easily or hastily shaken off. His horses, of whom he now possessed a dozen, withdrew a large share of his attention from the cultivation of those talents he had discovered in himself, and being entangled about this time in a third intrigue, this new and violent passion absorbed, for a time, all his literary ambition.

The object of Alfieri's attachment was a lady of distinguished rank, but of indifferent reputation, who was nine or ten years older than himself. He had been slightly acquainted with her during his residence at the academy, and,

though her charms were of no ordinary description, his indolence might still have baffled their influence, had not the lady herself made the first advances. The boundless affection she professed for him excited a corresponding ardour in the breast of Alfieri. His friends, his amusements, even his horses, were forgotten. From eight in the morning till midnight, he remained constantly by her side, ashamed and indignant at the servitude to which he was reduced, but without sufficient resolution to rebel against her authority. In this manner, he continued to exist for upwards of a year and half, in a state of incessant irritation, which soured his temper and undermined his health.

At the end of 1773, he was attacked by a disorder so singular, that it was said, in Turin, to have been made expressly for him. For thirty-six hours, he was afflicted with incessant vomitings, which were succeeded by convulsions so violent, that nothing could be administered to him. Though greatly reduced by illness and deprivation of food, his resistance to any

attempt to hold him was greater than it could have been in perfect health. On the fifth day of his illness, his life was despaired of, and one of his friends was sent for, to advise him to be confessed and to make his will. Alfieri, divining the purport of his visit, prevented him by coolly desiring a priest and a notary might be sent for. The day after, he was placed in a warm bath of oil and water, in which he remained six hours, and was much relieved: by perseverance in this treatment, he was in a few days cured of his disorder. His long abstinence and his violent retchings had caused a hollow to form between the two bones of his breast, large enough to admit a small egg, and which continued unobliterated all his life.

This illness afforded him a pretext for resigning his commission in the regiment of Asti, to which he had now belonged eight years, and, during that time, had assisted at only four reviews. His malady had interrupted, without weakening, his devotion to his mistress, and, as soon as his health permitted, he resumed his

diurnal attendance. Ashamed of this ignominious subjection to the humours of a capricious woman, he shunned the society of his most intimate friends, thinking that he read in every countenance condemnation and contempt. At the beginning of the ensuing year, the lady fell dangerously ill: her disorder required uninterrupted repose and silence, and her lover, placing himself in a chair at the foot of her bed, remained there from morning till evening without uttering a word for fear of disturbing her. In one of these sittings, overcome with weariness, he took up some sheets of paper, which happened to lie near him, and began writing, without any object or plan, a dialogue in verse on the story of Cleopatra. The persons in this shapeless sketch were Cleopatra, Photinus, and a female whom he called Lachesis, without recollecting that it was the name of one of the Parcæ. The impulse which directed him to this subject in preference to any other tragic adventure, he probably owed to the impression made on his mind by the splendid tapestry in

his mistress's anti-chamber, representing the story of Antony and Cleopatra.

The lady recovered, and Alfieri forgot his scribblings, which he had deposited under the cushion of her couch. Becoming every day more and more impatient of his bondage, he resolved to make a desperate effort to free himself, and to try if absence could not cure him of his passion. He took advantage of one of the frequent quarrels which broke out between them, and, without saying any thing of his intention, returned to his own house to make preparations for his departure from Turin. The lady heard next day of his intended flight, and returned him, according to custom, his letters and portrait. This shook his resolution, but did not overcome it. He set out manfully on the following morning, but by the time he arrived at Novara, his courage had forsaken him. He sent on his equipage and a French Abbé, whom he had hired to attend him on this journey, to Milan, with directions to wait there for his arrival. Mounting his horse, he travelled

all night on his way back, and, by day-break, found himself within sight of Turin. Ashamed to enter the city in the day-time, he stopped at a paltry inn in the suburbs, and despatched a penitent epistle to his mistress, entreating her forgiveness and an immediate audience. A favourable answer was brought him by Elias, who was left at Turin to superintend the Count's affairs in his absence, and who was always indefatigable in endeavouring to conceal his master's follies from the world. After night-fall, Alfieri stole into the city to his assignation, and received a free pardon on his unconditional submission. It was agreed, that he should resume his travels for four or five weeks, and then return under pretence of ill health. Peace being thus settled, Alfieri again sallied forth for Milan, bitterly regretting his vacillation, and cursing the fatal influence to which he had so weakly submitted. At one moment, he revolved every means to prolong his absence, without violating his promise, and the next how to shorten it, without rendering himself publicly ridiculous.

Seeking refuge from reflection in velocity of motion, he staid only two days at Milan, and from thence hurried to Modena, Bologna, Florence, Pisa, and Leghorn. At the latter place, he received letters from his mistress, and, unable to endure any longer the torments of absence, he turned his course homewards. Leaving at Genoa his carriage and his French Abbé, he took horse, and arrived at Turin, eighteen days after having quitted it for a journey of twelve months. He entered the city, as before, at night, to avoid the observations and jests of the fashionable world, and, by his austere and sombre demeanour, endeavoured to baffle the ironical congratulations of his ill-natured friends. Several months had elapsed in this state of irksome restraint, when, returning one evening from the Opera, where he had passed some hours in the company of his adored and hated mistress, he determined to make another and more desperate effort to recover his freedom. He had experienced the inutility of flight, and now deemed it best to meet and

brave the danger. The lady's house faced his own, and he resolved to see her go in and out, and to hear her voice, and yet remain unmoved, either by messages, direct or indirect, intreaty or threat, or even by indifference. To cut off all means of retreat, he wrote to one of his most esteemed friends, informing him of the step he had taken, and inclosing a lock of his long red hair, which he had cropped to preclude his appearing abroad, as none but peasants and sailors wore their hair short. He passed the first five days of his seclusion in giving vent to tears and groans. Distrusting the obduracy of his resolution, he caused himself to be tied down in his chair, leaving one hand at liberty to read or write, and concealing the cords by a large cloak in which he was wrapped. No one was aware of this restraint except Elias, who officiated as his goaler, and untied him when he appeared tolerably rational and temperate. He endeavoured to study, but he could not command attention sufficient to comprehend what he perused, and read over page after page aloud,

without recollecting a word. Sometimes he ventured out on horseback, chusing the most unfrequented places for his excursions. Two months passed away in this manner, leaving him in a state bordering on frenzy, when one day it occurred to him that the composition of poetry might divert the current of his thoughts; and, sitting to work, he strung together, with great labour and difficulty, fourteen lines, which he called a sonnet. This effusion he shewed to one of his friends, the learned Father Paciaudi, who compassionately visited him from time to time, in the hope of interrupting his melancholy reveries. Paciaudi bestowed on this jejune composition praises which he knew it did not deserve; but which had the desired effect of turning Alfieri's serious attention to composition. Some days before his rupture with his mistress, he happened to recollect the *Cleopatra* which he had left under the cushion of her couch a year before, and rescued it from its long immurement. In one of his solitary paroxysms, he chanced to cast his eye on it; and,

struck with the resemblance between his own feelings and those of Antony, he resolved to finish it and to develope the passions which tortured him. He set to work immediately (already half cured of his malady) scribbling, blotting, altering, adding, and subtracting, with infinite assiduity. So anxious was he for the success of his new enterprise, that even his pride gave way, and he submitted to consult such of his friends as had not, like himself, neglected the study of the Italian language and poetry, and teased them incessantly for their advice and opinions. His house appeared like an academy, and, from the most unmanageable, he became, all at once, the most docile of mortals. The ambition of learning overcame every obstacle of arrogance and indolence, and his love was absorbed by this new and master passion. He had no longer any occasion to be tied down in his chair. One of his latest freaks was to appear in the character of Apollo at a public ball in the Theatre, with a lyre, on which he played as well as he could, which was very in-

differently, and sung some sorry verses of his own composing. This exhibition was quite at variance with his character and habits, and seemed adopted to give some public display of his emancipation, and to render the breach between himself and his mistress irreparable. The passion for literary distinction continued to excite him to such exertions, that, after many poetical consultations, ransacking grammars and dictionaries, and scribbling and erasing abundance of nonsense, he managed to produce a tragedy in five acts. As soon as one act was finished, it was despatched to the polite Father Paciaudi, for his critical examination. Some of his marginal remarks made Alfieri laugh, though at his own expense. "*The barking of the heart*"—"This metaphor," observed the Abbé, "smacks of the dog:—pray, take it away." The Count Augustin Tana, one of the academical friends of Alfieri, and of his own age, assisted him greatly by his ingenious and just observations on this shapeless production. The advice of his two friends induced the young

bard to re-write the whole of his work, which he set about with great patience and industry. This laborious task was at last completed, and *Cleopatra* was produced at the theatre of Turin, June 16, 1775. After the tragedy, was performed a short piece in prose, which Alfieri had written for the occasion, entitled *The Poets*. In this, he introduced himself under the name of Zeuzippe, and ridiculed the defects of his *Cleopatra*. These dramas, though indifferent in the conception, and worse in the execution, were evidently the productions of a powerful mind, which only wanted judicious cultivation to bring forth nobler fruits. They were received with great indulgence, but their author, now more sensible of their defects, and repenting his temerity, caused them to be withdrawn after the second representation.

CHAPTER THE TENTH. 1775-1777.

His literary labours, and the difficulties he had to encounter.

ALFIERI was twenty-seven when he commenced author. His only guide in this undertaking was a vague recollection of the French tragedies he had seen some years before, but which he had neither read nor studied—and his principal support, a resolute, confident, and inflexible character, animated by a boundless feeling of love, and a more boundless hatred of tyranny. Ignorant of the rules of dramatic composition, and of the method of writing his own language with clearness and precision, he had almost every thing to learn, and, with a temper which could ill brook the laborious detail of study, he found that he must retrace his steps, return to

his grammar, and resume the docility and drudgery of the school-boy. This was a bitter and humiliating necessity, but his new-born enthusiasm was too powerful to allow him to shrink from the task. The Italian—the most musical, flexible, and poetical of modern dialects, equally susceptible of the impression of softness or of strength, of languid diffuseness or of vigourous compression—is rather a written than an oral language. It is commonly distinguished as the *Florentine* or the *Tuscan* dialect; but as the most rigourous verbal critics admit many words to be correct and classical, which are current neither in the capital nor the territory of Tuscany, this designation is incorrect, or at least not sufficiently comprehensive. The Italian is an ideal language, which has the Tuscan for its base, but which receives and naturalizes recruits from all the provinces of Italy, and (as it has been observed by one of their eminent writers*) is to be found every where in parts, but no where as a

* Monti.

whole. This ideal character, while it renders it a more delightful vehicle for the poetry of imagination, necessarily circumscribes the resources of the dramatist, and the want of a precise standard of idiomatic phraseology precludes the attainment of excellence in familiar humour and comic dialogue. Goldoni, by birth a Venetian, and instructed betimes in the written language of the Peninsula, who had passed six years of his life in Tuscany, and had written thirty-one octavo volumes in Italian, never attained the art of composing in it with purity, force, and precision. He went to France at an advanced period of life, and, after a few years' residence there, wrote a comedy in French, which was well received, and of which the language was sufficiently correct to escape criticism. The *Galateo* of Casa, the most perfect model of Italian elegance and purity, is said to have occupied its author thirty or forty years in its composition, yet the matter could hardly have cost him the labour of as many hours.

Alfieri entered upon his dramatic career with-

out being aware of half the difficulties he had to encounter, and to this ignorance may be traced his temerity, his perseverance, and his ultimate success. A more refined taste and a greater intimacy with the best models might have repressed emulation by despair, or restrained his genius within the limits of correct mediocrity. In the unreflecting enthusiasm of the moment, he had struck out a piece, which, crude and imperfect as it was, was crowned with a success which promised an ample meed of applause for his more mature and perfect productions.

Three months before *Cleopatra* was produced at the theatre, Alfieri had written two tragedies in French prose, *Philip* and *Polinices*. He read them to several friends, who not only praised them, but appeared interested and affected by their recital; but when he rendered a scene or an act into Italian, it appeared enervated and spiritless, and the same audience which had applauded it in French could scarcely believe it to belong to the same work in Italian. A habit

of speaking and thinking in French during five years of travelling, had given him a facility and power of expression in that language which he could not command in his own. He resolved to unlearn his French as fast as possible, and to clothe all his thoughts in Italian. He began to exercise himself in every species of poetical composition, and in every variety of metre. Among other attempts, he composed some couplets which he sung at a meeting of free-masons, who, understanding as little of the structure of verse as of buildings, applauded this effusion, though very poor in sense and lame in metre. Finding that the dissipation of the city prevented his bestowing undivided attention to his studies, he retired, in August, to Cezannes, a little village among the mountains which separate Piedmont from Dauphiné. It did not occur to him that he should there encounter the hated French language, and he even engaged as his companion the French Abbé, who had attended him on his last inglorious expedition. This Abbé, who was a native of

Cezannes, was a philosopher and a man of taste, and perfectly conversant with French and Latin literature. Besides his literary Abbé, Alfieri took with him to this retreat a musical Abbé, who taught him to play on the guitar; but though passionately alive to the influence of sweet sounds, he continued a very indifferent musician. He began to naturalize his two tragedies in Italian prose, but, in spite of his pains, they retained something of their mongrel origin. He re-wrote his *Cleopatra* for the third time: he had read some scenes of this play to Count Tana, who pronounced them fine and forcible, particularly that between Antony and Augustus; but when transformed into dry and nerveless Italian verse, he condemned them as below mediocrity. After having translated his tragedies into bad prose, he began to read and study, verse by verse, the most eminent Italian poets, marking such passages as appeared to him superior to the rest in the thought, expression, or cadence. He found Dante too difficult, and quitted him for Tasso: he afterwards read

the *Orlando*, then returned to Dante, and lastly studied Petrarch. But, as his object was to excel in blank verse, he began to look for models in that style of composition. He was advised to study Bentivoglio's translation of Statius, and perused it with great avidity; but the structure of the verse appeared to him too feeble for dramatic dialogue. Cesarotti's translation of Ossian he thought a much better model, and that, with some alterations, it would answer his purpose. The *Merope* of Maffei pleased him in parts, but its style fell far short of his ideas of dramatic excellence. Determined to avoid the diffuseness and languor which characterised the poets of the preceding generation, he went at once to the opposite extreme, and became systematically harsh in his style and versification. After spending six months in the study of Italian, Alfieri was seized with shame at being ignorant of Latin. He had seen some fragments of Seneca's tragedies, and was anxious to become acquainted with the whole of them, as well as the Latin translations of the

Greek tragedians, which were considered more faithful than the Italian. Having provided himself with an excellent master, he applied patiently to re-learn his Latin, and, after three months of hard labour, became a tolerable proficient in that language. He had versified his *Philip*, but, though superior to the *Cleopatra*, it was still languid and prolix. This play contained upwards of two thousand lines, though he afterwards reduced it to fourteen hundred. Finding the odious French language still cling to his tongue and his imagination, he determined to remove into Tuscany, and to accustom himself to speak and think only in Tuscan. He set out from Turin in April, 1776, with a small retinue and very little luggage, on this literary expedition. He was introduced by Father Paciaudi to most of the literary men of the cities he visited, and he now courted their acquaintance as assiduously as he had formerly shunned it. For some months, he kept a regular journal of all he did and learned, of his follies, and even of his thoughts. During a stay of six or

seven weeks at Pisa, he formed the plan of his *Antigone,* which he wrote in Italian prose. He versified *Polinices,* and afterwards read it to some of the principal professors of the university, who bestowed more praise upon it than its author could believe it deserved. He also translated Horace's *Art of Poetry,* in order to familiarize himself with its precepts, and began to study the tragedies of Seneca, which pleased him much, in spite of their transgressions against the rules of Horace, and translated portions of them into blank verse. The perusal of Seneca suggested the subjects of the tragedies of *Agamemnon* and *Orestes,* which he commenced soon after, but his manner of handling the story was original. He had hitherto taken the first idea of his tragedies from other plays, but he now determined to rely on his own resources, and, in adherence to this resolution, gave up reading the plays of Shakspeare, which he had just commenced in a French version. In proportion as he was pleased with this au-

thor, he thought it the more necessary to abandon him.

At the end of June, he left Pisa for Florence, where he remained two months, using every means of perfecting himself in the beautiful dialect of that capital, and employing himself in versifying his *Philip* for the second time. Hearing in a company of literary men some mention of the tragical death of Don Garcia, by the hand of his father, Cosmo I. he was struck with the account, and conceived the plot of his tragedy on that subject. He returned to Turin in October, not because he thought himself sufficiently *Tuscanized*, but from his not having made arrangements for a longer absence. His horses too were a powerful attraction to draw him home: indeed, his horsemanship had frequently struggled hard for mastery with his devotion to the Muses. In spite of the temptations of pleasure and friends which surrounded him at home, he continued to pursue his studies with increasing activity. Charmed with

the precision and elegance of Sallust, he set about translating his history, and accomplished his task during the winter. This translation, he several times subsequently corrected and polished.

While Alfieri was thus engaged, his friend Caluso, returning from Portugal, was agreeably surprised to find him immersed in literature, and encouraged him with his advice and assistance to persevere. About this time, he received the first and most gratifying reward of his exertions. Repairing one morning to Count Tana (to whom he always took his compositions as soon as written) with a sonnet, the Count on reading it, exclaimed—"These are the first of your verses which are worthy of you." This spontaneous tribute of sincere praise filled Alfieri with transport, and amply compensated him for the labour and humiliating tasks he had submitted to. This sonnet was a description of the carrying off of Ganimede, in imitation of Cassiani's fine sonnet on the rape of Proserpine. Encouraged by the success of this effusion, Alfieri wrote

many other sonnets, principally amatory, which were, however, but exercises of the imagination, and not dictated by love. In the spring, he versified his *Antigone*, completing this task in three weeks, with increasing facility: but, after reading it to some friends, he was convinced that his improvement was not so apparent as he had expected. He discovered in this piece abundance of false and feeble thoughts, and expressions deficient in force, conciseness, and elegance. He resolved immediately to leave Turin, convinced that the Piedmontese jargon which was spoken there, was as hostile to the Italian as the French itself. On applying for the King's gracious leave of absence, the Minister to whom he applied himself observed, that he had been in Tuscany the preceding year. Alfieri replied, that that was the exact reason why he wished to return thither. The desired permission was granted, but the accompanying demur was highly offensive to the ungovernable spirit of Alfieri; and this interview suggested to him a scheme of emancipation,

which a few months after he carried into execution. He intended to remain some time in Tuscany; and, mingling a little vanity with his passion for literature, he resolved to take with him a numerous train of horses and servants. He wished to act the parts, rarely united, of a poet and a great man. With eight horses and a proportionate suite, he set out in May for Genoa. Embarking there, with his carriage and luggage, he sent on his horses by land to Lerici and Sarzana. When within sight of Lerici, a contrary wind rose and drove him back to Rapolo, which is within two stages of Genoa. Disembarking at Rapolo, and being soon weary of waiting for a favourable wind, he left his luggage on board the felucca, and taking his portfolio (from which he never parted) he set out, accompanied by a single domestic; traversed the precipices of the Apennines, and arrived at Sarzana eight days before the felucca. Having only a Horace and a Petrarch in his pocket, the time passed away heavily, even with the company of his stud of horses, which he found at Sarzana. He bor-

rowed from a priest a copy of Livy, an author whom he had not met with since he left the Academy. Though a passionate admirer of the brevity of Sallust, he was struck with the majesty and sublimity of Livy. The story of Virginius and the glowing speeches of Icilius delighted him, and he immediately conceived the plot of a tragedy on this subject, but the arrival of the felucca interrupted its immediate completion.

The tragedies of Alfieri went through three distinct processes, which he entitled, *conception*, *developement*, and *versification*. To *conceive* was to arrange the subject in acts and scenes, fix the number of characters, and write a summary of what they were to do and say: to *develope*, to write the dialogue in prose, without rejecting any thought that occurred, and delivering himself up to the inspiration of the moment, without any regard to correctness. The third process consisted not only in putting the dialogue into verse, but in selecting, lopping, adding, and condensing, and giving to the whole a

more poetical form. After these three operations were completed, he revised and polished the work at his leisure. If on returning to his subject, after having *conceived* and *developed* it, he did not find himself actuated by the same enthusiasm, he abandoned it altogether: a tragedy of *Charles I.* and another of *Romeo and Juliet*, were thrown aside for this reason, after having gone through the first and second process. It was Alfieri's favourite object, and one which he never lost sight of, to preserve an uniformity and consistency from the beginning to the end of each play: to dove-tail the scenes into each other, so that their juxta-position could not be altered without ruining the plot; and to preserve a continuity in the style and sentiments, and imagery, as well as in the action.

From Lerici, he proceeded to Pisa, where he remained but two days, and hastened on to Sienna, partly because the Tuscan was spoken more correctly at the latter place, but chiefly to avoid a lady whom he had seen at Pisa the

year before, and whom he was afraid of falling in love with. Her person, character, and family, were unexceptionable, but his passion for study, and a conviction that he could not write or speak with the freedom essential to his literary independence, if encumbered with a wife and children, determined him to resist her attractions. At Sienna, he was introduced into a circle of five or six individuals of taste and judgment. Among these was Francis Gori Gandellini, with whom he contracted a friendship, which ended only with the life of the latter. Alfieri fancied he saw in Gandellini a strong resemblance to his own character and manner of thinking, united with more amenity, extensive learning, and an enlarged mind. This friend suggested to him the conspiracy of the Pazzi as a fit subject for a tragedy, and advised him to consult Machiavel for the details. Alfieri was so much delighted with this nervous and original writer, that after arranging the plot of his tragedy, he laid it aside to read and imitate Machiavel. This course of study produced his

two books, *Della Tirannide,* a series of close arguments and severe remarks on monarchy. Laying aside this diatribe, after reading it to a few of his friends, he resumed the cothurnus, and developed with rapidity, *Agamemnon, Virginia,* and *Orestes.* After passing five months at Sienna to his great satisfaction and improvement, he removed to Florence, intending to make a short stay there, but circumstances subsequently occurred which induced him to make that city his place of residence for many years.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH. 1777-1778.

His acquaintance with the Countess of Albany—Sacrifice of his property—Continuation of his literary labours.

DURING his visit to Florence, the preceding year, he had frequently seen the Countess of Albany, a Princess of the House of Stolberg, the wife of Charles Edward Stuart, better known as the young Pretender. Though charmed with her person and manner, Alfieri shunned being introduced to her, as most strangers were; and contented himself with seeing her at the promenade and public diversions. The Countess was in her twenty-fifth year, handsome, amiable, and accomplished, and rendered more interesting by her domestic unhappiness. The early history of the unfortunate prince, her husband, is too

well known. On the death of his father, the Court of France reduced the pension it allowed the royal exile, from twenty-four thousand crowns, to eighteen thousand. Charles Edward would not accept less than had been paid to his father, and consequently received nothing. Spain had promised him as large a revenue as France, and therefore gave nothing. A pensioner on the bounty of Churchmen, his character seemed to fall with his fortune. He gave way to ebriety in the company of his drunken followers; became gross and brutal in his manners, and harsh and insolent to his immediate dependants. Illiterate and ill-informed, he retired, on every new vexation, to consult *Nostradamus*, and continued, from the interpretation of his prophecies, to flatter himself with the hope of ascending the throne of his ancestors. Previous to his marriage, he kept a Mrs. Walkenshaw, a woman of vulgar manners, and, like himself, habitually drunken; they often quarrelled, and sometimes fought, and exposed themselves, not only to their own family, but to their neighbours. Ra-

ther than part with this woman, who was suspected to be in the pay of the British Government, and for whom he did not entertain the slightest affection, he offended, and lost the services of his most faithful and able adherents.

Alfieri was first introduced to the Countess in the great gallery of Florence, and this circumstance afforded him an opportunity of giving a whimsical proof of his gallantry. The Countess, in looking at a picture of Charles XII. happened to observe that she thought that the singular uniform, in which he was represented, extremely becoming. Two days after, Alfieri appeared in the streets, in the exact costume of the Swedish hero, to the surprise and consternation of the sober inhabitants. After struggling unsuccessfully for a time with this new passion, he gave himself up to its influence, and applied himself assiduously to cultivate the friendship of the Countess and her superannuated husband. This last attachment, however, was less violent, though more intense than the preceding ones. Instead of interrupting his studies, it added a new and

delightful incentive: her taste was a guide to his labours, and her approbation their most valued reward. He resolved not to leave Florence while the object of his affection remained there, and in consequence determined on carrying into execution a scheme, which he had for some time meditated.

He had long considered the ties which attached him to Piedmont, as an insupportable restraint, particularly the custom which obliged the possessors of fiefs to obtain leave of absence from the king, on going abroad; this permission, which was only for a limited time, was seldom obtained without difficulty, and was always granted with a bad grace. This circumstance, and the conviction that he could never print his works with safety, while subject to the laws of Sardinia, combined with his new attachment, determined him to expatriate. He might have got his permission renewed from year to year, but this state of uncertainty and dependence he could not submit to, and such an arrangement would have kept him under the control

of the Sardinian censorship. There was no way of transferring his fortune to another country, except in an illegal and clandestine manner, and to such a proceeding Alfieri could not stoop: he decided on sacrificing his property, rather than compromise his principles or independence, and, this resolution once taken, he lost no time in carrying it into effect. He made over his possessions to his sister, the Countess of Cumiana, in the most solemn and irrevocable manner, reserving a yearly allowance of fourteen thousand livres, which was about half his previous income. The King's consent was indispensable to this transfer; but his brother-in-law was too much interested, not to exert himself, and he obtained leave to accept the donation, as well as to pay Alfieri his annuity, in any country he might choose for his residence. The political sentiments of Alfieri were well known at Turin, and it was obvious that he had some other reason for this sacrifice, than mere change of place; but the king, or his advisers, probably thought it best to get rid of such a restless subject.

Though he had taken such a desperate step to free himself from the controul of his Sardinian Majesty, he continued, with a whimsical inconsistency, to wear his uniform for four years after he had quitted the army, because he fancied it became him. The necessary arrangements, and the legal formalities and procrastinations, protracted the discussion of his affairs from January till November, 1778, and harrassed and irritated him beyond measure. The settlement was still farther delayed by Alfieri's wishing to receive the sum of one hundred thousand livres, in lieu of a yearly annuity of five thousand livres. The consent of the king to this second arrangement was at length obtained, and Alfieri placed this, with other sums, in the French funds. He said nothing to the Countess of the sacrifice he was making to enjoy her society, till it was carried into effect, that her disinterested friendship might not oppose his romantic design. She blamed his precipitancy, as he expected; but finding it was too late to prevent his imprudent project, she did not trouble him with remon-

strances, and was probably not displeased at an extravagance, of which she could not but guess the motive. While Alfieri was writing letter after letter to Turin, to remove the obstacles which the king, the law, and his relations, threw in the way of the adjustment of his affairs, he had given orders to Elias, who remained at Turin, to dispose of his plate and other moveables, being resolved to adhere to his scheme of enfranchisement, let what would happen. Elias set to work diligently, and in two months time realized six thousand sequins, by the sale of his property, which his master directed him to remit to him at Leghorn. By some accident, the remittance was delayed three weeks, during which time, Alfieri received no letter from Elias, or any other person in Piedmont: though not of a suspicious nature, he began to apprehend that his valet had disappeared with his sequins; this conjecture was the more alarming, as his arrangements with his sister were not concluded, owing to the chicanery of her husband, and he had written to the latter a peremptory and defying

letter, insisting on the negociation being concluded, and expressing his determination to expatriate, though it were as a beggar. In the anxious interval which ensued, with the prospect of approaching poverty, Alfieri revolved the means of earning an independent livelihood, and the most feasible appeared to be the profession of a *horse-breaker*, for which he thought himself extremely well qualified. These chimerical distresses were however soon put an end to by the arrival of the bills of exchange from Elias.

As soon as the act of donation was passed, Alfieri dismissed all his domestics, except one. He accustomed himself to the strictest temperance and sobriety, abstaining entirely from wine, coffee, and similar luxuries, and confining himself to the most simple food. For several years he subsisted entirely on baked or boiled rice. He sold or gave away his fine stud of horses, bestowed his rich dresses on his valet de chambre, and resigned his cherished uniform. He chose a dark blue dress for the morning, which he exchanged for black in the evening, and adhered

to these colours for the remainder of his life. After giving away half his property, he felt so anxious to improve the remainder, that he became parsimonious in his manner of living, and was continually inventing new methods of economy and privation. The acquisition of books was the only expensive pursuit in which he indulged; he collected all the standard Italian works, and many of the Latin classics, of the best and finest editions. The society of the Countess presented an obstacle to the favourite object of Alfieri's ambition, the mastery of the Italian, since from her ignorance of that language he was obliged to converse with her in French. His repeated persuasions induced her to learn Italian, and she soon acquired the language so completely, that her pronunciation was as correct as that of any Italian lady, who was not a native of Tuscany.

In 1778, after having versified *Virginia*, and nearly the whole of *Agamemnon*, he was attacked by a severe illness, the result of the agitation he had experienced from his domestic embarrass-

ments, his study, and his love. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, he renewed his literary labours with unabated zeal. He wrote a poem on the death of Duke Alexander, killed by Lorenzino de Medici, as well as several amatory pieces, in which he delineated the passion he felt, and his grief for the unhappy situation in which its object was placed. In the course of the year, he sketched the plots of his tragedies of the *Pazzi* and *Don Garcia,* versified his *Orestes,* and commenced a tragedy on the subject of *Mary Stuart,* at the suggestion of the Countess. He also conceived, and divided into chapters, his three books of *Il Principe e le Lettere,* a work written to prove that poets, historians, and orators, can flourish only in a free state.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH. 1779-1782.

Separation of the Countess from her husband.— Alfieri completes twelve of his tragedies.

ALFIERI, at this part of his life, spent almost the whole of the day in his study, going out for a short ride, in the morning, for his health, and in the evening he visited the Countess and her disagreeable husband. In this manner his days passed, in an almost uninterrupted calm, enlivened by the society of the Countess, and the letters from his friends, among whom Caluso and Gandellini held the highest rank. His second fit of avarice had insensibly worn off: he had resumed a liberal, but still a moderate expenditure, and had purchased four horses, which however he regarded as too many for a poet. His principal in the French funds amounted to one

hundred and sixty thousand livres, and he congratulated himself on having secured a competent maintenance, independent of his Piedmontese annuity. The only interruption to his tranquillity resulted from the domestic unhappiness of the Countess, whose husband became every day more drunken and peevish. His ill humour was probably little alleviated by the attentions of Alfieri to his wife, though their intimacy was confined within the limits of the strictest decorum. Indeed, Alfieri was unable to see the Countess, except at dinner, or in the evening, when the husband was always present, or in an adjoining room, not so much from any jealousy the latter entertained of him, as from its being his custom. During the nine years the Countess had been married to him, he had never been out without her, or she without him.

In the course of 1779, he conceived the tragedies of *Timoleon* and *Octavia*, the subject of the one taken from *Plutarch*, and the other inspired by *Tacitus*. He developed *Mary Stuart*, conceived and developed *Rosmunda*, versified

Don Garcia, and the *Conspiracy of the Pazzi;* finished the first book of his poem of *Etruria Vindicata,* and made some progress in the second. In the following year he developed *Timoleon* and *Octavia,* and versified *Philip* for the third time, abridging it considerably. He also versified *Mary Stuart, Rosmunda,* and a great part of *Octavia.*

The ill treatment which the Countess experienced from the brutality of her husband becoming more intolerable every day, and her health being visibly on the decline, it became necessary to find means of rescuing her from his tyranny. Alfieri was thus impelled to adopt a course which he detested, and to engage in intrigues with those who had interest with the government, to effect the separation of the Countess from her husband. The ill-usage and restraint to which she had long been subjected, and which was gradually ruining her health, were sufficiently notorious, and Alfieri was ultimately successful in his application. The Countess, on receiving this welcome intelligence, went, as

was arranged, to visit one of the Convents of Florence: her husband, as usual, accompanied her, but was greatly astonished when informed that she was to remain there, by order of Government. This abrupt desertion deeply affected the unhappy prince, and he endeavoured by every concession to win her back. Finding his efforts ineffectual, he was persuaded to recall his daughter, by Mrs. Walkenshaw, to whom his previous conduct had been cruel and unnatural. He had revenged on this unfortunate girl the desertion of her mother, and now his returning fondness was as extravagant as his former aversion. The Countess did not remain long in the retreat she had chosen; she was sent for, to Rome, by her brother-in-law, Cardinal York, to be placed in a Convent, in that city.

Alfieri remained behind, disconsolate and helpless: he felt himself incapable of any occupation, his studies were abandoned, and even his love of fame forgotten. Propriety forbade him to follow the Countess to Rome, and he believed it impossible for him to exist in Flo-

rence. To add to his distress, his friend Caluso, who had resided, during the preceding twelve months, at Florence, and passed the greater part of his time in his company, was under the necessity of returning to Turin. After lingering at Florence for a month after the departure of the Countess, he determined to visit Naples, an excursion which would oblige him to pass through Rome. He set out on this journey the beginning of February, 1781, and visited Sienna in his way, to embrace his friend Gandellini. On his arrival at Rome he hastened to visit the Countess, and was allowed to see her through the grate of the convent. He found her comparatively well and tranquil: she was no longer persecuted by the presence of a drunken husband, who followed her like her shadow, and this reflection alone made their separation supportable to Alfieri. During his short residence at Rome, love made him submit to artifices, which his proud spirit would have spurned on any other consideration. He visited and paid his court to the Cardinal York, on whom the

restoration of his mistress's liberty depended, and who continued to flatter him with hopes. The Cardinal was a warm-hearted, hospitable, but testy man, peremptory in his manners, and of a slender capacity. Alfieri recommenced his journey in a few days, according to his original plan, which neither prudence nor delicacy would allow him to swerve from. The sight of Naples and its beautiful environs did not divert his grief, as he anticipated. His books wearied him—his verses and his plays were neglected; his existence seemed to depend on the punctual arrival of letters from his fair friend, and to read these over a hundred times, and to write voluminous answers, formed his only amusement and consolation. At the end of March the Countess obtained, from the Pope, permission to leave the convent, and to live separate from her husband in an apartment assigned her in the house of Cardinal York. Alfieri felt impatient to rejoin her, though convinced that he ought not, and after debating between love and prudence for a month, he set out on his return to Rome.

After so many sacrifices and struggles to free himself from the trammels of authority, love obliged him, against his nature, to play the courtier, visiting, caressing, and flattering the priests and priestlings, who intermeddled with the affairs of the Countess. Happily, she was not dependent on her brother-in-law for support, being possessed of an ample fortune, which was at her own disposal. When the necessity of his exertions was in some measure removed, and he was at liberty to pass his evenings in the society of the Countess, he applied himself with re-kindled ardour to his literary pursuits. He fixed his residence at the Villa Strozzi, a delightful retreat, near the Baths of Dioclesian. He devoted his mornings to unremitting study, except an hour or two passed in riding in the poetical solitudes of the environs, where every spot was hallowed with some recollection, to move the mind to meditation, or to kindle it to enthusiasm. In the evening he repaired into the city, to enjoy the conversation of the Countess, and returned punctually at eleven

o'clock, to his solitude. It was impossible to find, within the bounds of a large city, a spot more retired, yet more cheerful, than the one he had chosen, uniting the convenience of the town with the seclusion of the country. After having finished versifying *Polinices*, he exerted himself without interruption to complete his *Antigone*, *Virginia*, *Agamemnon*, *Orestes*, *the Pazzi*, *Garcia*, and *Timoleon*, and revised, for the fourth time, his early tragedy of *Philip*. As a relaxation from his dramatic studies, he proceeded with the third canto of his *Etruria Vindicata*, and in a fit of political enthusiasm he struck out the four first odes on the independence of America. At the commencement of 1782, he found his tragedies in such a state of forwardness, that he hoped to finish them during the year. He had conceived, developed, and versified twelve plays, and it was his intention not to exceed that number. He continued assiduously to revise, abridge, and polish them. While thus employed, the *Merope* of Maffei happened to fall in his way, for the second time; and on re-perusing it,

he felt indignant at the blindness of his countrymen, in considering this play as a model of tragic excellence. It struck him forcibly that the subject afforded materials for a much nobler drama, more simple in its construction, and more impassioned in its execution. This impulse produced his tragedy of *Merope*, which he completed with a rapidity which surprised him. He had usually allowed a considerable interval of time to elapse between the different processes to which he subjected his pieces, but in this instance, he never laid aside his work till it was completed. His *Saul* was produced in the same manner. About this time he began to study the Sacred Writings, but without any method or regularity. He felt irresistibly impelled by their perusal to attempt a tragedy on a sacred subject, and conceived, developed. and versified *Saul*, which was his fourteenth tragedy, and which he fully intended should be his last. Many subjects presented themselves in the scriptures, which he burned to dramatise, but, fearful of writing too much, he resolved to

pause. By the end of September the whole of his tragedies were copied, re-copied, and corrected. In ten months he had versified seven tragedies, invented, developed, and versified two, and corrected fourteen. These compositions he had successively read in different companies of both sexes, critical and uncritical. Alfieri knew the little dependence that could be placed on the approbation which was lavishly bestowed on them, and endeavoured to estimate his success by the involuntary expressions of the countenances of his auditors, and the interest they evinced in the progress of the story. The various opinions and criticisms elicited from his friends, he carefully and scrupulously examined, and endeavoured to profit by them.

From an author of the ardent and impetuous character of Alfieri might naturally have been expected a bold and irregular style of composition, daring flights of imagination, vehement expressions, passion distorted into extravagance, great beauties, and still greater faults. He ap-

peared formed to trample, with lawless and irrepressible energy, on established rules and opinions, and to have founded a new poetical dynasty on the ruin of the old. Instead of this, we find him circumscribing himself within narrower limits than his predecessors, entrenching himself behind the barriers of critical refinement and classical authority, lopping off every redundancy of sentiment and imagery, restraining every sally of the fancy, and thinking, speaking, and writing with the rigidity of a stoic, and the propriety of a master of the ceremonies. More anxious to render himself invulnerable to the shafts of criticism, than to seize on the sympathies of the world; to win the applause of the head, than to command the homage of the heart; he continued to re-mould, to condense, and to refine his dramas, till they acquired the hardness as well as the polish and durability of marble;—splendid monuments of art, but cold and cheerless compared to the varied and glowing creations of nature.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH. 1782-1783.

He commences printing his tragedies—Interruption of his studies—His travels resumed.

REPOSING from his labours, Alfieri remained for some time undecided whether or not he should venture on the desperate course of printing his tragedies. Before he submitted them to the criticism of the public, an opportunity presented itself of trying the effect they were capable of producing, in a less hazardous manner. A select company of amateurs had got up pieces occasionally at a theatre in the palace of the Duke de Grimaldi, the Spanish ambassador. They had hitherto produced only bad translations of French dramas. Alfieri had assisted in the performance of the *Earl of Essex* of T.

Corneille: the part of Elizabeth was indifferently played by the Duchess of Zagaralo; but, as she possessed great beauty and dignity of person, Alfieri was in hopes, that by advice and practice she might make a good actress. He offered one of his own tragedies to these noble performers, wishing to try the effect of his peculiar style, great simplicity of plot, few characters, and a nervous and abrupt versification, the opposite of the usual monotonous, antithetical dialogue, on a select and refined audience. He chose his *Antigone*, the coldest of his plays, calculating that, if it was favourably received, his others, which possessed more fire and action, could not fail of success. His proposition was eagerly accepted: the Duke and Duchess de Ceri took the parts of Hæmon and Argia; Antigone, the most important character in the piece, was supported by the beautiful Duchess of Zagaralo, and, for want of a better representative, Alfieri himself performed the character of Creon. Encouraged by the success which attended this experiment on the taste of the

public, Alfieri determined on submitting his plays to the dreaded ordeal of the press. As he found the scruples of the censors at Rome were vexatious and interminable, he wrote to his friend, Gandellini, requesting him to get his tragedies printed at Sienna, a charge which the latter undertook with enthusiasm. Alfieri wished to risk only four tragedies at first: he sent his friend the manuscripts, carefully written out, and, as he thought, sufficiently correct, but when they appeared in print, he found in them numberless deficiencies in clearness, elegance, and brevity of style. During the two months occupied in printing them, Alfieri remained at Rome, in a state of alarm and perplexity; and, but for shame, would have sent for his manuscripts back, so much did his horror of public criticism increase as the day of trial drew near. At length, the books arrived, correctly but inelegantly printed, and the author for several days was occupied in running from one friend's house to another, presenting copies of his work, handsomely bound, to propitiate criticism. He

even solicited for the same purpose an audience of the Pope, Pius VI. which was readily granted. Alfieri felt very little respect for the Pope in his pontifical character, and still less as an individual, as he was neither a man of letters himself, nor a patron of those who were. He, however, presented his handsome volume with due reverence, and his Holiness received the gift with the most gracious condescension; opened it, turned over the leaves, and put the author to the blush with the praises he lavished on it. He would not permit Alfieri to kiss his foot, but raised him from the humble posture he had assumed, tapping him on the cheek with paternal benignity. The sturdy champion of liberty was converted in a moment into a devout courtier; and taking an opportunity when the Pope, after eulogising the tragic art, asked him if he had written any other tragedies, he replied, he had written many, and among others, *Saul*, the subject of which being taken from the Bible, he wished to dedicate it to his Holiness, if he would permit him. The Holy Father ex-

cused himself from accepting the proffered honour, saying, he could not allow any theatrical piece to be inscribed to him. Alfieri was much mortified at this refusal, and still more, at having incurred it by his weakness or duplicity. The reason which induced him to adopt a line of conduct so foreign to his nature was this.—The Cardinal York had expressed much dissatisfaction at the frequent visits of the Count to his sister-in-law, and these ebullitions were reported by the Priests who surrounded the Cardinal, with the usual exaggerations. The breach between them appeared to widen every day, and by propitiating the Pontiff, Alfieri hoped to secure a friend in the hour of need against the persecution he foreboded, and which soon after commenced. The performance of *Antigone*, by gaining him a certain degree of celebrity, had only made him a more prominent object of curiosity and scandal.

In April, 1783, Prince Charles fell dangerously ill, and the Cardinal set off precipitately for Florence, to see his brother before he died;

but the Prince's malady disappeared as suddenly as it came, and, on his arrival, he found him out of danger. During his convalescence, the Priests who came from Rome with the Cardinal united with those who attended the invalid in persuading the former, that he ought no longer to overlook the conduct of the Countess under his own roof. The freedoms assumed by married ladies in Italy are sufficiently notorious, and the Countess had rather kept within than exceeded the ordinary bounds of propriety, though the ill-usage she had received from her husband would have been considered an ample justification for any deviation from them, in a country of such easy morality. We have Alfieri's solemn assurance, that their intimacy never exceeded the bounds of honour; but he admits, that his attentions were such as to warrant the jealousy of the husband and his brother. The Cardinal, on his return to Rome, intimated to the Countess, that it was absolutely indispensable, that she should put an end to the assiduities of Count Alfieri, and that nei-

ther his brother nor himself could any longer tolerate them. Not contented with this injunction, the imprudent Cardinal thought fit to proclaim his indignation to the world, raising a clamour throughout the city, and even laying his complaints before the Pope. It was reported, that his Holiness had ordered Alfieri to quit the papal territory, and this rumour, though false, being not improbable, the latter thought it best to be before-hand with his enemies, and to leave Rome before he was compelled. To be absent was less insupportable, than to remain in the same city with the Countess without seeing her: to persist in visiting her publicly was out of the question, and to see her privately might be attended with danger and disgrace. Under these circumstances, he addressed himself to the Sardinian Ambassador, and desired him to inform the Secretary of State, that, aware of the reports in circulation respecting him, and of the scandal they gave rise to, Alfieri valued too highly the peace and reputation of the illustrious lady in question not to put an end to them; that

he had resolved to remove from Rome for some time, and he should set out the beginning of the following month. This spontaneous declaration was approved of by the Ambassador, and graciously listened to by the Pope and his Secretary of State.

'After taking a melancholy farewell of the Countess, Alfieri set out from Rome, May 4, 1783. He proceeded in a state of abstraction and insensibility to surrounding objects, to Sienna, to confide his sorrows to his friend Gandellini. The latter indulged, instead of vainly endeavouring to repress the grief of his friend, and, by his active sympathy, succeeded in softening his regrets. All his faculties seemed overwhelmed by this separation from the object of his affections, and the only exertion he was capable of, was to write frequent and voluminous letters to the Countess. His literary ambition appeared completely extinguished, and even the severe criticisms which were written on his publication, and which Gandellini occasionally read to him, failed of producing any

irritation. These criticisms were of various merit and respectability, and the only thing they agreed in, was to find fault with Alfieri's style, as harsh, obscure, and unnatural. After remaining three weeks at Sienna, the fear of wearying out his friend by his importunate grief, and his own incapability of study, induced him to seek a change of scene. The Feast of the Ascension, which he had seen before at Venice, was about to take place, and he determined to proceed thither. He passed through Florence in his way, without stopping, unable to bear the sight of a place where he had spent so many happy hours. The fatigue and distraction of the journey soon improved his health, which anxiety and inactivity had visibly impaired. At Bologna, he quitted the direct route, to go to Ravenna, to visit the tomb of Dante, where he spent a whole day in weeping and meditation. Every day he gave vent to his feelings in one or more impassioned odes, which seemed dictated to him by an irresistible impulse. At Venice, when he heard of the ratifi-

cation by England of American independence, he wrote his Fifth Ode, which terminated his lyric poem of *America Delivered*. From Venice, he proceeded to Padua, and did not neglect, as on a former occasion, to visit the tomb of Petrarch, but devoted a day to meditate and versify over it. At Padua, he became acquainted with the celebrated Cesarotti, whose vivacity and politeness pleased him as much as his writings had done. In his return to Bologna, he made his fourth poetical pilgrimage to Ferrara, to visit the tomb and the manuscripts of Ariosto. He had previously seen the mausoleum of Tasso at Rome, as well as his birth-place at Sorrento. These two poets, with Dante and Petrarch, were the gods of his poetical creed, and he devoutly believed that they comprised every excellence of style, except the blank verse of the drama, of which he frequently more than hints that his own compositions are the only correct models. Arriving at Milan, he hastened to join his friend Caluso, in the country, at the château of Masino, near Verceil,

where he remained a few days. Finding himself very near Turin, he was ashamed of leaving its vicinity without visiting his sister: he went thither, accompanied by Caluso, and returned the next morning, having no wish to be publicly seen and recognized in the country he had voluntarily abandoned. He spent a month at Milan, and, during his stay there, had frequent conversations with Parini, the well-known Italian satirist. He consulted him on the structure of dramatic blank verse, but, though he found him intelligent and communicative, yet Parini, as well as Cesarotti, failed to convince Alfieri that they understood the matter half so well as himself. At the beginning of August, he departed for Tuscany by way of Modena and Pistoia. Stopping some days at Florence, he consulted many of the literati of that city respecting his tragedies: he found them very liberal of their advice, which he paid no attention to, and of their censures, which he endeavoured to despise.

On his arrival at Sienna, he committed six

more of his tragedies to the press, and attended to the printing with so much industry and perseverance, that in two months they were ready for publication, in spite of the hindrances of censors and printers. His mind, however, was so little interested in this operation, that many faults of style escaped his observation, which he corrected in subsequent editions. The application and the fatigue of this period brought on a fit of the gout, which tormented and confined him to the house for fifteen days, though he obstinately refused to keep his bed. He had experienced an attack of this disorder at Rome, but his extreme sobriety had prevented it from being very severe, or of long continuance. He had just finished printing his tragedies, when he received from Naples a long and elaborate critique, by Calsabigi, on his first publication. As this was much superior in talent, discrimination, and candour, to any which had appeared, Alfieri thought fit to answer it. In this reply, he developed and justified the principles he had adopted, and the method he had adhered to in

his compositions, and pointed out the misconceptions of which his critics had been guilty.

The object of all his anxiety, his re-union with the Countess, being still as uncertain as ever, he resolved to make a journey into France and England, not from any desire of re-visiting those countries, but from a conviction that volition and excitement were necessary to divert the chagrin which oppressed him. He was also actuated by a strong desire to purchase as many English horses as his finances would admit. His devotion to the Muses had been so much shaken, that it gave way to his old passion for horses; and, metamorphosed from a poet into a horse-dealer, he set out for London, his imagination engrossed by the forms, sizes, and colours of his future stud. During the eight months which were occupied in this excursion, he hardly ever opened a book.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH. 1783-1785.

His horse-dealing expedition to England—His re-union with the Countess—Resumption of his literary pursuits.

QUITTING Sienna, with his mind divided between melancholy recollections of his love, and rapturous anticipations of his horses, he proceeded through Pisa and Lerici to Genoa. His friend, Gandellini, accompanied him to the latter city, where they stayed a few days. Gandellini returned to Tuscany, and Alfieri embarked for Antibes, where he arrived safely after a rough passage of forty-eight hours. As soon as disembarked, he proceeded to Aix, and from thence to Avignon, where he duly visited the magic solitude of Vaucluse, consecrated to fame by the muse of Petrarch, and added his tears

to the fountain of the Sorga. In returning to Avignon, he composed four sonnets, to commemorate the emotions of the day, which he accounted one of the most happy as well as melancholy of his life. He entered Paris in a fit of despondence and ennui, and experienced the same sensations of loathing and disgust at the filth and finery of this metropolis, as on his first visit. Though he had letters of introduction to many of the French literati, the month he spent at Paris passed away very tediously. The necessity of hearing and speaking their hated language was to him a perpetual source of annoyance and irritation.

Embarking for England in December, he commenced, as soon as he arrived in London, to purchase horses: at first, one race-horse; afterwards, three for the saddle; and subsequently, six for a carriage. Of these, he had the misfortune to lose several before he left England; but for every one that died, he purchased two; and, at his departure, he increased his stud to fourteen, the number of his tragedies.

This whimsical numerical coincidence amused Alfieri, and he was wont to say to himself, "Thou hast gained a horse by each tragedy," alluding to the method of inflicting flagellation on juvenile delinquents. The composition of his tragedies appeared to have exhausted his inventive faculties; the acquisition of his horses drained his purse. Since the donation of his property to his sister, he had lived penuriously for the first three years, and liberally, but frugally, for the other three. He found himself master of a considerable sum, produced by the accumulated interest of his money in the French funds, which he hitherto had not touched. The purchase of his fourteen horses, and the expense of transporting them to Italy, exhausted the greater part of this surplus, and their support, during five subsequent years, consumed the remainder. In riding and superintending these horses, and writing letter upon letter to the Countess, Alfieri spent the time he resided in London, and thought no more of his tragedies.

After passing some months in England, he set out on his return, accompanied by his numerous suite of horses and their attendants. The whole of this journey was a series of embarrassments and disasters. Every day some new mischance befell his cavalry, and embittered the pleasure with which he contemplated them. One horse coughed, another became lame, and a third would not eat. In the passage from Dover it was necessary to stow them, like ballast, in the hold of the vessel, till their bright bay colour was not distinguishable through the dirt with which they were covered. On arriving at Calais, they were slung over the sides of the vessel into the sea, as the tide would have prevented a boat from going ashore till the next morning. By unremitting personal exertion, he succeeded in getting his invaluable cargo ashore, without any serious misadventure. The admiration his horses excited at Amiens, Paris, and Lyons, amply repaid him for his cares, and inspired him with courage and perseverance to achieve the remaining and most ha-

zardous part of his journey—this was the passage of the Alps, between Lanslebourg and Novalesa. To conduct horses, young and full of spirit, up and down the steep ascents and descents of those mountainous regions, was a task of considerable difficulty and danger. Alfieri took with him to Lanslebourg as many men as he had horses, so that each horse had its conductor, who led him by the bridle. The horses were fastened together by the tail, and to every three was allotted a guide, who, mounted on a mule, superintended and directed their march. In the midst of the convoy was the farrier of Lanslebourg, with the instruments of his profession, ready to lend assistance to any that might require it. Alfieri, as commander-in-chief, brought up the rear, mounted on Frontino, the smallest and lightest of his horses. He had at his side two aides-de-camp, agile and light of foot, whom he despatched with his orders to different parts of the cavalcade. They arrived in this manner, without accident, at the top of Mount Cenis, from which the descent

appeared rather alarming. Alfieri dreaded the vivacity of his horses, increased by the accelerated motion of their descent. He immediately changed his plan of operations, alighting and placing himself at their head on foot. To retard their descent, he placed the most heavy and least spirited of his horses in front, and his active assistants ran backwards and forwards from van to rear, to see that they were kept at a proper distance from each other. The loose and rough stones over which they passed, caused many of the horses to lose their shoes; but the arrangement was so complete, that the farrier quickly supplied their wants, and they arrived in safety at Novalesa, without laming more than one horse.

Alfieri arrived with his convoy at Turin, seven years after his expatriation, greatly improved in health by this excursion, but with his learning and power of application as much deteriorated. A few days after his arrival, he sent on his horses, of whose society he began to be wearied, to proceed leisurely to Tuscany, where he in-

tended to rejoin them, and to retrieve the time and knowledge he lost in his unpoetical pursuits. The pleasure of re-visiting Turin, and of seeing familiar faces and long-remembered spots, was chilled by the unkind reception he experienced there. His eccentricities, his expatriation, his *penchant* for freedom and for horses, were causes assigned or understood for the alienation of almost all his early friends, who either shunned or received him with marked and repulsive coldness. He had scarcely arrived, when his brother-in-law waited on him to know whether or not he intended to be presented at court. Alfieri, aware that he could not leave Turin with propriety, without paying his respects to the King, had made up his mind to submit to this disagreeable necessity, and immediately signified his assent. Next morning, he waited on the Minister, to express his anxiety to be presented to his Majesty, and to offer him his respectful homage. The Minister received him very graciously, and expressed the King's wish to see the Count settled in his own

country, and to avail himself of his services; that he could not fail to distinguish himself—and many other *et cæteras*. Alfieri briefly replied, that he was about to return to Tuscany, to superintend the printing of his works; that he was at an age when habits were not easily acquired or changed; that he had devoted his life to literature, and should employ the remainder of it in the pursuit of literary distinction. The Minister admitted, that the profession of an author was a good and a fine thing, but observed, that there were occupations more dignified and important, of which the Count was every way worthy. Alfieri thanked him for his good opinion of him, but persisted in his negative. On being presented to the King, he was received by his Majesty very graciously, and heard no more of the employment that had been tendered him. While at Turin, Alfieri had an opportunity of witnessing the public performance of his *Virginia* at the Theatre, where, nine years before, his *Cleopatra* had been brought out. One of his friends of the Academy, without

being aware of the author's approach, had got it up before his arrival. This gentleman waited on Alfieri to request that he would assist the actors with his instructions, as he had done on the performance of his *Cleopatra;* but the latter, aware of the incapacity of the actors, declined any interference which might implicate him in their failure, though he consented to witness their performance. The Italian tragic actors are in general indifferent, and treated with little respect by the public. Before the time of Alfieri, there were no tragedies which would now draw an audience. Such as they possessed were seldom acted; and for want of better, Metastasio's operas were occasionally performed, with the omission of the airs. The actors, on this occasion, having the Venetian pronunciation, their Italian declamation had all the heaviness and insensibility of a school-boy's recitations. *Virginia,* notwithstanding, was indulgently received, and its repetition was demanded by the audience for the ensuing evening.

After passing some pleasant days with Caluso, whose society seemed to revive his dormant faculties, and to rouse him from his lethargy of idleness, Alfieri left Turin for Asti, to visit his mother, whom he had only seen once since he was separated from her in his ninth year. For this amiable woman, Alfieri always professed the greatest veneration and love, yet in a period of twenty-six years, he had visited her only for a few hours *en passant*. They now took a mournful farewell of each other, with the presentiment of never meeting again in this world.

Once again beyond the Sardinian frontier, Alfieri seemed to breathe more freely, and to feel himself finally delivered from the natal yoke which he had struggled so hard to shake off. In approaching Modena, the intelligence which he received from the Countess filled him alternately with grief and hope, and kept him in a state of the most anxious uncertainty. At Placentia, he received the welcome information that she was, at length, free, and

was about to quit Rome. After contending with many difficulties, and making many pecuniary sacrifices to her husband, she obtained permission, from the Pope and the Cardinal, to go to the waters of Baden for the benefit of her health, which was much injured by the restraint and agitation she had suffered. She set out from Rome in June, and, travelling along the shores of the Adriatic, took the road to the Tyrol, at the same time that Alfieri proceeded from Turin, through Placentia, Modena, and Pistoia, to Sienna. The thought of being so near the Countess, and of being so soon removed to a much greater distance from her, at once delighted and distracted Alfieri. He thought of sending on his carriage, and taking post to rejoin her, but, hesitating and debating for some time between prudence and passion, he got the better of his inclination, and proceeded, weeping and exulting, to Sienna and his friend Gandellini.

So much had his attachment to his horses estranged him from literary pursuits, that it was

a considerable time before he could force his mind to any effort of amendment. He, however, managed to finish the third canto of his *Etruria Vindicata*, which wanted only a few stanzas to complete it, and entered upon the fourth and last canto. This poem was almost the only one of his compositions which was written in detached portions and at different times, without any digested plan. While at work on this poem, he continued to write and receive long letters to and from the Countess, which every day augmented his hopes and his desire of rejoining her. This impulse soon became so powerful, that he could struggle with it no longer. Without mentioning his intention to any one but Gandellini, and feigning to be bound for Venice, he set out, on the fourth of August, for Germany. Full of spirits from the hope of rejoining the Countess, and the reflection that he was traversing the same roads which she had taken, he proceeded rapidly towards Alsace. The poetic fit was so strong upon him during this journey, that he made

three or four sonnets every day. He wrote a poetical epistle to Gandellini, which was his first and only attempt at burlesque poetry: in this *jeu d'esprit,* he recommended his favourite horses to the care of his friend, and gave him instructions for their treatment. He met the Countess near Colmar, in Alsace, and in her society two months glided rapidly away. He seemed restored at once to the possession of all his faculties: fifteen days had hardly elapsed after his arrival, when, as if the presence of his mistress was his inspiration, he began to compose more tragedies. After writing *Saul,* he had determined to resign the cothurnus, but he now found himself impelled to the composition of his *Agis, Sophonisba,* and *Myrrha.* The two first, he had often contemplated, but had hitherto resisted his inclinations to dramatise them. *Myrrha* was a subject he had considered too revolting for the drama, until, happening to read in *Ovid's Metamorphoses* the beautiful and impassioned speech of Myrrha to her nurse, it had such a powerful effect on his imagination,

that he determined to dramatise the story. The noble play which he has constructed from such hideous and disgusting materials is, perhaps, the most perfect triumph of his genius and skill.

A week after Alfieri's arrival at Colmar, intelligence reached him of the death of the younger brother of Gandellini, and of the dangerous illness of his friend himself: the next post informed him of his death. This was a severe blow to Alfieri, and which he could not have borne with any degree of fortitude, but for the society and sympathy of the Countess, who knew and esteemed Gandellini, and lamented his death as sincerely, though not so violently, as her lover. This melancholy event saddened the short period which remained for them to pass together, and rendered their second separation more bitter. When the dreaded hour of parting arrived, Alfieri tore himself away, and proceeded on his solitary journey, bewildered and overpowered by grief, and weeping incessantly. In this state, he arrived

at Sienna, where the ungovernableness of his sorrow was augmented by the details of the sickness and death of his friend, which he eagerly and painfully listened to. He quitted the house in which Gandellini had lived, and in which he had himself occupied an apartment, and could never persuade himself to re-enter it. Sienna was insupportable without his friend, and, anxious to escape from scenes which every moment reminded him of his loss, he set out, in November, for Pisa. Meantime the Countess, re-crossing the Alps, had re-entered Italy, and arrived, in December, at Bologna, where she stopped to pass the winter, under pretext of the season being too far advanced for travelling: thus, without quitting the papal territory, she avoided returning to her former prison at Rome. The lovers were thus situated with only the Apennines between them, yet with the prospect of being separated for five months. Alfieri received letters from the Countess every three or four days, but would not venture to visit her, fearing the scandal of provincial towns, where

any person above the common rank was sure to attract the attention of all the idle and malevolent. He passed the whole of the winter at Pisa, dividing his time between his correspondence with his mistress and the exercise of his horses. In one of his brief intervals of study, he perused the *Letters* of Pliny the younger, which pleased him much by the elegance of the style, and the insight into Roman manners which they afforded him. On perusing Pliny's *Panegyric on Trajan,* he was much surprised and disappointed, recognising in it none of the characteristics of the writer of the *Letters,* and still less of the friend of Tacitus. In a fit of indignant enthusiasm, he seized his pen, and began writing the Panegyric which Pliny *ought* to have written, and which is, perhaps, the most animated and eloquent of the prose compositions of Alfieri. By intense application, the work was completed in five successive mornings, nearly in the same form in which it was afterwards printed. This occupation relieved for a time the anguish of his spirit; and, when

it was finished, he took up the translation he had made of Sallust ten years before, and applied himself to correct and polish it. The labour of revision possessed too little interest to divert the current of his reflections, and he soon laid his Sallust aside to proceed with his *Il Principe e le Lettere,* of which he had formed the plan some years before at Florence, and wrote the first book and two or three chapters of the second. In the course of the preceding summer, the third volume of his tragedies had been printed, and he had sent copies of it to most of the Italian literati. The presentation of the work to Cesarotti was accompanied with a request that he would favour him with his opinion on the style, the composition, and the conduct of his pieces. He received from Cesarotti, in April, a critical letter on the three tragedies in this last volume. Alfieri wrote a brief reply to this letter, thanking Cesarotti for his remarks, and adding notes to some of the observations which he thought admitted of a refutation. He had intreated Cesarotti to point out

to him proper models for his dramatic blank verse; and the latter, to his surprise and indignation, instanced his own translations from the French, *Semiramis*, &c. which Alfieri despised, considering them as greatly inferior in style to his own, and unworthy of the translator of Ossian. Alfieri remained at Pisa till the end of August, employing himself in revising and polishing the first ten tragedies which he had printed. At the fête which took place in honour of the King and Queen of Naples, who were on a visit to the Grand Duke Leopold, he distinguished himself by displaying the unrivalled beauty and spirit of his English horses. In spite of the exultation of this triumph, Alfieri observed with grief and indignation, that in Italy he could more easily attract attention and admiration by his horses than his tragedies.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH. 1785-1789.

He completes his nineteen tragedies—Settles in Paris—He prints the whole of his works.

THE Countess had left Bologna, in April, for France, where most of her friends and relations resided; and, after remaining at Paris till August, proceeded to Alsace, and took up her abode in the same house in which she had resided the preceding year. Alfieri set out in the beginning of September to rejoin her: he put all his cavalry in motion, and arrived in Alsace without mischance, taking with him all his property, except his books, of which he had left a large portion at Rome. He enjoyed the society of the Countess for two months only; at the end of that period, she removed to pass

the winter at Paris, and Alfieri accompanied her as far as Strasburg. This third separation was much less bitter than the preceding ones: the possibility of rejoining her at will, and the prospect of passing the ensuing summer with her, alleviated the pain of parting, and he returned to Alsace in comparative tranquillity, to devote the interval to the Muses. As soon as he was reinstated in his retreat, he began to develope his tragedy of *Agis*, and subsequently *Sophonisba* and *Myrrha*. In January, he finished the second and third books of his *Il Principe e le Lettere*, and a short piece, intended as a tribute to the memory of his friend Gandellini. He, also, conceived and wrote the lyrical part of a drama, on a plan entirely new, which he called a *melo-tragedy*, and in which his object was to unite the attraction of music with the grandeur and pathos of tragedy. The subject was the *Death of Abel;* angels and demons form part of the dramatis personæ, and are the singers of the play: Adam and Eve, and their two sons, discourse in blank verse and without music. He

now finished the fourth canto of his *Etruria Vindicata,* and polished and endeavoured to make it amalgamate with the three preceding cantos, which he had written by snatches during a period of ten years, and which did not harmonise throughout so completely as his other pieces. The Countess, in one of her letters from Paris, happened to mention her having been present at the performance of Voltaire's *Brutus.* A tragedy on *Brutus* by a Frenchman and a plebeian, and one who styled himself "gentleman in ordinary to the King," provoked the spleen of the poetical aristocrat, and he determined to show what a patrician could produce on such a subject. He immediately conceived the plots of his two *Brutuses,* such as he afterwards developed. The *twelve* tragedies to which Alfieri had restricted himself now amounted to *nineteen,* and, on the last, he renewed his vow to Apollo, that he would not increase that number. For five or six successive months, he devoted himself to literature with unremitting diligence. On ri-

sing in the morning, he began to write five or six long pages to the Countess; then applied himself to study or composition until two or three in the afternoon, and afterwards mounted his horse and rode for a couple of hours. Such close application brought on a violent attack of the gout, which, for the first time, confined him to his bed, where he remained suffering and immoveable for fifteen days. This malady probably saved him from the ill effects of a system of extreme mental exertion, which his mind might have sunk under but for this unwelcome interruption. By repose and a strict regimen, he was nearly recovered by the end of May. Accidental circumstances preventing the return of the Countess to the country at the appointed time, he sunk into a profound melancholy, which, for the space of three months, incapacitated him for effectual exertion. The arrival of the Countess, at the end of August, restored him to mental and bodily health. He returned to his labours with fresh vigour, and, by the end of the year, completed the versification of

his *Agis, Sophonisba,* and *Myrrha;* developed his two *Brutuses,* and wrote his first *Satire.* The latter species of composition, he had attempted at Florence nine years before, but had abandoned it, owing to his unskilfulness in the Italian language and versification. Before he quitted Alsace, he went over and examined all his poems, of which he had already revised and polished the greater part. After an uninterrupted residence of fourteen months in the country, he set out, with the Countess, for Paris. Uncertain how long he might remain there, he left his favourite horses in Alsace, and took with him only his manuscripts and a few of his books. The noise and offensive odour of the French capital so grievously annoyed Alfieri after his domestication in the country, that had he been alone he would not have remained a day in it; but the company of the Countess reconciled him to every personal inconvenience, and converted this purgatory into a paradise. He endeavoured to turn his stay in Paris to some account in his literary pursuits, but he found the

French *savans* very superficially acquainted with the Italian language and literature, and could not hope to derive any assistance from them on that subject. On the dramatic art they were willing to harangue for ever, but Alfieri had no great respect for their dicta, and contented himself with listening in silence, as he had no relish for contradictory discussion. He had finished versifying *The First Brutus*, and, by a whimsical sally, obliged himself to recast his *Sophonisba* entirely. He happened to read this piece to a Frenchman whom he had known at Turin, and who had given him some judicious advice on the composition of his *Philip*, which he had read to him in French prose. The Frenchman listened to him with mute attention; but Alfieri, who kept a watchful eye on his companion, did not perceive that anxiety expressed in his countenance which he expected to excite; and feeling convinced, by the time he got into the third act, that the interest grew colder and colder, by an irresistible impulse, he tossed the tragedy into the fire. The

Frenchman started up, surprised at this sally, and endeavoured to rescue the manuscript from its fate; but the infuriate author, seizing the tongs, thrust his unfortunate offspring into the middle of the fire, and kept it there till it was entirely consumed. Some months after this sacrifice, he happened to take up the original sketch, and finding in it something that pleased him, in spite of the original defects of the story, he versified it again, abridging and altering it considerably from his first design. He embraced the opportunity which his residence in Paris afforded of re-printing the whole of his tragedies in a handsome and correct edition. In order to judge of the accuracy and beauty of Parisian typography, he committed to the press his *Panegyric on Trajan*, which, being short, was finished in a month. The manner in which it was executed induced him to change his printer, and to enter into an engagement with Didot the Elder, who, besides being well-informed and devoted to his art, was perfectly conversant in the Italian language. The first volume of the tra-

gedies went to press in May, but the progress of the work was considerably retarded by the departure of Alfieri to Alsace in the following month, though arrangements were made to forward the proofs to him every week. Many errors of style, which had escaped him in the former edition, became visible in the revision of the sheets, and added greatly to the labour and delay of correction. The love of tranquillity and the country, the uninterrupted society of the Countess, the enjoyment of his much loved books, and his more loved horses, were strong incentives to this return to his seclusion in Alsace. A few weeks after their arrival in the country, Alfieri and the Countess set out to meet Caluso, who had promised to pass the summer with them, at Geneva, and returned with him through Switzerland. The first discourse which Caluso had with Alfieri, to the great surprise of the latter, turned upon matrimony. Caluso had received from Alfieri's anxious mother a commission, somewhat strange, when her son's age, habits, pursuits, and connexion were considered :—it

was a proposal of marriage with a rich heiress, the daughter of one of his father's friends. Who the lady was, Alfieri had not the curiosity to ask, or even to guess: he rejected the offer, as it was made, laughing; and they arranged an answer between them to satisfy the old lady. This affair being settled, Alfieri enjoyed for some time in his friend's society the pleasure of conversing in pure Tuscan, and of discussing his literary views with a congenial spirit. Their happiness was interrupted by the illness of Alfieri, who was attacked by a violent dysentery, which reduced him to the last extremity. Despairing of recovery, his greatest affliction was the thought of leaving his works without his finishing touches, and Caluso, at his entreaty, promised to take charge of them and of his posthumous reputation. After the fifteenth day his disorder took a favourable turn, and gradually left him by the thirtieth. In six weeks he was cured, but reduced to a skeleton; and so enfeebled, that for fourteen weeks he could not move without assistance. He remained so weak

that he was unequal to the task of revising his works; and the first three tragedies which passed through the press did not receive the tenth part of the correction he intended to bestow on them. This circumstance was his principal reason for re-printing them afresh three years after. When his friend was somewhat recovered, Caluso, being obliged by his literary avocations to return to Turin, where he was Secretary to the Academy of Sciences, wished, before going to Italy, to visit Strasburg. Though Alfieri was still weak, he resolved to accompany him to this city, that he might prolong the pleasure of his company. They set out, in October, accompanied by the Countess, and in this excursion they visited the magnificent printing-press, furnished with the types of Baskerville, which M. de Beaumarchais had established at Kehl, for the purpose of printing an edition of the works of Voltaire. The accuracy of the workmen and the beauty of the type, as well as the knowledge he possessed of M. de Beaumarchais, rendered Alfieri desirous of printing, at

this establishment, the whole of his miscellaneous works, which might have experienced some obstruction from the vigilance and severity of the French censorship. Having obtained permission from Beaumarchais to make use of his presses, he left his five Odes on American Independence to be printed as a specimen. Being perfectly satisfied with the correctness and beauty of the impression, he had the remainder of his works printed in the same manner, in the course of the two following years. A proof was forwarded to him, at Paris, every week, and he was sure to make abundance of alterations in it. He was delighted with the care and docility of the printers at Kehl, contrasted with Didot's, who exhausted his patience and drained his purse by their exorbitant charges for corrections. From Strasburg, the party returned to Colmar, and a few days after, Caluso left them for Turin. Alfieri and the Countess remained in the country till the middle of December, when they set off for Paris. Previous to his removal, he had versified his *Second Brutus*, the

last of his tragedies. As his arrangements were likely to detain him at Paris for a considerable time, his first care, on arriving, was to look out for a house, and he had the good fortune to find one, very cheerful and very tranquil, in the Fauxbourg St. Germain. The situation was fine and airy, and the prospect picturesque; and he could enjoy the seclusion of the country, as at the Baths of Dioclesian. He brought all his horses with him, though not without some difficulty: of these, he presented one half to the Countess, who continued to have a separate establishment, and was thus lightened of much trouble and expense. As soon as he was settled, he devoted himself to the harassing and laborious task of superintending the press. In February, 1788, the Countess received intelligence of the death of her husband, at Rome. She was greatly afflicted on hearing of this event, though his dissolution had been expected for some time, and though she was finally delivered from her tyrant and left mistress of herself. The only

obstacle to the legal union of Alfieri and the Countess was now removed, but it remains more than doubtful whether they were ever married. If they were married, they both took as much pains to conceal the circumstance as is usually taken to make it public; yet it is difficult to assign any adequate reason for a concealment so injurious to the reputation of the lady.*

Early in the year 1789, Alfieri had completed both his publications: the six volumes of tragedies printed at Paris, and the miscellaneous pieces at Kehl. He had his *Panegyric on Trajan* re-printed with many corrections; adding an Ode on the taking of the Bastille, and an apologue on existing circumstances, in which the English were represented as the *bees*, and

* On the tomb of Alfieri, we are told, that Louisa, Countess of Albany, was his *only love*, "quam unice dilexit." A church was not the place to boast of an illicit attachment; but the silence of Caluso, who wrote the epitaph, respecting any legal connection between them, naturally leads to the inference, that he knew, but did not choose to tell, that his friend was never married to the widow of the Pretender.

the French as the *flies*, of the fable. He had now nothing remaining unprinted, except his melo-tragedy of *Abel*, and his translation of Sallust.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH. 1789-1792.

The French Revolution—Alfieri's fourth visit to England—An unexpected recognition—Flight of Alfieri and the Countess from Paris.

DURING the latter part of the period occupied in printing, Alfieri lived in a fever of anxiety and rage. The daily disturbances from the commencement of the convocation of the States-General threatened a termination to his publications, and, after so much fatigue and so many expenses, he saw himself in danger of a shipwreck within sight of port. Didot's men were metamorphosed into politicians, and wasted whole days in reading newspapers, instead of composing and correcting. Alfieri was almost distracted; but, at length, to his great joy, the

tragedies were finished, and were forwarded to Italy and other parts of the continent, from whence he, in due time, received intelligence, that the works had sold well and met with general approbation.

Alfieri, in common with wiser men and better politicians than himself, had hailed, with joy, the first dawn of French emancipation, and had written an ode to celebrate the taking of the Bastille.* But a revolution, which uprooted the power of the aristocracy as well as the kingly authority, was utterly at variance with the patrician feelings of the haughty Piedmontese. His fancied love of freedom resulted from a hatred of the few whom fortune had placed above him, and not from any sympathy with the thousands who were beneath him: chance might have made him a patriot, but nature intended him for a tyrant. He would not have abolished despotism, but divided it among a privileged class. From the visionary zealot of freedom, who had spurn-

* As well as some other pieces, of the same tendency, which he afterwards thought proper to disclaim.

ed the mild authority of his native sovereign, might have been expected an ardent and honest sympathy in the struggles of a great nation for deliverance, and a lenient feeling even for their errors and excesses; but, before the revolution had assumed its wilder and more sanguinary character, Alfieri became as furious in his hatred of Gallic innovation, as the most bigoted supporter of the old *regime*. His own turbulent feelings had taught him that a Count ought to be free; but he had yet to learn, that a plebeian had any claim to the same privilege. He beheld, with abhorrence, the encroachments of the people, and his hatred of kingly authority gave way to his horror of the usurpation of the mob. His personal dislike of the French made him look on their proceedings with a jaundiced eye, and he could never forgive them for being free while Italy remained enslaved. He became ashamed of having ever felt and thought in common with the "tiger-monkeys," as he called them; and his subsequent writings breathe a furious and indiscriminating spirit of hostili-

ty, which reflects little credit on the judgment or feelings of the author. The dread of appearing to countenance the revolutionary demagogues induced him to delay the publication of the works which he had printed at Kehl, with the exceptions of *America Delivered* and *Departed Virtue*. Melancholy presentiments of the future, the state of inaction in which he was left by the completion of his printing, with the consciousness of having produced, in his fourteen years' labour, something capable of immortality, induced him to write his *Memoirs*, which he terminated at Paris, the 27th of May, 1790, in his forty-second year, intending not to resume his narrative till his sixtieth, when, if he lived so long, he calculated on terminating his literary career. This task being accomplished, after a short interval of restless idleness, he determined to amuse himself by translating some parts of the *Æneid*, distrusting his present competence to the task of invention and originality. At first, he translated only such passages as particularly pleased him, but, finding his em-

ployment both useful and agreeable, he began to translate it regularly. To diversify his labour, without interrupting his intimacy with the Latin, he commenced a version of Terence, intending, by the study of so pure a model, to qualify himself for writing comedies, and to form an appropriate and peculiar style. He proceeded regularly with his version of Virgil and Terence on alternate days, and, by the end of April, 1791, when he left Paris, he had translated the four first books of the *Æneid*, and *The Andrian*, *The Eunuch*, and *The Self-tormentor* of Terence. His faculty of original composition appeared extinct, and six melo-tragedies, which he had intended to compose, were given up in despair. During this and the two following years, he composed only some epigrams, to give vent to his hatred of democratic tyranny. He attempted a sort of melo-drama, entitled *Count Ugolino*, but incapacity or apathy prevented its developement. In the latter end of 1790, he made a short tour with the Countess into Normandy; and, anxious to obtain another respite

from the horrors which surrounded them, they set out, in the spring of the following year, for England. As they intended to remain there for some time, they took their horses with them, and disposed of their house at Paris. The Countess had never visited England before, and was highly delighted with it in some respects, but as little in others. Though it presented nothing new to Alfieri, he admired it still on account of the government, of which he, more than ever, appreciated the excellence; but the climate and the late hours of English society were equally destructive to his spirits and his health. He was speedily attacked by the flying gout, which he thought a disorder indigenous in the island; and the charm of novelty being dissipated, the Countess, as well as himself, began to get weary of England.

The political horizon in France became more gloomy and threatening. About this time, the unfortunate Louis made his escape from Paris; but, being re-taken at Varennes, was brought back to the capital, and confined more rigor-

ously than ever. Alfieri and the Countess experienced considerable embarrassment in their finances. They both derived three-fourths of their incomes from France, where the currency had disappeared, and was replaced by an excessive issue of paper money, which was falling every day in value. Deprived, in a great measure, of the means of subsisting out of France, they submitted to the frightful necessity of returning thither, as the only place where they could live on this depreciated paper. After making a short excursion, in August, to Bath, Bristol, and Oxford, they returned to London, and from thence proceeded to Dover, where they embarked a few days after.

In his third visit to England in 1783, Alfieri had neither seen, nor had he endeavoured to learn any thing of Lady L——. Public report had apprised him, that, soon after her divorce, her husband had died, and that she had married again with some obscure individual. During the four months he had just passed in England, he had never heard her name mentioned, and was

ignorant if she still lived. On embarking at Dover, Alfieri went to the vessel a short time before the Countess, in order to see that every thing was in readiness. Just as he was on the point of entering it, he happened to cast a look towards a number of persons who were assembled on the shore, and the first object that met his eyes was the *ci-devant* Lady L——: still handsome, and scarcely altered from what she had been twenty years before. As he gazed more intently, a gracious smile of recognition convinced him that he was not mistaken. Bewildered with the multitude of conflicting emotions which her appearance conjured up, he threw himself into the packet-boat, and did not again go on shore. In a few minutes, the Countess arrived, and they weighed anchor. Alfieri acquainted the Countess, between whom and himself a reciprocal frankness and confidence had always existed, of his unexpected interview with Lady L——. The Countess informed him, that some ladies, who had accompanied her to the vessel, had pointed out her

ladyship to her, and had related some of the incidents of her past and present life. On arriving at Calais, he could not be satisfied, without writing to the lady, for whom he had once experienced so extravagant a passion, and whom accident had so oddly brought again in his way. He despatched a letter to a banker, at Dover, to be forwarded to Lady L——, directing the answer to be forwarded to him at Brussels. In his letter, he expressed the strong emotions which her re-appearance had excited, and the remorse which he felt at having been the cause of her degradation from her former rank to an obscure and ignoble life, when, but for the notoriety and scandal of his attachment, she might have retrieved her first false step. A month after, he received her reply, expressing herself contented and happy in her present situation, and grateful for having been withdrawn from a rank for which she did not feel herself formed: that her life glided away pleasantly in the less polished and more sincere society in which she was now placed, and in the amusements of

drawing, reading, and music: that, above all, she was happy in the unalterable affection of a brother, whom she loved beyond the world. She concluded, by expressing the pleasure she had felt at hearing the name of Count Alfieri mentioned at Paris and London, with applause, as an eminent writer—and her wishes for his continued happiness, as well as that of the amiable Princess with whom he travelled, and to whom she heard he was tenderly attached.

Before returning to their prison at Paris, Alfieri and his companion made a tour in Holland, proceeding along the coast from Calais to Bruges and Ostend, and from thence through Antwerp and Rotterdam to Amsterdam and the Hague. By the end of November, they arrived at Brussels, and passed some weeks in that city with the mother and sister of the Countess. On their return to Paris, they hired a handsome and commodious house, and awaited patiently, but anxiously, for a more fortunate order of events. Two years before, Alfieri had sent for all the books which he had left at Rome in

1783, and which, added to those he had purchased in England and Holland, formed a considerable collection. He divided his time between his library and the society of the Countess, and endeavoured to shut his eyes and ears to the tumult and confusion around him. During the whole of his last abode at Paris, he studiously kept aloof from political discussion, and the society of the sanguinary factions which successively predominated. In March, he received letters from his mother, expressing her inquietude at his remaining in a country so disturbed, where the exercise of the Catholic religion was no longer allowed, and where only new calamities could be expected. Before her son's return to Italy, she breathed her last, having just completed her seventieth year. The Revolutionists were now endeavouring to abolish the only remaining vestige of royalty—the name: the famous tenth of August speedily followed with all its horrors. After this catastrophe, Alfieri thought only of withdrawing the Countess from the dangers which surrounded

them. He would not defer for a moment the preparations for their departure, and, by the twelfth, they were ready for their journey. To obtain leave to quit Paris and the kingdom, at this time, was attended with great difficulty; but, by unremitting exertions, he procured passports on the fifteenth for them as foreigners; his own from the Venetian envoy, and one for the Countess from the Danish ambassador, the only ministers who had not quitted the miserable court of Louis XVI. He had still greater difficulty in obtaining passports from the section of Mont Blanc, in which they resided. It was necessary to have a passport for each individual, whether master or servant, describing their sex, age, size, the colour of their hair and eyes, &c. Furnished with these documents, they fixed their departure for the twentieth, but a well-founded presentiment of danger induced them to set off on the afternoon of the eighteenth. Arriving at the Barriere Blanche, the nearest outlet to the Calais road which they intended to take, they found there an officer and three or

four of the National Guard, who, after examining their passports, prepared to open the barrier, when a croud of thirty or forty individuals, of the lowest description, sallied out of a neighbouring cabaret, half-naked and frantic with intoxication. As soon as these wretches saw the two carriages of the fugitives, laden with trunks and other property, they began to vociferate, that, if all the rich people were thus allowed to leave Paris with their wealth, they should all be reduced to want and beggary. A dispute immediately ensued between the few guards and the mob, the former attempting to clear a passage for the travellers, and the latter to detain them forcibly. Alfieri leaped out of the carriage into the midst of the crowd, armed with his seven passports, and began to storm and out-clamour the rabble, knowing, by experience, that this was the only way to deal with Frenchmen. The passports were read one after another, by such of the party as could read. Furious and half mad with the delay, Alfieri forgot or despised the danger which menaced them. He snatched his

passport out of their hands, vociferating, "See—hear—my name is Alfieri—I am an Italian, not a Frenchman—tall, meagre, pale, and red-haired.—Look at me—see if I am not the individual described. I have a passport—it is correct—it is given by the proper authorities—I want to pass—and by G—— I will pass." This tumult lasted near half an hour, and the crowd continued to increase round the travellers. Some cried out to burn the carriages, some to stone the party, but the greater number insisted that they were some of the *noblesse* flying with their wealth, and that they should be taken to the Hotel de Ville, to be delivered up to justice. At length the assistance of the guards, who occasionally threw in a word in their favour, and the stentorian clamour of Alfieri, bore down the opposition of the mob—the guards made signs to him to remount the carriage—the postilions sprang on their horses—and the party dashed through the barrier at full gallop, pursued by the hisses and curses of the disappointed ruffians. In two days and a half they arrived at

Calais. The Municipal Officers, who examined their passports on the road, were ignorant of the recent events at Paris, and were horror-struck on perceiving the name of the King, which had been printed on them, erased. The party found no difficulty in pursuing their journey, by Gravelines, to the frontiers of Flanders. They learned afterwards that they were the first foreigners who had escaped out of Paris and the kingdom after the fatal tenth of August. The health of the Countess requiring some repose after the anxiety and alarm she had suffered, they remained a month with her relations at Brussels. Alfieri received letters from the domestics whom he had left at Paris, informing him that on the day *intended* for his departure (but which he had luckily forestalled) orders had been issued to arrest the Countess, whose rank and wealth were crimes sufficient to have condemned her before a Parisian tribunal. Finding their victims had escaped, they declared them emigrants, confiscated their horses, furniture, and books, and sequestrated their revenues.

Alfieri and his fair friend were too grateful for having escaped the horrors of the second of September, which occurred so speedily after their flight, to repine at this deprivation of fortune, and comforted themselves with the reflection of having saved their lives, and the means of supporting them.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH. 1792-1800.

He returns to Florence—His Anti-gallican compositions—Learns Greek in his forty-sixth year—His translations from that language—Invasion of Italy by the French.

SETTING off for Italy on the first of October, they passed through Aix-la-Chapelle, Frankfort, Augsburg, and Inspruck; crossed the Alps, and arrived at Florence on the third of November. Alfieri was overjoyed in finding himself again in the Tuscan territory, and at hearing his favourite dialect spoken, and never after quitted the country of his adoption. Though they had both lost the greater part of their property, they had still enough left to live with comfort and respectability. The satisfaction of finding his tragedies a subject of conversation, and of seeing

them frequently, though indifferently performed, roused his literary ardour, which had so long slumbered. His first production, after three years of inaction, was an apology for Louis XVI. He re-commenced his translations of Terence and the *Æneid*, which he completed in the ensuing year, and re-copied and re-touched his translation of Sallust. He also wrote a short historical and satirical view of the French Revolution, as an introduction to a collection of Sonnets, Epigrams, and other short pieces, on the melancholy events in France, which he entitled *Misogallo*. This work, of which he speaks with great complacency in his *Memoirs*, is below mediocrity, and betrays all the rage of impotent scurrility. The Epigrams are seasoned with more malice than wit, and would be considered wretched, even as the production of a middling author. The *Misogallo* however contains two pieces well worthy of perusal: the defence which Alfieri would have put into the mouth of Louis in the Convention, and the apology of the author for his detestation of the French Revolution.

Of his large library, he had only preserved about a hundred and fifty small volumes of the classics, which he continued to study assiduously. He had not courage to attempt the completion of the melo-tragedies he had so long meditated. The drudgery to which he had subjected himself, during the five years occupied by the impression of his works, and the cares and disappointments he had experienced, had deprived him of that warmth and energy which he deemed essential to such compositions. His splenetic feelings prompted him to resume his satires, but, after completing the second and part of the third, his attention was diverted by a whim for performing in his own tragedies. Among his juvenile acquaintance at Florence, there were some who possessed much taste and some talent for the histrionic art. They performed *Saul* in a private house to a select audience, and with great success. At the end of 1793, he removed to a small but commodious house on the Arno, near the bridge of Santa Trinita, of which he kept possession for

the remainder of his life. The convenience, the airiness, and the delightful situation of his new dwelling had a beneficial effect on his health and spirits. A great portion of his time and attention, during 1794 and the following year, was devoted to his theatrical performances. His principal characters were Saul, Junius Brutus, Don Carlos, and Philip, which he performed with increasing spirit and success, and his co-adjutors under his care promised to become, if not a good, yet the best tragic company in Italy, had his patience, health, and finances been adequate to their continued guidance. His last performance was at Pisa, where he had been invited by a company of amateurs, during the Feast of the Illumination: the character was his favourite one of Saul.

Since his return to Tuscany, he had re-purchased many books, particularly the best Italian authors, to which he added many of the Latin classics, and the Græco-Latin editions of the Greek classics. At the age of forty-six, he felt ashamed of having remained ignorant of the

Greek language, and of having been twenty years a dramatic and lyric poet, yet not being able to read the tragic writers of Greece, nor Homer, nor Pindar, in their own language. He spent nearly a year and half in perusing attentively the Latin translations of the best Greek writers. In this period, he wrote occasional poems, and increased the number of his satires to seven. In 1796, the invasion of Italy by the French took place; an event which Alfieri contemplated with alarm and horror. Too haughty and inflexible to bend to the storm, or to fall in with the prevailing party, he endeavoured to shut himself out from the world, and prosecuted his studies with more intense application. After hovering for some time on the confines of the Greek language, he determined on making himself master of it, and set about the task with characteristic impetuosity and devotedness. He had never possessed any aptitude for the acquirement of language, and he was now at a time of life when the memory becomes less susceptible and tenacious. He had never mas-

tered the English language, though he had made several attempts, and had mixed so much in English society. He had a great aversion to the study of grammar, and was imperfectly acquainted even with his own.—The Greek characters disgusted him, and, for a long time, he was unable to retain their forms in his memory. His invincible perseverance, however, surmounted every obstacle, and, without instructor or assistance of any kind, he made himself, by the end of 1797, sufficiently master of the language, to read most of the Greek writers with facility. His intense application strengthened instead of weakening his faculties as he had apprehended. In the course of this year, he composed ten more satires, and revised a great portion of his poems. Becoming more enamoured as he became more intimately acquainted with the Greek, he translated the *Alceste* of Euripides; afterwards, the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles and the *Persians* of Æschylus; and, when more completely conversant with the language, the *Frogs* of Aristophanes. He was assisted in these

translations by a young man of talent and respectability, and the manner in which his assistance was received is singular and characteristic. The tutor slowly read aloud the Greek original, translating it as he went on, and Alfieri walked about the room with his pencil and tablets, noting down his version. When his assistant recited too rapidly, or when he did not fully understand the passage, he held up his pencil, and the last sentence was slowly repeated, or the reading stopped until a tap of the pencil on the table warned the translator to proceed. The lesson began and concluded with a silent obeisance, and, during twelve months of instruction, the Count scarcely uttered as many words to his preceptor. The latter hinted a remonstrance to the Countess on this coldness and reserve, but she assured him, that the Count had the highest esteem for him and his services.

When Alfieri first read the *Alceste* of Euripides, he was so much pleased and affected, that, in spite of his oath, he felt irresistibly impelled to form the plan of a tragedy on the same sub-

ject. This done, he continued to prosecute his studies for two years without proceeding with his tragedy, when the perusal of the Greek original heated his imagination so much, that he could no longer restrain his inclination to develope it. He composed, without a pause, the whole of the first act, and inscribed on the margin, "Written in a paroxysm of enthusiasm, and while shedding tears." He wrote the remaining four acts, sketched the choruses, and composed a preface to the tragedy, but without any intention of versifying it. However, in the latter end of 1798, the re-perusal of the original induced him to complete it, but, fearing to incur the charge of ingratitude or plagiarism, he placed this piece among his translations, by the title of *The Second Alceste*, in contradistinction to his version of the *Alceste* of Euripides. The *Alceste* is the happiest of his latter efforts, and possesses a tender pathos which Alfieri could not or would not infuse into his other tragedies, in which he aimed at a stoical elevation of sentiment. Alfieri had kept his study of Greek a

profound secret, even from Caluso. Sending his portrait, painted by Fabre, to his sister, he wrote on the back of the canvas two Greek verses from Pindar. His sister was delighted with the picture, and observing the inscription at the back, sent for Caluso to decipher it. The Abbé was surprised to find a scrap of Greek attached to the portrait, and, convinced that his friend was incapable of the paltry pedantry of making use of a quotation which he did not understand, he wrote immediately to task him with his secresy. Alfieri sent him, in reply, a letter in Greek, adding some specimens of his translations. The praises which the Abbé bestowed upon his proficiency, incited him to follow the study of the Greek with unabated ardour.

The speedy occupation of Tuscany by the armies of the Republic now appeared inevitable. In November, 1798, the French troops entered Lucca, and threatened Florence. Alfieri anticipated their arrival with gloomy resolution. Having always proclaimed his unmingled hatred

of the French democracy and its adherents, he expected to experience every species of outrage from them. He determined not to court their resentment causelessly, but, if called upon, to perish with the dignity and firmness becoming an admirer of Roman virtue. Anxious lest what he left behind him might lower his literary reputation, he set to work, examining, revising, and polishing his unpublished pieces, and in destroying what appeared unfit for the public eye. Having accomplished his fiftieth year, he seriously bade farewell to the Muses. His last poem was a pindaric ode, which he entitled *Teleutodia*: he wrote, indeed, a few sonnets subsequently, but these he took no care to preserve. He thought it better to lay aside the lyre while in the full possession of his faculties, than to wait till age or imbecility compelled him to resign it. His *Misogallo* was not yet sufficiently finished for publication, nor would it have been very prudent to have sent it forth to the world at this conjuncture: to secure this favourite but imbecile composition from the possibi-

lity of destruction, he caused ten copies of it to be made, which he deposited in different places.

Having thus "set his house in order," he felt tranquil, and prepared for the worst fortune that could befall him. To employ his time to the best advantage, he adopted a regular routine of study, to which he rigidly adhered. Monday and Tuesday, he devoted to the perusal and study of the Scriptures: Wednesday and Thursday, to Homer: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, (during the first year) to Pindar, the most difficult of the Greek poets. The Bible he perused first in the Septuagint version, afterwards in Diodati's Italian translation, and lastly in the Latin Vulgate. Homer he read in the original, pronouncing every word aloud, and rendering literally into Latin an immense number of verses for reconsideration and study. He also perused attentively the Greek Scholiast and the Latin notes of Barnes, Clarke, and Ernestus. By the most patient and persevering labour, having made himself master of the lyric flights of

Pindar, he applied himself to study and analyse Sophocles and Æschylus with equal industry. Having arranged this course of study, he sent away all the books which he did not absolutely want to a house which he had taken in the country, that his library might not again fall a prey to the rapacity of the French. The Republican army entered Florence on the twenty-fifth of March, 1799, and, on the same day, Alfieri quitted the city, and retired with the Countess to his house in the country, removing all their property, and abandoning their mansion to the occupation of the military. He remained in the country with very few domestics, and without any society but that of the Countess. The latter was well acquainted with the English, German, French, and Italian languages, and was perfectly conversant with their literature, as well as with the best translations of the classics. Her taste and acquirements enabled her to discuss with Alfieri his plans and pursuits; and the society of this amiable and accomplished female was his best and only refuge from the

tedium of study, and the agitations of his own wounded spirit. She was, indeed, the only link which united him to the world: without her, he would have degenerated into a savage, or have railed himself into a madman.

In this period of terror, distrust and apprehension kept friends and acquaintances aloof. The liberty which existed in France had been proclaimed in Florence, and the system of military despotism was in active operation. Arbitrary arrests in the night were of frequent occurrence, and young men, of the first families, were torn from the arms of their friends, and carried off as hostages. This state of things lasted till the fifth of July, when the victories of the Allies obliged the French to evacuate Tuscany. A month after this welcome event had taken place, Alfieri returned to Florence; but he was scarcely settled in his old habitation, when his equanimity received a shock which he had long expected and dreaded. There fell into his hands an advertisement of Molini, an Italian bookseller at Paris, announc-

ing a complete edition of the works of Alfieri, both in prose and verse, and adding the titles of the different pieces: among these, Alfieri recognised, with dismay, all the works which he had printed at Kehl, but never published. After his escape from France, being apprehensive that the faction which confiscated his library would not let his unpublished works escape their rapacity, he had inserted a notice in all the Italian gazettes, disclaiming any publication that might bear his name, unless published by himself. The sentiments which he had formerly maintained were so little in unison with his present feelings, and he felt so much ashamed and exasperated at having ever coincided with a set of ruffians whom he hated and despised, that his first impulse was to issue a counter-advertisement, detailing the manner in which he had been robbed, and to publish his *Misogallo* as an antidote to his former, and a vindication of his present politics. But a regard for the safety of those connected with him prevented this step, and he contented himself with repeat-

ing his former advertisement, and adding, by way of postscript, that having heard that what was called a complete edition of his works was about to be published at Paris, he renewed the protest which he had made six years before. Alfieri was at a loss to conjecture why a new edition was printed in preference to publishing that which he had printed at Kehl, and of which the type and paper were superb. Five hundred copies of the book had been left at Paris, in bales on which he had written *Italian tragedies*, a title which probably condemned them to destruction as waste paper.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH. 1800-1803.

Alfieri and the French General—Manners and habits of Alfieri in his latter years—His six Comedies—He institutes the Order of Homer —Death of Alfieri.

In October, 1800, the French re-entered Tuscany, and took possession of Florence: this irruption was so sudden and unexpected, that Alfieri had not time to escape into the country before the arrival of the enemy. He had obtained, as a foreigner, from the municipality of Florence, an exemption from having soldiers quartered in his house, an infliction which he particularly dreaded. Relieved from this apprehension, he shut himself up in his dwelling, never venturing out, except for a walk of two

hours in the morning, which was essential to his health, and for which he chose the most retired spots. But Alfieri had obtained too much celebrity by his writings to be allowed to escape individual observation: General Miollis, the French commandant at Florence, had a taste for literature, and was anxious to become acquainted with the greatest Italian dramatist. He called several times on the Count, but the latter was always invisible. Tired of these unavailing visits, the General sent him a polite message, requesting to know when he might be permitted to wait upon him. Alfieri returned a written answer, stating if the General, as commandant of Florence, ordered him to appear before him, Vittorio Alfieri would obey him, as he never resisted the constituted authorities, whatever they might be; but if he was actuated only by individual curiosity, Alfieri, naturally unsociable, wished to make no new acquaintance, and requested the General to hold him excused. The General immediately replied, that the works of Alfieri had given him a great desire

to become acquainted with the author, but as that was disagreeable to him, he should not again importune him. This was the only annoyance Alfieri experienced during the two invasions of the French, from whom he expected little better than martyrdom; and the manner in which he conducted himself on this occasion reflects little credit on his urbanity and good sense.

The French General, however, was not singular in the repulse which he experienced from the haughty recluse. Alfieri, in his later years, studiously avoided the formation of new intimacies, and all letters addressed to him, unless directed by a well-known hand or under the seal of a friend, were usually thrown into the fire unopened. He never looked into the public journals or the periodical papers, and thus deprived himself of the means of learning the extent of that fame, which it had been the labour and object of his life to earn. He never appears to have suspected that he had obtained that high rank in the estimation of Italy and of

Europe which he deserved, and which he already possessed; and his wayward imagination rejected the only illusion which could cheer or irradiate his existence. The concluding years of his life were divided between a profound melancholy and a haughty irascibility. In his more tranquil intervals, he sometimes conversed with animation, but always with a degree of bitterness. At other times, he hardly ever spake in company, and as seldom smiled. His temper depended not a little on his favourite horse, which was led out to him every morning, and which he used to feed with his own hand. If the animal neighed, or exhibited any symptom of pleasure or gratitude, his countenance lost something of its austerity and gloom, but the insensibility of the horse to his caresses was usually accompanied by the increased dejection of the master. Alfieri passed a considerable portion of his time in the different churches, frequently sitting there, silent and motionless, from vespers to sunset, apparently absorbed in listening to the psalms of the monks, as they

rose from behind the screen of the choir. His recorded opinions and the manner of his death would lead us to conjecture, that he did not seek these holy places to indulge in devout or penitent meditation, but to cherish a solemn and unearthly melancholy, and to mitigate the intensity of those turbulent feelings which harassed and maddened him.*

Piedmont, already revolutionized, had, in imitation of its French master, changed its *Royal* Academy of Sciences into a National Institute, on the plan of that of Paris, uniting the *belles lettres* with the fine arts. This society named

* His floating robe around him folding,
Slow sweeps he through the column'd aisle ;
With dread beheld, with gloom beholding
The rites that sanctify the pile.
But when the anthem shakes the choir,
And kneel the monks, his steps retire ;
By yonder lone and wavering torch
His aspect glares within the porch ;
There will he pause till all be done,
And hear the prayer, but utter none.

Byron's Giaour.

Alfieri a member of their Institute, and sent him a letter, informing him of the appointment. Alfieri, having been previously informed, by Caluso, of their intention, returned their letter unopened, and made known to them his rejection of the proffered honour in no very polite terms. Their having addressed him by the title of *citizen* was sufficient to rouse the dignified resentment of the patrician bard. About this time, Alfieri gave way to a new, or rather an old impulse to write comedies, and arranged the plots of six, out of twelve which he intended to compose. These pieces are much more remarkable for their extravagance than for any merit in the design or execution, and only excite our admiration of the persevering infatuation of the author. One of them is a satire on Italian marriages, and is entitled *The Divorce*. The others are after the manner of Aristophanes, and are all on political subjects. Three of these, *L'Uno (The One) I Pochi (The Few)* and *I Troppi (The Too Many)* expose the faults of the monarchic, the aristocratic, and

the popular government; and a fourth teaches us, that the One, the Few, and the Too Many, should be blended together, and that their union may compose a somewhat tolerable system. *Il Finestrino* is a satire partly against religious impostors, but principally against the philosophers, who would destroy the old religions without substituting any other in their stead; a bad one, in the opinion of the author, being better than none at all. Anxious to develope these heterogenous conceptions, which were intended to close his literary career, he resolved to put forth all his remaining strength in their composition. He wrote them in the same order in which he had conceived them, and allotted only six days for the developement of each. This immoderate exertion brought on a severe illness, before he had finished his fifth comedy. His malady was violent and short, but was attended by a long convalescence; so that he was not able to resume his labours until the latter end of 1801. He then finished developing his fifth and sixth comedies, and, having surmount-

ed this fatiguing task, he felt relieved from an insupportable burthen.

At the end of this year, he received intelligence of the death of his sister's only son, the young Count de Cumiana, in the flower of his age. Though Alfieri had seen little of this youth, he was deeply afflicted at his death, and he felt some chagrin at seeing his possessions pass into the hands of strangers. His sister's three daughters were all married, and this event induced him to enter into new arrangements with her to secure the payment of his pension, that he might not be in any way dependent on his nieces or their husbands, with whom he was not at all acquainted. The peace of Amiens had restored some degree of tranquility in Italy; and the French having abolished the paper currency at Rome, as well as in Piedmont, Alfieri found himself delivered from the embarrassments he had experienced during the last five years. Estranged from the gaieties of life; plain in his attire, which was always black; seeing no company; and profuse only in the pur-

chase of books; he found himself amply rich for a man of his unostentatious habits. In the summer of 1802, he began versifying his comedies with the same ardour and application with which he had conceived and developed them, and again felt the evil effects of this unremitting labour. Throughout these avocations, he never infringed upon the three hours he had devoted to reading and studying every morning. By the time he had finished versifying two of his comedies, he was attacked by an inflammation in the head: his body became covered with biles, accompanied with an eresipelatous affection and violent spasmodic pains, which confined him to his bed for fifteen days. Caluso, who had promised him a visit in Tuscany for some years past, arrived at this period, and remained with him for twenty-seven days, the longest time that his engagements at Turin would allow. The Abbé read over to Alfieri his satires, his translations from the Greek, the Æneid and Terence, with which he was well pleased. The comedies, Alfieri would not venture to show him,

considering them still too imperfect even for the eye of friendship. On his departure, Alfieri sunk into a state of grief and despondency, which it required all the care and attentions of the Countess to alleviate. He was cured of his disorder by the end of October, and immediately resuming his task, finished the versification of his comedies by the end of December. Increasing infirmities reminded him of the resolution he had taken to close his literary career while in the full possession of his faculties. He, however, continued to prosecute his studies, occasionally examining his own writings for the purpose of correcting and polishing them. He felt anxious to prepare an edition of his unpublished works, but a dread of the harassing task of revision deterred him. He took the precaution of leaving a correct manuscript of those pieces which he thought worthy of seeing the light, and of burning the remainder. Vain of having made himself master of the Greek language at such an advanced period of life, Alfieri hit upon a somewhat singular device

to reward and commemorate this exploit: this was the institution of THE ORDER OF HOMER, of which he enrolled himself a member. He caused a superb collar of THE ORDER to be made, of solid gold, richly ornamented with precious stones, and inscribed with the names of twenty-three poets, ancient and modern. To the collar was appended a cameo, with the head of Homer, and on the reverse two Greek verses of his own composition, and of which he made an Italian translation.* With the invention of this institution, which he flattered himself with the hope of perpetuating, Alfieri terminated his *Memoirs*, on the fourteenth of May, 1803. From this period, he relinquished all his literary pursuits, with the exception of his comedies, the completion of which was the principal object of his solicitude. The gout, which usually annoyed him in the changes of the seasons, attacked him in the spring of this year with unusual vio-

* Forse inventava Alfieri un Ordin vero
Nel farsi ei stesso Cavalier di Omero.

lence. His digestion had, for some years, been difficult and painful: and, in order to ward off, or, at least, to weaken the attacks of the gout, he continued to diminish the quantity of food which he allowed himself, moderate as it was, convinced that a spare regimen was conducive to his health and to his power of application. In vain the Countess entreated him to abandon a system of abstinence, under which his constitution was evidently sinking: he continued obstinately to adhere to the resolution of starving his disorder, and persisted in labouring on his comedies, fearing that the approach of death might deprive them of his finishing touches. He also constantly devoted some hours every morning to reading, according to his custom for some years, and in this manner continued to labour and grow worse, until the latter end of autumn. The presence and society of Caluso, who remained with him nearly the whole of this period, assisted in dissipating the languor of this protracted illness. On the third of October, Alfieri rose, apparently in better health and spirits than

usual; and after his morning studies, went out for an airing in his phaeton. He had scarcely set out, when he was seized with a cold shivering: he alighted, expecting to dissipate it by walking, but was attacked by an acute pain in his bowels, which obliged him to return. He remained extremely ill with a fever during the day, but was somewhat relieved in the evening. He passed the night without much suffering, though troubled with a continual inclination to retch. The next day he dressed himself, and descended from his apartment to the hall to dinner, but was unable to eat. He passed the greater part of the day in sleep, and was extremely restless during the night. On the morning of the 5th, he wished to take the air, but was prevented by the day being rainy. In the evening he took his chocolate as usual, and with apparent relish. In the succeeding night the pain in his bowels returned, and his physician ordered sinapisms to be applied to his feet: they had scarcely began to operate, when the Count ordered them o be taken off, fearing that the

sores they produced would prevent his walking. On the following morning the physician called in another member of the faculty, and the result of their consultation was to order fomentations and blisters, to be applied to the lower extremities. To this remedy the patient, though evidently in danger, obstinately refused to submit, as it would deprive him of the use of his legs for some time. He was visited in the course of the day by a priest, whom he received with more urbanity than was usual with him, but parried the object of his visit by saying to him, "Have the kindness to look in to-morrow: I trust that death will wait for four-and-twenty hours." In the evening he took a dose of opium, which alleviated his pain, and procured him a tolerably tranquil night. The relief thus obtained was accompanied by occasional delirium: while this lasted, he talked repeatedly of his studies, and of his labours for thirty years, and repeated a number of Greek verses from Hesiod, an author whom he had never read but once. At six in the morning the Countess, who had attended

him almost incessantly, retired to take some repose. Contrary to the advice of his physicians, Alfieri persisted in taking oil and magnesia, which had speedily a prejudicial effect, and in two hours he appeared in imminent danger. The priest at this time made his appearance: he found Alfieri sitting in his arm-chair, suffering from a difficulty of breathing, which almost choked him. "At present," said Alfieri, "I imagine I have but a few minutes to spare," and requested Caluso, who was present, to fetch the Countess. When he saw her, he stretched out his hand, exclaiming, "Clasp my hand, my dear friend, I die." A moment after his eyes became dim, and he expired.

Thus died Vittorio Alfieri, in his fifty-seventh year, October the 8th, 1803. His remains were deposited in the church of Santa Croce, at Florence, near the tombs of Michael Angelo and Machiavel, and a plain stone was laid over them, till replaced by the splendid monument which the Countess erected to his memory. It is the work of Canova, but is considered as

being by no means one of his happiest conceptions. A little step, opposite the monument, is shewn as the spot where the Countess periodically contemplates the tomb of her beloved Alfieri.

THE END.

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