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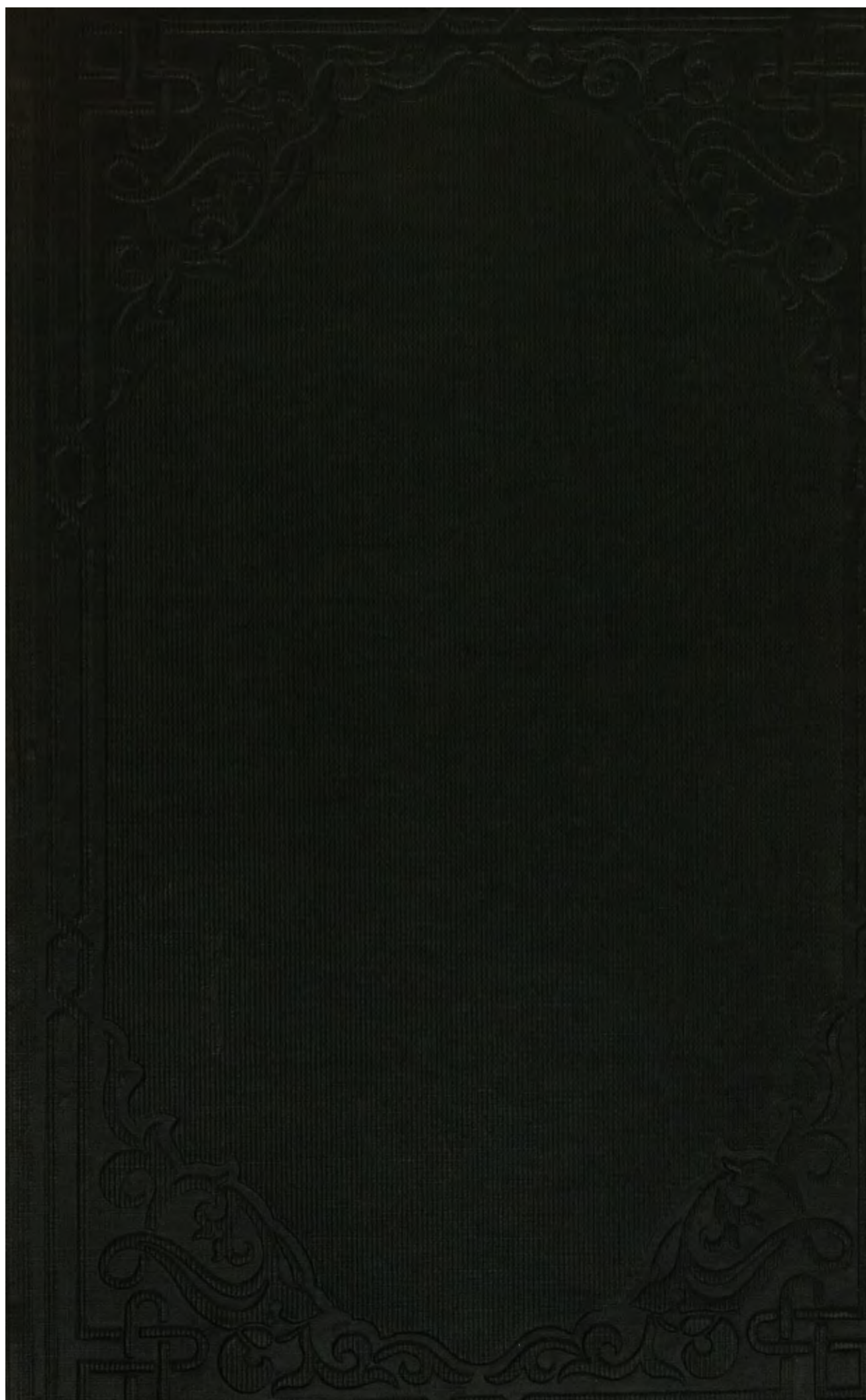
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47.1488.





FLORENTINE TALES.

FLORENTINE TALES:

WITH

MODERN ILLUSTRATIONS.



LONDON:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THREE of the stories in this volume have appeared before; but one of these three, "The Abbot of Florence," has been *entirely* re-written. The Poems of "Salvestra" and "Fiorante" have also received revision. Four of the remaining five are now, for the first time, published. The title of the volume, which previously confessed its obligations to Boccaccio, is now properly altered; the Author being indebted to him in the present issue for three subjects only out of the eight. The more generic appellation of "Florentine Tales" has therefore been preferred.

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THE
ABBOT OF FLORENCE.

A Tale from Boccaccio.

CANTO I.

I.

It was a mossy Abbey, hid away
In the deep bosom of a leafy wood,
Wherein the oily monks were wont to stray,
Unchecked, in quiet contemplative mood,
And chiefly at the silent close of day;
For then the musing fancy seeks to brood
On themes which lift our very souls above,
And mingle all our thoughts with heaven and love.

L

B

II.

Twilight ! so soft, so tender, and so sweet,
Subtle to win, to “startle and waylay,”
'Tis then that lovers' souls grow indiscreet,
And “winged words” fly on their burning way :
Then sage and saint feel clad in thought complete,
And some come forth to meditate and pray ;
While others in much odour we could mention,
Like them come forth, but not with like intention.

III.

And sometimes I have heard the spiteful hint,
That pious ladies love the twilight too,
But scandal gives to every thing its tint,
And colours all that saintly people do ;
Such tattlers have a kind of jaundiced squint,
As men who look through spectacles of blue,
Which make the very fairest of complexions
Open to what the critics call “*objections.*”

IV.

But to return :—the Abbot of this place
Was very holy, as such men should be,
Yet sometimes, when he saw a pretty face,
He felt as *always* feel the laity ;
And though he vehemently prayed for grace
To curb such grievous impropriety,
He could not (though he prayed in ghostly fashion)
Quench altogether the disturbing passion.

V.

This gnawed our Abbot to the very bone,
Well knowing it would bring down heaps of
scandal
If his peculiarity were known,—
For it would give the godless ones a handle ;
And withered spinsters, too, would sigh and groan,
Swearing the holy offices were manned ill :
He therefore, feeling for the Church's glory,
Was sly in all his dealings amatory.

VI.

Love rears a throne in proud hearts : in the pure
He builds and consecrates an altar, where
His holy worship ever shall endure !
In sensual souls he forms, with wanton care,
A bower where syren beauties do allure,
And flowers fling out their fragrance to the air ;
In sordid hearts he moulds a golden calf,
And builds in vain ones what makes all men laugh.

VII.

This self-denying Abbot had a neighbour,
A Franklin named Ferando, dull and wealthy,
Who'd gained the best part of his cash by labour,
And had been, as all working men are, healthy.
He loved to see girls dance to pipe and tabor,
And often laughed outright to watch the stealthy
And merry glances of some canny vixen,
Who'd capture any man she chose to fix on.

VIII.

Ferando had a wife of wondrous beauty,
Who went to our good Abbot for confession,
Which is, of course, a pious woman's duty,—
Alas! that it should lead them to transgression!
But I, though sorry, must admit that few tie
Their faith to ONE; for every new impression
Wipes out all earlier traces that remain,
“Wax to receive,”—wax also “to retain!”

IX.

Fair Gertrude's dress was quite *correct* in fashion,—
That is to say, she wore it very low,
Which awfully stirred up the Abbot's passion:
'Tis wrong that ladies dress, or undress, so!
But I myself have seen some maidens rash on
That point, who really made my cheeks to glow;
For showing all their charms so very nude,
Is half an invitation to be rude.

X.

Our Abbot felt the witchery of this

Sweet woman telling all her sins to him :

She'd mourn the coldness of her husband's kiss,

While *he* would tell her of the Cherubim,

The wondrous rapture of celestial bliss !

At last, his longing eyesight growing dim

Beneath the brightness of her beauty's splendour,

From the sublime would tumble to the tender.

XI.

In time his passion swallowed every thought,—

He had, in fact, no other meditation ;

Daylight and darkness the same vision brought,

As overseers deal out the changeless ration :

Or as a bee, in new-made honey caught,

Dies overwhelmed by thorough saturation.

Thus our good Abbot felt the Franklin's wife

At once the joy and torment of his life.

XII.

The wife and Bennet (so the monk was called)
Would often in the Abbey's garden stray.
This pleasant garden was full lofty walled,
And spreading trees were growing every way,
While jessamines and honeysuckles crawled
O'er buttresses fast creeping to decay;
And here and there, above one's drowsy head,
A mighty vine its leafy shadow spread.

XIII.

By heavens ! it must be a pleasant thing
To live and die within a garden land,—
To see the bursting herbage in the Spring,
And watch as day by day the buds expand ;
To hear the sweet birds in the morning sing
Those songs which the pure heart can understand ;
To sit at noon beneath the leafy tree,
Whose rustling makes a music like the sea.

XIV.

An ancient Abbey in a twilight gloom,
With music speaking like a soul of sound
That trembled 'twixt the bridal and the tomb,
While incense, curling its white smoke around,
Seemed some old anthem dying in perfume ;
Or voice of violets from garden ground,
Which o'er the craving sense so gently steals,—
No voice can utter what the spirit feels.

XV.

'Tis beautiful to see the sunset thrown
Through gorgeous windows of flushed blazonry
On the grey pavement of sepulchral stone,
'Neath which the shrouded dead oblivious lie ;
Then, pacing down the echoing aisles alone,
To watch by slow degrees the daylight die,
While now and then some fitful gust moans near,
As though the buried whispered in your ear.

XVI.

Do the dead whisper to us? Who can know
The mood or season when the soul is stirred
To the great depths, whence calm its fountains flow,
By the strange mystery of some haunting word,
Some dread presentiment, impending woe,
Some footstep which the ear hath never heard,
But whose approach we feel, until at last
The heart, recovering, tells us,—it has past!

XVII.

Do the dead whisper to us? Ah, they speak,—
Their voices come from out the by-gone time
At intervals of heavenly peace, and seek
The heart that pines for folly or for crime,
Or suffered wrong, or love despised. When, weak
Or wrung, the soul stooped from its height sub-
lime,
Who has not heard, when silent and alone,
From the still grave some old familiar tone?

XVIII.

The faces of the dead unchanged remain
For ever in the record of the eye,
And on the pensive mind return again,
At the first biddings of its phantasy;
There, all undimmed by sorrow, time, or pain,
Fresh as an angel from the azure sky,
Stands forth unveiled the enfranchised from the
tomb,
Her eye relit, her cheek renewed in bloom.

XIX.

And then to watch the twilight shadows creep
Over the mighty heavens, like a thought
Glooming the mind; to know the world asleep,
And Nature to the breast of midnight caught;
To feel the silence, passionately deep,
Till every sense is to its climax wrought:
Oh! for one year of life like this, I'd give
In glad exchange the years I have to live.

XX.

Oh ! for a day of leisure and sweet thought,
When I could roam among the daisied meads,
And feel the music of life's morning brought
To memory's ear ; the crispèd sound of reeds,
Half-moan, half-scream, at fitful pauses caught ;
The dreaming heart with its heroic deeds,
Its loves, regrets, fond hopes, and tender fears,
And gentle thoughts, which cloud the sight with
tears !

XXI.

E'en while I muse, the grave of buried time
Re-opens, and a sunny day in June
Gathers around me in its glorious prime,
As a bright halo circles the wan moon :
I seem once more to hear the village chime,
Which told the hungry villagers 'twas noon ;
I see them sit beneath the shady trees,
Enjoying Barclay's stout with Gloster's cheese.

XXII.

But where's the friend who shared this pleasant day
 With me, and all its sunshine, birds, and mirth ?
Deep bedded in the consecrated clay !
 Great heavens, what sorrows slumber in the
 earth !
Six thousand years yet now have rolled away,
 And still it swallows up all human birth ;
Each moment adds to this vast globe of graves,
Made up of tombs as ocean is of waves.

XXIII.

Dread theatre, where each man acts a part
 In the great tragedy of human life !
Thou torture-engine of the human heart,—
 The home of bitterness, despair, and strife,
Where Death for ever rears th' uplifted dart,
 And hungry murderers whet for bread the knife ;
Where millions grin at man through prison-bars,
Now, slavish sycophants ! admire the stars !

XXIV.

The shadow of Mont Blanc is thrown afar
To sleep upon the bosom of thy stream,
O sweet Geneva ! of all lakes the star :

But thou must be as placid as a dream,
Or the least breeze will all the vision mar.

So, in calm moods, some shade of the Supreme
May cast its awful impress, and impart
God's image to the uncorrupted heart !

XXV.

In the fierce glare of day if ye descend
Some quiet pit, ye'll see the stars shine bright ;
And if ye to the loftiest Alps ascend,
The once-blue skies frown on ye black as night :
The sunshine and the azure heavens depend
On man, and that he gaze on them aright ;
For if he sink too low, or scale too high,
He sees no beauty in the glorious sky.

XXVI.

But these reflections on the stars delay
Somewhat the progress of Boccaccio's story ;
Yet love-sick snobs have had so much to say
On solemn midnight and its starry glory,
Which are at best but mouldy lumps of clay
Mildewed with age, (the Poets call them 'hoary,')
That I resolved, through my small drop of ink,
To let the snobs and stars know what I think.

XXVII.

Here often in the abbey-garden sat
The Abbot, Gertrude, and her jealous spouse,
Spending the hours in theologic chat
Beneath the cooling shadow of the boughs ;
Such furious love her charms at last begat
In Bennet, that it quite disturbed his vows,
And vexed him so, he took no pleasure in
His meals and masses, but was growing thin.

XXVIII.

One day she mourned at the Confessional
Her husband's jealousy, which grew absurd;
And said, that were her life transgression all,
She could not more suspicion have incurred.
The holy man, with twang professional,
Replied, when he this woful case had heard,
"That, of a truth, it was a great omission
On her part, not to justify suspicion."

XXIX.

He then discoursed of spiritual pleasures,
And talked a little quiet "double entendre,"
Declaring love the sweetest of all treasures,
More precious than the diamonds of Golconda,—
And ever kept up his besieging measures,
And getting every passing moment fonder;
Until, at length, he cast his eyes above,
And very coolly said "that heaven was love!"

XXX.

The buxom Gertrude, old Ferando's wife,
Mistook the meaning of the Abbot's lecture,
And said, that midst her matrimonial strife,
She scarce could get of heaven the least conjecture ;
No, she would rather lead a widow's life,—
Would rather that all sorts of passions pecked her;
Would rather be the inside of the bellows,
Than live with one so past all reason jealous.

XXXI.

“ Therefore, good Father, give me your advice
How I may cure my spouse, this sottish swine,
Of jealousy,—that inconvenient vice;
It leads away my soul from thoughts divine,
So that I quite despair of Paradise ;
Whereas I'm sure, if wedded peace were mine,
I should all wives in piety eclipse,
And nought save Watts' hymns should pass my lips.”

XXXII.

“ Well,” said the monk, “ no question can be had
That such a husband renders life unpleasant,
And poisons holy thoughts. Indeed, I’m sad
To think that such a gross and stupid peasant
Should have so fair a woman ; still I’m glad
In thinking that ’tis but for the present ;
For I will undertake to cure Ferando,
And do for you what none else living can do.

XXXIII.

“ For in my youth I studied pharmacy,
With other things my grave pursuits to vary ;
And for your gentle sake a charm I see,
In acting for the once apothecary
Without a licence. I’d not harm a flea,—
Much less a man, however arbitrary :
Therefore if you will only keep it close,
I’ll cure your husband with a single dose.”

XXXIV.

“ Good Father,” said the lady, “ never doubt
That, though a woman, I can hold my tongue.
I will undertake the secret shan’t come out ;
If needs be, in my mouth I’ll cram a bung,
So that my nimble tongue can’t wag about.
In future times by poets shall be sung
This somewhat more than miracle complete,—
That I, though woman, was for once discreet ! ”

XXXV.

“ I doubt you not,” said he. “ I’m quite content,
And therefore tell you that the only cure
Is Purgatory, where he must be sent,
Its purifying process to endure ! ”
“ Good Heaven ! ” said she, in blank astonishment,
“ My husband is not dead,—nor sick, I’m sure ! ”
“ Nay, he *must* die ! ” the Abbot slily said :
“ He never *can* be cured until he is dead.”

XXXVI.

“What! kill Ferando? Oh, you wicked monk!”

“Listen, dear daughter, to my plan,” said he;

“For when my wondrous potion he has drunk,

He will appear as dead as dead can be,

And his poor soul in Purgatory sunk,

Where we will cure him of his jealousy.

After a time we will bring him back to life,

Cleansed from his sins, and doting on his wife.”

XXXVII.

“Do what you will,” the injured wife replied,

“So that you cure him of his cruel doubts.

Alas! that beings, more to heaven allied

Than earth, should be so prone to spleen and pouts,

So full of whims, of coquetry and pride,

So fond of plays, and masques, and balls, and routs,

And every kind of pomp and vanity,

From which we every Sunday vow to flee.”

XXXVIII.

Alas ! that those, who in their spinster state
Are more angelic than the seraphs' selves,
And whom, when 'unappropriate,' we rate
More gay and lightsome than the fairy elves,
Should, when they've blessed some happy mortal's
fate,
Lay all their graces on the household shelves;
And being married, shut at once their shop,
And let their stock of spinster virtues drop.

XXXIX.

But I digress,—all first-rate poets do.
The solemn dolt that never soared beyond
The simple fact that one and one make two,
Whose mind is like a shallow stagnant pond,
Whose only soul is that beneath his shoe,
Calls us "too vague." I own I'm rather fond
Of mystifying fools, and their surmises :
I answer just as Solomon advises.*

* Prov. xxv. 5.

XL.

Sam Johnson likened critics to weak wine,
Which turns to vinegar for lack of strength,
Since most at first, as feeble rhymesters whine,
Ere falling to their natural state at length,
How can a mongrel worship the divine ?
Or know of awful truth the vast extent.
'Tis certes true, that as weak wine's the best,
Of vinegar—the critics know the rest !

XLI.

“ Hereditary critics, know ye not,
Who would be free ” of your exalted sty
Must first themselves the snowy paper blot,
And write a book which nobody will buy ?
Then forth ye rush out, critics, and red hot
Snarl, bark, and bite at all the passers by ;
And though some fools may buy your praise, I say
I'd rather have your venom any day !

XLII.

'Tis said, that in these times a bard's a martyr:

But how? Who martyrs him unless himself?

The man whose bark's at sea without a charter,

Who wonders if 'tis wrecked upon a shelf?

And he who what he calls *his lays* would barter

For vain distinctions, or still vainer pelf,

Doth the world wrong to scorn him, or to chide?

A martyr call him? No, a suicide!

XLIII.

Epics are somewhat at a discount now,—

The last was knocked down at a farthing; yet

Eight large editions crown the starry brow

Of bald "Orion,"—no mean coronet!

But, after all, the price was very low,

And to my dying day I shan't forget

When epics "four a-penny" at the shops,

Brought down the price of taws and lollypops.

XLIV.

I'd build a little gaol for all these men
Who flood us with such deluges of rhyme :
For the more hardened ones I'd have a den
Dug deep, and filled with critics' filthy slime.
There should they live, like hedgehogs in a fen ;
For now their verse becomes a serious crime,
And wants judicious discipline and physic,—
I give them up to Doctor Bell of Chiswick !

XLV.

I think his plan of treatment rather cruel.
He first debars them all from pen and ink,
Then doses them with Rogers' water-gruel ;
After this discipline they cease to think
Of verse, but take to Brougham, and Locke, and
Whewell,
Until the "rolling eye" can scarcely wink.
He then considers the tamed maniacs fit
To be the lords of their *recovered* (?) wit !

XLVI.

Yet there are prosperous books. I've heard of one
That filled these three great kingdoms with its
fame;
It spake of heaven and earth, and sea and sun,
And to all kinds of learning it laid claim;
And though it has through five editions run,
No one has yet found out the author's name.
But if you're anxious for the revelation,
I know who wrote the "Vestiges of Creation."

XLVII.

This book, this very learned book, was made up
By Ainsworth and Carlyle, those great twin stags,
Whose literary capital, when paid up,
Would scarcely furnish stables for such nags
As Pegasus:—no matter, they keep trade up,
And one his wit, and one his wisdom brags.
Their shares in this concern may thus be reckoned,—
Tom finds the first, and William finds the second.

XLVIII.

I'll now return, and ne'er digress again ;
Just as a sinner (when fallen ill from sinning,
And being for the time in frightful pain,)
A virtuous life determines on beginning :
But next day growing well, he can't refrain
From Folly's path ; for Wisdom ever dinning
His old dull lessons in our ears, makes youth
To stuff his fingers there,—and so chokes truth.

XLIX.

“ Father !” said Gertrude, “ I thought *you* a saint ;
I never dreamed that *you* could feel so naughty.
Upon my word I'm half inclined to faint,
To think that one so very far past forty
Should talk to ladies in a way so quaint.
How is it that you can't let sense or law tie
Your passions down to a correcter level ?
Pray, are you moved by wine, or by the Devil ?”

L.

“ Be not amazed,” the Abbot quoth, “ fair dame,
That I have passions, like a human creature :
Call me not old, nor of an ugly frame,
But rather of a free and comely feature.
Methinks, my daughter, you’ll be much to blame,
If you decline to let me have the key to your
Affections ; for whatever I may do,
I can but have your future good in view.

LI.

“ So while my friend Ferando’s being cured
In Purgatory of his jealous folly,
And your eternal happiness secured,
I’ll comfort you,—or share your^{*} melancholy ;
Deeming, for your sweet sake, all pain endured
With perfect joy, and resignation wholly.
No one shall know our love, so don’t be cruel,—
Allow me to present you with this jewel !”

LII.

At this he slipped a bracelet on her hand
Of finest gold, with glittering diamond graced ;
A language this all women understand,
And I confess that I admire their taste.
“Nay, pause no more : the holiest in the land
Would yield, were they in such position placed.
You know I am a priest of too much virtue
To do a thing that could in conscience hurt you.”

LIII.

The lady cast her eyes upon the floor,
And seemed uncertain rather, and uneasy ;
But loving costly jewels somewhat more
Than virtue, which ofttimes is made to teaze ye,
She thought, as many a dame has thought before,
(Not knowing that the path to sin is greasy,)
That she'd defeat the Abbot's plan, yet gain
His jewels to reward her for her pain !

LIV.

She told him she'd take time—that she'd consider :
At all events, he need not pine to Hades.
She thought how she should make a pretty widow,
For weeds are an announcement from the ladies
“ The wearer is for sale : the highest bidder
To be the buyer,—when the duty paid is ! ”
An old divine once said,—and not in fun he,
“ That matrimony is a matter o' money.”

LV.

We left the lady with the Abbot's ring
Upon her finger, leaving him in doubt
Whether he had not done a foolish thing,
In thus investing property without
Security. Next time, he thought, he'd fling
His jewels to regale a fish's snout :
In Stepney church, upon a marble slab,
You'll read this wondrous story of a crab !

LVI.

The lady and the Abbot soon agreed
That old Ferando should be straightway sent
Where he would all their pious masses need,
To get his Spirit out of punishment.
The Abbot swore it was a holy deed,
And that her conscience never would repent !
But added, if it came to that conclusion,
He'd ease her with a little absolution !

LVII.

Then on her queenly brow he stampt a kiss,
Which sent the blood through all his body
rushing :
The lady took it as a pious bliss,
Or she had overcome her virtuous blushing.
But I repeat, dark passages like this
Are not for laymen such as me to push in ;
There's quite enough of mysteries as it is,
Without our making new ones of a kiss.

LVIII.

I crave the pardon of my gentle readers,
That I have soiled my page with angry words.
But shadows come on all :—the lofty cedars,
Whose spreading branches house the tuneful
birds,
Harbour the spiders, solitary breeders :
They, like great poets, hate the common herds,
And spin their flimsy lines to catch a fly,—
I'm tired of spinning verses none will buy.

END OF CANTO I.

THE
ABBOT OF FLORENCE.

Canto II.

THE
ABBOT OF FLORENCE.

A Tale from Boccaccio.

CANTO II.

I.

FERANDO to the abbey went next day ;
And after walking in the shady garden
With the old Abbot, who had much to say
On bulls, indulgences, and papal pardon,
Felt somewhat thirsty with the summer's ray ;
And knowing that his friend would not be hard on
A little drinking, asked the saintly vicar
To let him have a drop of cooling liquor.

II.

The crafty priest called for a mighty jug,
And under the green shadow of the trees
They sat' around the rustic table snug,
Chatting and drinking at their fullest ease :
The Abbot slyly put a potent drug
Into Ferando's cup, who nothing sees
Save his good friend the Abbot, and a monk
Or two,—in short, they all were getting drunk.

III.

This powder was of very wondrous quality,
And worked so on the vitals, heart, and brain,
That when he drank it, poor Ferando's jollity
Went from him, like the cork flies from Champagne.
In short, this stupid sot had let his folly tie
A knot, which he might ne'er unloose again ;
For of a sudden from his seat he slid,
As dead and dismal as a coffin lid.

IV.

And there he lay to all appearance dead,
The brethren round him looking much amazed :
One rubbed his hand, another rubbed his head,
And one declared his eyes were dim and glazed ;
While one poor monk some tears of sorrow shed,
But he had been, poor fellow, long since crazed.
His death was very sudden all agreed,
And 'twas no use to blister or to bleed.

V.

They took the body to the chapel straightway,
And sent for his relations and his wife ;
And when they came, the Abbot had a great say
On the uncertainty of human life.
He proved this world was but a little gateway
To everlasting happiness or strife ;
That if not good, we should have all our fat in
The fire,—and then he larded it with Latin !

VI.

'Tis needless to relate the wife's affliction,
Which sometimes far exceeds the undertaker's.
Sweet lips may smile, as though I dealt in fiction,
But I love truth, being of the sect called Quakers;
And though in verse I throw aside their diction,
As they cast off their Tawells and Greenacres,
Still I adopt the drab, broad brim, and collar,
And worship quite as much the full-weight dollar!

VII.

Now to the dead:—within a hollow vault
The Abbot laid the body of his friend:
'Tis said, the virtuous are the saving salt
Of the whole earth, which else would rankly end.
I meant to sing (but ah! my Muse *will* halt
When I begin Parnassus to ascend)
That when a godly man returns to earth,
“ A mortal dies to give an angel birth!”

VIII.

The widowed Gertrude to her home returned,
And on her solitary couch reclined.
I will not swear her gentle spirit mourned
The sudden death of husband dull and blind,
But she had now by practice fully learned
That royal art—dissembling; and we find
That women always seem most deeply grieved
At losing those whom they have most deceived.

IX.

A widow sitting silent by the bed
On which her husband-lover lies in death,
Her children crying round her for some bread,
Her little infant breathing gentle breath,
Unconscious of the tears that it must shed:—
All this has happened since the days of Seth,
And will again—nay, happens every hour!
Ah! who would wed with such a “fatal dower?”

X.

The Abbot rose in midnight's solemn dead,
 (Taking a monk on whom he could rely,)
And going to Ferando's shrouded bed,
 They carry him, in horrid secresy,
To a deep dungeon, where he lies like lead,
 A heavy mass of slumb'rous lethargy :
There on some straw they leave him to awaken,
While they go to discuss their eggs and bacon.

XI.

Next day the pious Bennet went to see
 The widow, who in weeds looked very killing ;
He kissed her with a grave propriety,
 And found her lovely eyes with tears were filling.
Widows and monks are famed for purity,
 So we'll excuse their cooing and their billing ;
Although we might suspect, if we believe
Our eyesight,—but the senses so deceive !

XII.

Howe'er it was I don't pretend to say,
But Gertrude found his conversation lightened
Her loneliness,—so he came every day ;
And at his coming her whole features brightened,
Like the dark earth at Cynthia's gentle ray.
He came sometimes at night, which vastly fright-
ened
The lady's servants, for the Abbot drest
Himself in all Ferando's Sunday best.

XIII.

They said, of course, that 'twas their master's ghost,
And ran like Buonaparte at Waterloo :
Some stood with terror stiff as any post,
And the nurse vow'd it pinched her black and blue
For forty minutes, or an hour almost ;
And though she nearly had a quarter due
Of wages, yet she could not, would not stay
To be disturbed at night—in such a way !

XIV.

The simple rustics, who had seen Ferando
Lying stark dead within the abbey wall,
And little dreaming what an Abbot can do,
Thinking them good and honest one and all,—
The rustics even yet, and to a man, do
Believe, whene'er they hear the slightest brawl,
That 'tis the jealous ghost, condemned to roam
Abroad, as penance for his sins at home.

XV.

Some said they heard the clanking of his chains,
And others that he had no chains at all ;
Some that he roared aloud with hellish pains,
While others said he let no murmur fall.
One lady, blest with rare poetic brains,
Distinctly stated, coming from a ball
She saw the goblin, miserable croaker,
Dance in his fetters Jullien's last new Polka !

XVI.

We left Ferando lying in a sleep,
From which at three days' end he slowly woke:
He rubbed his eyes, and then began to weep;
Then into louder lamentation broke,
For he could nothing see but darkness deep.
And let me tell you, reader, 'tis no joke
To wake up—find yourself kicked out of bed,
And not know whether you're alive or dead!

XVII.

Right suddenly the monk (our Abbot's friend)
Came to Ferando, with a little candle
In one hand; in the other a rope's end,
Which he commenced with jockey skill to handle.
The half-awakened sot began to send
Such moans and shrieks, to manhood's very
scandal,
You would have surely sworn—had there you been,
'Twas Hamlet being murdered by young Kean.

XVIII.

“Where am I?” said Ferando, roaring out
Like a mad bull, (so goes Boccaccio’s story).
“Where are you?” said the monk with hideous shout;
“Where you should be, you fool, in Purgatory!”
And then again his scourge he laid about
The Franklin’s back till it was torn and gory.
“What! am I dead?” the poor Ferando bellows:
“Yes, and in torment too, for being jealous!”

XIX.

After a time the monk grew faint and tired
Of lashing, so he paused and wiped his head;
For being corpulent, he much perspired.
Then bringing forth some meat, and wine, and
bread,
He gave it to Ferando, who inquired
“If men could eat and drink when they were
dead?”
For, though a fool, thought he, “The very deuce
Is in it, if dead men have gastric juice!”

XX.

"'Tis true," replied the monk ; " the meat and drink
You see before you was this morning brought
By your unhappy wife, who is, I think,
A pattern for all widows. She has bought
Ten pounds of good wax candles, and won't shrink
From buying till she has your freedom wrought
From Purgatory ; she all wives surpasses,—
She's killing all the monks with singing masses !

XXI.

" To get your soul from this accursed place,
Your friend the Abbot's hoarse as any raven,
And black as any negro in the face !
But doubtless, as your appetite is craving,—
At least I judge so from your lean grimace,—
You'd better be some little dinner having.
But eat it slowly,—masticate your food,
Or else, my friend, 'twill do you little good !"

XXII.

Ferando, having fasted three whole days
And three whole nights, was glad to get his dinner:
But still he swallowed it in some amaze,
For though he was a very stupid sinner,
He could not swallow all the priesthood says!
There's many "*a Charge*" chokes many a young
beginner,
And if you add the Oxford Tracts, 'tis plain
The human stomach brings all up again.

XXIII.

Ferando, after eating, fell asleep;
Whereon the monk effected his retreat,
And left him to enjoy his slumbers deep.
Next night he took again more bread and meat,
And woke the man,—who felt old hunger creep
Upon him, as the time approached to eat.
The monk replied, "Before you taste, O sinner!
We'll get a little appetite for dinner.

XXIV.

Thereon he lashed him with most famous spite ;
And as he lashed he sung a funeral hymn,
Pausing at times to say it served him right,
Declaring he'd excoriate every limb ;
And that he must endure this every night,
Till e'en the stars of heaven grew old and dim !
At this Ferando took to raving madly,
And swore the Saints were acting very badly.

XXV.

“ Where's Saint Ignatius ? Where's Saint Jeremy ?
And where's my sometime patron Saint old
Gregory ?
How could he ever let the villains bury me ?
Oh ! may these faithless Saints all come to beg-
gary,
If they don't send old Charon's boat to ferry me
From this vile place. You've got my leg awry,
You'll break the bone, you villainous old goblin,
And I through all eternity go hobbling.”

XXVI.

While the poor Franklin ate, the monk began
To tell him there was not a sin so base
As filthy jealousy, which brings a man
To Purgatory (that most dreadful place).
At this the tears of poor Ferando ran,
And nearly washed the whiskers from his face ;
“ Oh, injured wife !—the very best in Florence,
I now confess I am my own abhorrence.”

XXVII.

Then breathing forth a groan most piteously,
He begged the monk to tell him all he knew :
Who forthwith forged a very pleasant lie,
Which poor Ferando swallowed down as true.
He told him he was born in Italy,
Where skies are sometimes black and sometimes
blue,
And that he had a very jealous master,
From whence sprang all his penance and disaster.

XXVIII.

“ For, ah ! I helped him in his jealous folly,
Instead of aiding the suspected dame,
Who first took to a kind of melancholy,
Ere she encouraged a poetic flame.
At last she let the Muses take her wholly,
And lost all sense of womanhood and shame ;
For one day she put on her shawl and bonnet,
And bolted with the writer of a sonnet !

XXIX.

“ Which is of jealous doubts the sure effect,
For wives are but a very fragile crockery ;—
Therefore if you betray that you suspect
Their virtue, they disdain the mockery
Of smiling looks, when the great faith is wrecked
On fell suspicion,—that black rock awry,
Standing, for ever frowning, yet concealed,
And only when the ruin’s past revealed.

XXX.

“ Therefore this dreadful penance I endure
For all my sins, past, future, and the present ;
Its blest result, that it perchance may cure
Your jealousy, a frailty most unpleasant.
It is no happiness to me, be sure,
To flog you like a girl or Polish peasant ;
In short, I’m not the ‘ greatest of the Tsars,’
Nor any other ruffian, thank my stars ! ”

XXXI.

They say that Nicolas, the Russian Czar,
Flogged Polish ladies at the Insurrection,
When Warsaw threw his impious chains afar,
And dared to set at nought his grim direction :
E’en the unarmed are sometimes stung to war.
But fate and doctors like a large dissection,
And millions die because a villain rules,—
How can the millions be such slavish fools ?

XXXII.

'Tis well for monarchs that the millions sleep,
For in their waking will the thrones be hurled
Hither and thither, like the troubled deep
When a strong earthquake heaves the trembling
world.

Then o'er the tyrants' heads the storm shall sweep ;
While Freedom's glorious banner, high unfurled,
Gathers beneath it Earth's enfranchised slaves,
Like Ocean re-assembling all her waves.

XXXIII.

In my young days, when history was a book,
And I lived on with nations page by page,
I well remember how my bosom shook
With passionate longings, deepening into rage,
Which by degrees a darker colour took.
Like to a tiger in a fiery cage,
Opinion grew,—the history of France
Made every drop of blood within me dance.

XXXIV.

Great Heavens ! it was a frightful page to read,
How woman, child, and man were daily crushed
Beneath the iron heel which made them bleed,—
Yet bled in silence ; for their cry was hushed
By that foul leprosy, the Popish creed.
Great Nature, roused at last in madness, rushed
On her tormentors, and with hellish glee
Bettered the instruction of old tyranny !

XXXV.

Dawn breaks at last !—the night of tyranny
Slowly recedes before the growing day,
Which faintly glimmers in the Eastern sky,
Then to the hills and valleys slopes away.
Freedom and Truth as yet in slumber lie,
But will be stirring 'neath its gladsome ray ;
When, arm'd for fight, rise those glorious twins,
Look out, ye gouty tyrants, for your shins !

XXXVI.

O war and trumpets!—peace and penny-whistles!

How is it that a wholesale slaughter brings
(Instead of stinging plants and thorny thistles)

The wreath of laurel on the brow of kings?

Is it that weak digestions feed on gristles,

Or that the tortured linnet better sings?

But Truth declares she sees no earthly reason,

Why loyalty is less a vice than treason!

XXXVII.

We'll deem Ferando heard these sentiments,

And that they did not shock his Tory morals:

Ah! there are many gentlemen, or “gents,”

Think duelling the Christian end of quarrels,

And by “*prosperity*” who mean high rents:

In short, that all mankind are stupid squirrels,

For ever rushing round an iron cage,

Instead of going farther every age.

XXXVIII.

The monk informed Ferando that his wife
Spent all her money and her time for him;
And that she parcelled out her daily life
In trying to release him, soul and limb,
From all the pangs of purgatorial strife.
'Twas first a "paternoster," then a hymn,
Then a wax taper, then a mass divine,
In which the Abbot felt delight to join.

XXXIX.

"All this will, doubtless, in due time," said he,
"Release you from this shocking place of tears:
We'll hope once more you will the daylight see,
Though really, to my mind, it now appears
Your only vice was foolish jealousy;
A fault you can amend in future years,—
That is, if your dear wife should agitate
For your release: if so, your chance is great.

XL.

“ You see that Purgatory has its tattle,
And that the dead are not so very stupid ;
Perchance what we denominate ‘ *death rattle*,’
Is the first lisping of the future Cupid !
Ofttimes a peace is brought on by a battle ;
And battles are sometimes won by a group hid
Behind a hillock ;—thus what we can’t see,
May very often gain the victory.”

XLI.

With these reflections, moral and religious,
The monk left poor Ferando to his dose
Of daily slumber, which soon grew prodigious ;
For being shut up in a dungeon close
Inclines to sleep, like down-beds at the Bridge-house
Hotel. One should be careful where one goes,
For at an inn upon the Rhine, Smith swears
The fleas combined, and carried him down stairs.

XLII.

We'll therefore leave Ferando to his dreams,
Which constitute so nearly half our life.
The gourmand snores in turtle, wine, and creams ;
The foolish maiden dreams she is a wife,
Or else in single blessedness she screams
Cantatas, which cut through you like a knife :
The sable sweep dreams of the joys of May-days,
And Dillon dreams he's preaching to the ladies.

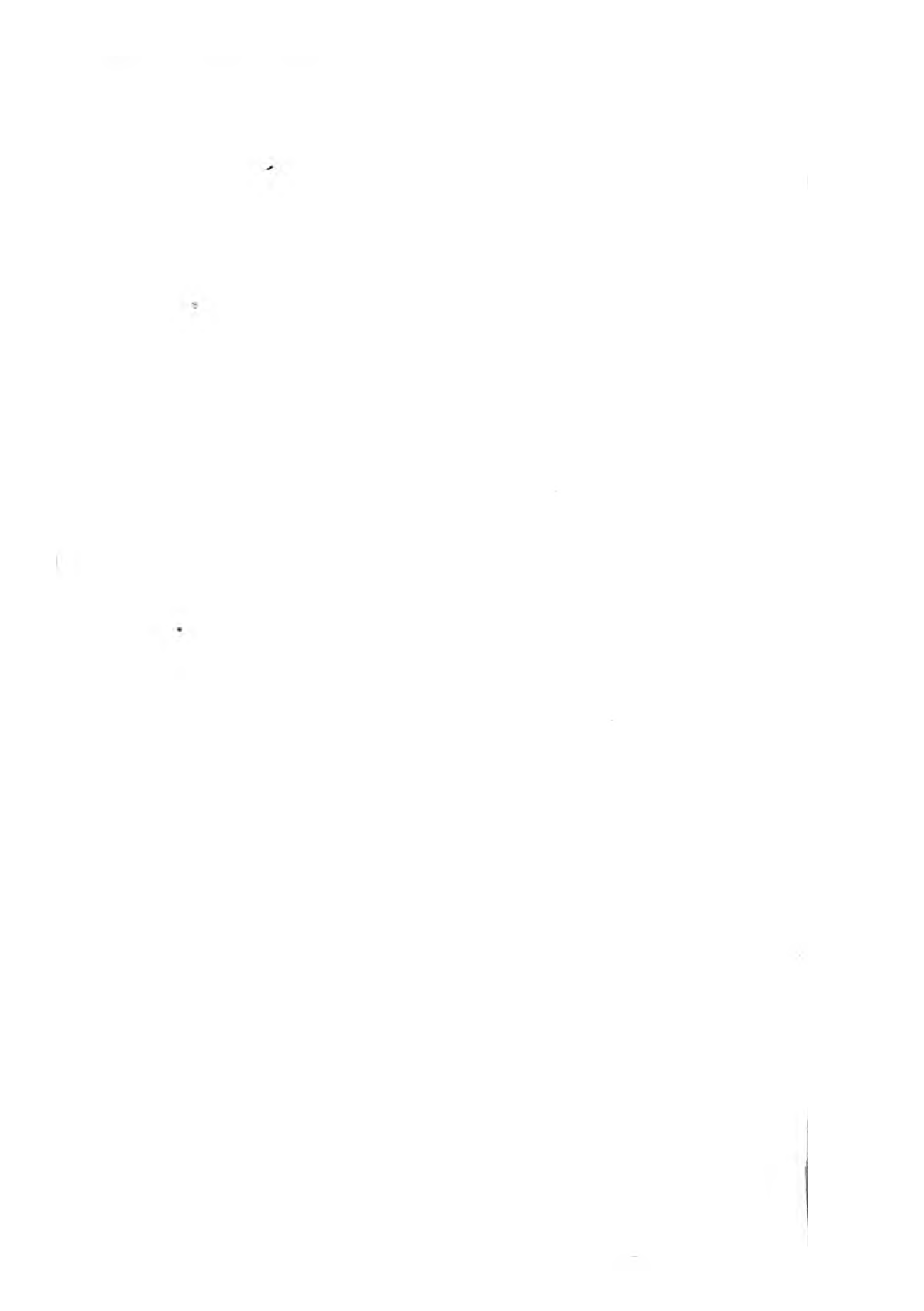
XLIII.

The poet sometimes dreams of poesie,
And that he sits, crown'd with the deathless wreath,
On great Olympus, towering in the sky :
Beneath his feet are darkness, woe, and death,
Above him, life and immortality,—
Around him is a world of loving breath !
Inspired by these to angel hearts he sings,—
He wakes to critics, taxes, rates, and kings !

END OF CANTO II.

THE
ABBOT OF FLORENCE.

Canto III.



THE
ABBOT OF FLORENCE.

A Tale from Boccaccio.

CANTO III.

I.

WE left our hero deep in Purgatory,
Where every husband is,—or else will be ;
Should any Caudle contradict my story,
And make an oath to his felicity—
Adding, by way of proof confirmatory,
That he has won the fitch, it seems to me
Either that falsehood ranks among his sinning,
Or, like an eel, he has got used to skinning.

II.

The Abbot now was growing somewhat weary
Of Gertrude's beauty, so he thought it time
To let Ferando from his dungeon dreary.

He might begin to think upon his crime ;
And, like our own eighth Harry, I much fear he
Found pleasure, which once seemed almost sub-
lime,
Now sad and loathsome, lifeless, soulless, tame :
He scarcely could believe it was the same !

III.

Satiety is often called repentance,
And incapacity for sin, reform ;
Sins leave us, and we swear that they've been sent
hence,
Like devils driven from us, strong and warm,
When the fact is, they're worn like men whose sen-
tence
Of three-score years and ten has passed in storm.
There is but One who can cast out a sin :
Philosophy invites the Devil in !

IV.

There was another reason why the priest
Desired to set our hero from his gaol ;
The ninth revolving moon—the eighth at least,
Was growing small and thin,—a curled rat's tail ;
Whereas the lady's figure was increased,
As Shakspeare says, like to a swelling sail :
Had she been in the Zodiac, I ween,
Right soon would she have made the signs thirteen.

V.

In midnight's darkness, when the stars were fled,
The Abbot sought Ferando's gloomy den,
And in a counterfeited voice he said,
“Awake—arise, thou happiest of men!
For I am sent to fetch thee from the dead,
To see thy friends and family again,
And thy fond loving wife, who has, I swear,
Presented thee with a fine son and heir.

VI.

“ For know, she had, Ferando, when you died,
Newly conceived the child that’s born to-day,
The chubbiest cherub that you ever spied.

Like yours, his eyes are of the finest gray,—
But I forbear to rouse a father’s pride,
Who’d find out music in a donkey’s bray,
And think its squall Rubini’s notes surpass,
Were he the parent of the little ass.

VII.

“ ’Tis very natural,—but I’ll say no more,
Ferando, now to hurt your ‘*amour propre*,’
Soon shall you hear the little darling roar.

You’re cured of jealousy, my friend, I hope;
If not, you’ll die again, and have some more
Of darkness, fasting, goblins, and the rope!
But don’t expect to ’scape, as now, the curse,
For you’ll go farther then, and fare much worse!

VIII.

“ Name the child Bennet, to that great Saint’s glory,
For ’tis by him, the Abbot, and your wife,
That you have been released from Purgatory,
To all the blessings of your former life.”
(My readers must, of course, believe the story,
Though palpably with honest truth at strife;
’Tis better far to gulp absurdities,
Than think that clergymen would tell us lies!)

IX.

Ferando quite believed the tale, and cried,
“ Oh, blessed wife and Abbot ! blessed Saint !
Whom I love more than all the Saints beside,—
How I should like some dinner ! I’m quite faint ! ”
“ Here is your daily meal,” the voice replied.
“ Eat and rejoice, and let no sorrow taint
The last day that you’ll spend in this dark place :
To-morrow you will see the world’s bright face.”

X.

The Abbot mixed some powder with his wine,
Which was enough to make him sleep for hours,
So when he'd drunk it, down like any swine
He lay, bereft of all his conscious powers:
The monk and Abbot then their efforts join,
And bear him straightway from the dungeon
towers ;
Then, having drest him in his shroud of gloom,
They lay him snugly in his former tomb.

XI.

Ferando slept until the break of day,
When, waking from his trance, he saw the light
Stream thro' the broken chinks which stern decay
Had made in that dim sepulchre of night.
He rubbed his eyes, and then began to say,
“The purgatorial fiend has told me right ;
For as I live, I see the daylight through
The crannies in the tomb—I'll swear I do !”

XII.

Perceiving plainly that he was not dead,

He cried aloud, " Oh, let me out ! I've been
Long enough here in this sepulchral bed.

I must be very much reduced and lean,
Or else on me the hungry worms had fed :

I wonder what the plague it is they mean ?
Perhaps, when hungry myriads came to stuff,
They did not think my carcase ' game ' enough ! "

XIII.

The rosy monks were going to their breakfast,

When suddenly they heard Ferando call.

Their first attempt was flight, their next to make fast

All doors and windows in the abbey wall ;

Then they began to pray aloud and shake fast,

As though they never meant to rest at all :

At last they got into a kind of frantic

Skiping and jumping, the St. Vitus' antic !

XIV.

The Abbot stood undaunted,—waved his hand,
And bade the monks regain their usual valour :
At his rebuke they try like men to stand,
Although as pale and wan as Russian tallow.
But I would have my readers understand
That piety delights in looking sallow ;
No man with rosy cheeks and healthy brain,
Can hope to rival Irving or Romaine.

XV.

Our hero, not the Abbot, but the man
Who had been buried, stood in great amazement
By the tomb's side,—the monks in terror ran.
The Abbot said, still looking from the casement,
“ If you can't work a miracle, I can.
Is it a wonder that a man long days pent
In gloomy grave should, when I tell him, rise
And see again his dinner and the skies ?

XVI.

“ But not alone to me belongs the praise :
One third to Bennet, Saint renowned and blest ;
The other third his pious wife repays,
For all the troubles of her widowed breast.
If there is any left, (the legend says,)
’Tis clearly due to this delightful nest
Of pious monks, whose virtues are declared
By this new miracle,”—at which they stared !

XVII.

Ferando threw himself upon his knees,
And cried, “ Most holy Father ! by your pleading,
St. Bennet’s, and my wife’s, I’ve got this ease :
I thank you much for your kind interceding.
I hope in future, saintly sir, to please
My wife, by all my former errors weeding,
So that my life, henceforth, shall be a garden ;
And on such terms perhaps she’ll grant my pardon.”

XVIII.

“Go,” said the Abbot, “comfort your fair wife,
Who ever since your death has been a martyr
To sorrow, with all thoughts of joy at strife,
Declining with contempt and scorn a charter,
Which would have made her wealthy for her life.
But she declined the matrimonial barter,
And said with tears, ‘She’d rather be your widow,
Than marry one whose wealth was huge as Skiddaw.’

XIX.

“Love, cherish her, and make much of her, there-
fore;
Afflict her with your jealousy no more !
For having you, what else, sir, can she care for ?”
“I warrant you,” said he, “I shall adore
Her for the future, without why or wherefore.
My shoulders now are feeling somewhat sore
For doubting such a wife might deign to leer
On priest, or life-guardsman, or grenadier.”

XX.

The monks sang "Miserere" in a chorus,
Which made of music general rout and slaughter,
As though a band of Hullahs rushed before us,
Leading in either hand a wife and daughter,
And doing their unearthly best to bore us.
The Abbot sprinkled him with holy water,
Muttered some Latin, (Porson says it scann'd ill,)
And put in either hand a lighted candle.

XXI.

"Go home, Ferando," said the Abbot, "go,
And never afterwards your dear wife vex :
Cherish and love her : she's, I'd have you know,
The crowning glory of her virtuous sex.
Tell her I thought her wrong to mourn you so ;
But still the lustre of her weeping, decks
Her beauteous face more than a West-end milliner.
I really thought, one time, her grief was killing her !"

XXII.

Without another word Ferando went,
And walked in this array towards his dwelling.
Some people stared in blank astonishment,
Some fled away, their terror loudly yelling :
One woman did not stay to pay her rent,—
She'd been the day before her chattels selling :
Therefore, sometimes a ghost may seem to play
His tricks suspiciously near quarter-day.

XXIII.

Ferando reached at last his lawful door,
Rang the gate-bell, and gave his usual knock.
The housemaid came, but fell upon the floor
In strong hysterics at the sudden shock ;
The footman sprang up stairs, and gave a roar
Which made the house like any cradle rock ;
While cook, who just across the hall was scudding,
Screamed out " A ghost," and dropped her batter-
pudding.

XXIV.

The governess, whose nerves were more expensive,
With scientific footsteps sought the place
From whence proceeded noises so extensive:
Seeing Ferando, she assumed a face,
First agitated, solemn next,—then pensive,
Remarking 'twas “a most unheard of case!”
While the fair housemaid said, in accents faster,
“It is the Devil, miss,—or else my master!”

XXV.

Joy for Ferando! But there's many a scribe
Whom I would see in Purgatory still
A hopeless prisoner, whom no richest bribe
Could move stern Charon of his own good will
To set at large,—and others of his tribe,
Who have, like geese, misused the goose's quill;
And should stay there awhile to expiate
Some venal faults they've blundered on of late.

XXVI.

There's Wilson Croker, the Protectionist,
Who galvanises all dead fallacies,
And makes them start and stare, and shake their fist,
When they have long lost terrors in men's eyes,
Howe'er they gloom or glare, or turn or twist,
And, waiting burial, but offend the skies;—
Let him remain no longer and deceive,
But draw, in Hades, water in a sieve.

XXVII.

Statesmen are there in crowds, and lawyers too,
Whose evil deeds admit the less excuse,
And take a deeper, darker, deadlier hue,
Having flirtations with the heavenly Muse,
With whom of right they should have nought to do—
Not even in vacation; yet they choose
Each, Numa like, his nymph and grot Egerian,
And quaff, for inspiration, mock Falerian.

XXVIII.

I name no names: there are lots of these in limbo,
And some, who yet are not, will soon be there,
Who better far had stood with arms a-kimbo,
Waiting for briefs with dull contented air,
Than so misused their leisure,—like old Grimbeau,
Who sat, like Frenzy smiling at Despair,
Stiff on his stool, till gnawed to life with hunger,
Lost in the dream that he was growing younger!

XXIX.

Ferando, when the hubbub was allayed,
Told to his gaping audience many a story,—
What exposés his fellow-sinners made
While being criticised in Purgatory:
What Peter Bell confessed he'd done and said
Under strange influences,—not of glory:
How Rogers, unpoetical old fellow,
Beat off the Muses with his silk umbrella!

XXX.

How Louis Philippe caught a Metternich,
And both a Tartar, in the scorn of men,
Who, quite as wise and no less politic,
Hold all is lost with honour ; how, agen,
Sir Francis Head, to play Bob Peel a trick,
Had with gun cotton charged his witty pen,
Which, while he wrote, sudden explosion made,
Burning his fingers at their naughty trade.

XXXI.

There are some men who never will be taught,
Whatever old experience may declare ;
And still employ themselves, at least in thought,
With tomahawk and scalpel laying bare
The prophets, who, with holy passion fraught,
Cherish high hopes for man, and visions rare.
Weak are their means of literary slaughter,
Yet venomous withal—bad bile and water.

XXXII.

But time would fail, were I to sum up all
The punishments that righteously befell
The tyrants who, beneath the purple pall,
Hid hearts that burned in their own proper hell ;
The sophists, who would bid the willing ball
Stand still, as once did he of Israel
The sun and moon, in that old land sublime,
Whose story holds of the primeval time ;

XXXIII.

Such as would grind the faces of the poor,
Such as would smite the humble and the meek ;
Such as would drive lone merit from their door,
And smite the man of genius on the cheek,
Leaving the artist to his doom obscure ;
Living themselves in style so smooth and sleek,
As talent were a sin and vice no shame,
And virtue but the shadow of a name.

XXXIV.

And even Popes were there, if truth he spoke,
And for my part I rather think he did ;
For surely 'twould be far too sore a yoke,
If every sovereign pontiff must get rid
Of all our weakness. No man ever broke
His nature in so fully, nor was bid
To do so ; and I'm told, though Heaven's own
vicar,
That the late Pope was rather given to liquor.

XXXV.

One morning he was walking with a bishop,
And felt, as often in the pulpit, dry :
He therefore naturally sought to fish up
Some reason for potations deep and sly ;
And his companion, who had skill to dish up
Good arguments to indulge his fantasy,
Gave such advice, that lo ! the Pope of Rome
Got drunk, and in that way was carried home !

XXXVI.

Next day the Vatican's gruff Abernethy
Called in, to feel his pulse and see his tongue,
Declared that he would be shipped off to Lethe,
If he were not more careful, before long :
Adding, moreover, that he ought to flee the
Charms of old Bacchus,—pleasant, but so wrong !
And finished, while his voice to whisper sunk,
“ For Heaven's sake, pontiff, don't get quite so
drunk ! ”

XXXVII.

And in this chatty limbo he was told
Celestial consolation fell like dew
On Ingoldsby, whose spirit ne'er was cold
When want and suffering urged its story true.
Methinks I now thy jocund face behold,
Thou best and wittiest of the mirthful crew ;
Whose song was ever in the comic key,
At war with dismal Horne and tragedy !

XXXVIII.

And I—the poet, I too stole a look
Over our friend Ferando's rounded shoulder,
And saw the spirits caught by Satan's hook.
Ah ! little did they think a new beholder
Would put their names and sorrows in a book ;
And even now, though grown by absence bolder,
I scarcely dare to do it, lest in turn
I should be sent to those dark pits to burn.

XXXIX.

And, oh ! what hosts I saw of titled dames,
Men about town, guardsmen and dashing blades,
Beauties and gamesters ; but the scorching flames
Made no distinctions,—earthly charms and grades
Availed not here. Foul fiends with hideous frames,
“ Fashion's gay votaries,” and ancient maids
Of ancient blood, mixed with the vulgar crowd
Of common criminals, and howled aloud.

XL.

London and Paris ! half your populations
Came streaming down for one most common sin—
The warring on their neighbours' reputations.
Would I could make earth hear the furious din
Of every age, each sex, all ranks and stations,
Pent up and seared those gloomy walls within,—
And these were chiefly women ; and 'tis worse
In them, for *they* should *bless* our life, not *curse*.

XLI.

On earth from house to house they'd drive or walk,
Much as the men of Athens did of yore,
Collecting news and retailing small talk,
And making every little scandal more ;
With eyes like the keen optics of a hawk,
Piercing each tiny failing to the core,
And causing many broils and much contention,
By an amazing genius for invention.

XLII.

And as I scanned the purifying fire,
And deemed within my heart that less misdeeds
Were visited with deeper, deadlier ire,
I saw a stately form, whose mourning weeds
Were all but newly changed for bright attire;
And I exclaimed, exulting, "Now there needs
No other guide; for lo! the Florentine,
Great Alighieri,—Dante the divine!"

XLIII.

"Deem not," the mighty master spake, "that
Heaven
Forgets its own eternal justice here:
To each degree of crime is ever given
Its own degree of woe,—a lower sphere
Receives the greater criminals. Be riven,
Earth and ye clouds! ye awful realms appear!"
And as he spake, away the vapoury tide
Rolled round, and made a wall on every side;

XLIV.

So that I saw but one dark vault of hell,
One phase of guilt, one dismal form of woe.
And, oh ! what mortal tongue can rightly tell
The fearful tale ! what mortal spirit know
The agonies that every bosom swell
Among the damned,—the scalding tears that flow !
While all within was ever-raging fire,
And hatred fierce and unrepressed desire !

XLV.

And by those beds where poisonous plants were
growing,
And pale, sad sufferers wailed in endless pain,
I saw two radiant forms with white robes flowing :
One with bright hair flung back in grand disdain,
And eye with righteous indignation glowing,
And foot that passed through hell without a stain.
And as he passed, he spurned the prostrate frames
Of some amidst that crew of evil names.

XLVI.

And by his side moved on, in gentler guise,
A spirit of milder glory, whose dark hair,
Flowing in long soft tresses, veiled her eyes ;
And I perceived the all too dazzling glare
Of him she leaned on, tempered as the skies
Of Andalusia when the evening air
Is lighted by the moonbeams, and the maids
Of Seville dance beneath their orange shades.

XLVII.

“ And who are these,” said I, “ oh, glorious sire
Of sacred song ! quitting their own bright sphere
To wander midst these scenes of penal fire,—
They who have left behind all grief and fear ?
Tell me, I pray, led on by what desire
Did they descend ? and wherefore doth appear
Anger so mighty in the one to reign,
And in the other only love remain ? ”

XLVIII.

And he to me, “ The twain thou dost behold
All radiant, passed through sorrows deep and long
On earth above : and if I must withhold
Their names, lest thou shouldst note them in thy
song,
Thus much thou *mayest* be of their story told,—
They see the pains of those who did them wrong :
And He who hath forgiven *his* foes, doth still
Hate with just hatred those who wrought *her* ill.”

XLIX.

Thus while he spake, again my eyes I turned
To those who suffered ; and I straightway knew
Among the damned, who there for ever burned
In lightless fires, the countenance of two ;
The one esteemed a maiden, though I learned
Not rightly,—and the other a wife untrue ;
Brought here by that same sin, whose lighter dyes
The purgatorial penance purifies.

L.

And I beheld how, in the place of hair,
 Were matted vipers, rooted by their fangs.
And oh ! the wretchedness of that sad pair !
 Their looks of misery, their hopeless pangs !
But when they saw how the infernal air
 Was lighted by the glory which ever hangs
Round the celestial visitants, a curse
Burst from the elder culprit, and the worse !

LI.

And then the sterner spirit stooped and tore
 Her snaky locks ; and as with hideous strain
They loosed their hold, forth stream'd the putrid gore
 From fang and flesh. Then crawled they back
 again,
And fastened on the scalp as heretofore,
 Hissing their vengeance to the cancerous brain ;
While the vile slanderer filled the starless air
With frantic screams of agonized despair.

LII.

Then frowning, he addressed her: " I would tear
From thy foul breast that sponge of venomous
blood
Thou call'st thy heart—would cast it prostrate there,
And trample it to its congenial mud ;
But she whom thou hast wrong'd, the pure and fair,
Forgives thee, and would save thee if she could."
And while he spake, I saw the gentle tears
Fall from the lovelier stranger's lustrous spheres,—

LIII.

Celestial tears, and healing where they fell :
Like halcyon wings that bring on sunny weather,
They called up smiles of calmness e'en in hell.
But once, but only once they dropped,—and never
Again such soothing balm can come: 'tis well !
And those blest spirits floated off together
Into the azure heaven, and I returned
To where the purgatorial furnace burned.

LIV.

And now, methinks, my story's well nigh done,
Nor is there any need to make it longer.
The Abbot's point is gained, the lady's won ;
My moral's strong,—it could not well be stronger,
Nor could I have supposed, when I begun,
I could hit Rome so hard, and yet not wrong her.
So we'll dismiss our hero and his wife,
With this slight notice of their after life:—

LV.

Ferando never quarrelled after this
With Gertrude, who on her part gave up pouts,
Meeting him night and morning with a kiss :
He let her go to sermons, balls, and routs,
Which was to her the perfect form of bliss.
If any reader entertains his doubts
Touching the good effects of Purgatory,
May he one day be hero of the story !

END OF LAST CANTO.

NOTES TO THE ABBOT OF FLORENCE.

NOTES TO THE ABBOT OF FLORENCE.

CANTO I.

*“ And therefore tell you that the only cure
Is Purgatory, where he must be sent,
Its purifying process to endure.”—St. 35.*

THE selection of this subject is at once a test of the truly Protestant feelings of the writer. It is needless to suggest that he means a sly hit at “the damnable figment of purgatory;” the source of so much profit to the Romish priesthood. The doctrine has no scriptural warranty; but it is amusing to read the pretensions to it in some papistical tracts; which nevertheless, we must accept, under peril of perdition. For what says Bellarmine?

“Constanter iterum asserimus, dogma esse fidei Purgatorium, adeo ut, qui non credit Purgatorium esse, ad illud nunquam sit perventurus, sed in Gehenna sempiterno incendio cruciandus.” Bellarm. de Purgat. lib. ii. c. 15, tom. ii. p. 404, G. Colonix, 1628.

Which, being interpreted, would thus run in plain English:—

“ We again positively assert that Purgatory is an article of the faith ; so much so, that he who does not believe that there is a Purgatory, will never arrive at it, but will be tortured with everlasting fire in hell.”

A pleasant jest, truly ; yet not quite so pleasant as that which we will, and should, as Protestants, boldly and not profanely make of this absurd doctrine. What a Protestant was Boccaccio ! What a vein of profound irony underlies his apparently simple stories ! The origin of the notion is clear enough. Plato divided mankind into three classes, as capable of Elysium, or of Tartarus, or of some third purgatorial state. Homer also, in his *Odyss.* lib. xi., hints at a similar notion ; and makes Ulysses refer to it in his interview with Elpenor. The doctrine, in fact, is one of the concessions virtually made by Constantine to the genius of paganism ; though it was not until A. D. 600, that it was promulged as an unquestionable, because it had been found to be the most profitable dogma of the Harlot Church. Purgatory, however, must not be confounded with the true doctrine of a middle state, the place of separate spirits. For the valid ground of the distinction, the reader may consult Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, Bernard, Bede, Lactantius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Theophylact, Bellarmine, Ward, Challoner, Alexander, and a thousand others, at his leisure : or he may save himself the trouble by reading Bp. Horsley's celebrated Sermon on the disputed text in St. Peter. It would not be quite so easy to point out an equally compendious exposition of another difficult text in relation to the same subject, 1 Cor. iii. 10—15. If the reader would desire, however, to judge for himself of the wonderful unanimity of the early fathers, we would recommend him to consult on this point the follow-

ing amusingly conflicting authorities: Clem. Alexand. Strom. lib. v. tom. ii. pp. 660, 683. Oxon. 1715; Tertul. contra Marcion. lib. v. c. 6, p. 468, D. Paris, 1664; Chrysos. Hom. ix. in 1 Cor. iii. tom. v. p. 93; Hom. lvi. de Pœnit. tom. i. p. 616, C. Paris, 1636; Greg. Dial. lib. iv. cap. 39, tom. ii. col. 441, Paris, 1705; August. in Ps. vi. tom. iv. p. 24, C. Paris, 1691; De Civit. Dei. lib. xxi. cap. 26, sec. 2; De Fide et Oper. cap. 16, sec. 27, tom. vi. col. 181; C. Enchirid. cap. 69, Paris, 1685; Origen, Hom. vi. in Exod.; Hom. xvi. in Jerem. xv. 16, tom. iii. p. 221, Paris, 1740; Jerom. lib. ii. advers. Jovinian, tom. iv. Paris, 1706; Theodoret, in 1 Cor. iii. 12, 13, tom. iii. p. 134, Paris, 1642; Theophylact, in 1 Cor. iii. 13, p. 186, Lond. 1636; Bede in 1 Cor. iii. tom. vi. Oper. col. 373, Basil, 1563; Bernard, Serm. in 1 Cor. p. 411, Coloniae, 1620; Ambrose in 1 Cor. iii. 15, tom. ii. pt. ii. col. 122, Paris, 1690. To whom may be added, the commentator Estius,—in 1 Cor. iii. 10—15, p. 220, 399, Colon. 1631.

“ *Of jealousy,—that inconvenient vice.* ”—St. 31.

Jealousy is rather a comic than a tragic passion, and has been mostly treated as such by novelists and dramatists. To Shakspeare, however, it must have appeared differently; witness his Leontes and Othello. Is it possible that our sweet Swan of Avon could have been himself a “jealous soul?” Is it possible that Mrs. Shakspeare could have given him cause? What say the psychological commentators to this? Is not the vein worth working? O Anne Hathaway!

“ *The vestiges of creation.* ”—St. 47.

This book is an attempt to link together the fragments of scientific discovery into a consistent chain, or system. Where

lacunæ occur, in the accepted authorities, the anonymous author supplies them with guesswork and obscure testimony. The result is absurd enough, but not more absurd than mere science appears to the rational mind when considered as divorced from philosophy. Yet how few are there who combine the principles of the one with the facts of the other!

*“ The Abbot swore it was a holy deed,
And that her conscience never would repent !
But added, if it came to that conclusion,
He’d ease her with a little absolution ! ”*—St. 66.

A great source of priestly profit this same power of absolution. I have before me a black catalogue of crimes, for which absolution may be had, together with the price charged for its granting. The “Tax Book of the Roman Chancery” has been compiled and published, bearing the imprimatur of Anthony Egane, 1674. It was reprinted by J. Edes, Great Knight Rider-street, 1825. The following was lately copied by a resident in Belgium from the Papal Tariff, which was published by authority in France in 1691, and is still in force; a sort of debtor and creditor account between His Holiness and the delinquent worshipper:—

	£
For absolution of the crime of apostasy	4
Absolution and dispensation for bigamy	1050
For heresy	80
Murder	95
Being accessory to a murder	85
Indulgences for seven years	12
Perpetual indulgencies for a fraternity	40
Permission to read forbidden books	25

	£
Dispensation for simony	40
Permission to eat flesh	65
Dispensation for vows of chastity . . .	15
Declaration of nullity of a religious vow .	100
The same, after ten years of profession . .	200

To these is added a variety of other charges, having reference to the forging of wills, fratricide, seduction, rape, incest, perjury, infanticide, sacrilege, and sundry other enormities, for which absolution may be obtained at moderate prices. That the spirit of Romanism is the same at this time as it always was, let the late disgraceful affair of the Holy Coat of Treves testify. But by this infamous *ruse* Rome has lost Germany!

“I see, as from a tower, the end of all.”

CANTO III.

The crowning glory of her virtuous sex.—St. 21.

The author here, perhaps, may appear too hard on the sex, as if he were inclined to insinuate the impossibility of finding any virtue in it. In disproof of this, however, take the following from an old book of paradoxes, which, as it has neither date nor title-page, I cannot more particularly describe.

“I am not so courageous, that I dare defend women, or pronounce them good; yet we see physicians allow some virtue in every poison: then why should we except women? Since certainly they are good for physic at least, so as some

wine is good for a fever. And though they are the occasioners of many sins, they are also the punishers and revengers of the same sins; for I have seldom seen one who consumes his substance upon them escape distress and beggary: and this is their justice. And if *summ cuique dare* be the fulfilling of all civil justice, they are most just, for they deny that which is theirs to no man.

‘*Tanquam non liceat nulla puella negat.*’

And who may doubt of great wisdom in them, that doth but observe with how much labour and cunning our justices and other dispensers of the laws study to embrace them, and how zealously our preachers [*no doubt a sly allusion to Boccaccio’s Abbot of Florence*] dehort men from them, only by urging those subtleties, and policies, and wisdom which are in them? Or who can deny them a good measure of fortitude, if he consider how valiant men they have overthrown; and being themselves overthrown, how much and how patiently they bear? And though they be most intemperate, I care not, for I undertook to furnish them with some virtue, not with all. Necessity, which makes even bad things good, prevails also for them; for we must say of them, as of some sharp finding laws, *If men were free from infirmities, they were needless.* These or none must serve for reasons, and it is my great happiness that examples prove not rules; for to confirm this opinion, the world yields not one example! To this tirade, suffice it to reply—“*Qui magis sapiunt, magis insipiunt.*”

—

“*He found her with the doctor at some strife.*”

There is a current suspicion, amounting to belief, that doctors kill more than they cure. Our old paradoxical friend above quoted, affirms indeed, that “a new physician had

need of a new churchyard." "I dispute not," he adds, "who kills safest, the Galenist or the Paracelsian. 'Tis all one whether a man die by the stiletto or broadsword." I find him soon after asking "Where do they live longer than in the Orcades, Forest of Arden, Norway, &c. ? or sounder, than where the name of physic is not once heard of ?

"Quot Themison aegros Autumno occiderit uno ?"

Anon, he complains that "they are rewarded too for their murders. They are the common executioners [kill at least 200 to 1 more than they cure] :—their art (if one) is but conjectural, full of imposture, the devil Apollo the inventor of it. And if success follow, it is by chance, not their cunning ; or nature had done it without them. And for this very reason, Avicenna (an eminent physican) wept every time he prescribed a purge ; and well he might, for he could not but know that many diseases no physic can cure.

'Tollere nodosam nescit medicina podagram.' "

"Wordsworth wrote fifteen sonnets praising hanging."

To counterbalance with the ladies the abuse of physicians in my former note, it may be mentioned that the faculty once restored a woman to life who had been hanged. Her name was Anne Green, who was executed at Oxford, 4th December, 650. The pamphlet recording the story is so scarce as not now to be purchased. Our old paradoxical friend, however, has more than one fling at it, apostrophising in rhyme both the hangman and the gallows—not neglecting the *amende honorable* to the physicians, which he doth in the following rhapsody (*inter alia*) :—

"To raise a pyramid unto your skill,
Were to mistrust experience, and still

Think death a gyant, whose vast gripe could span,
And squeeze to nought both memory and man,
Ye are not mortal, nor need fear to die ;
To conquer Death is immortality.
Ye have done that, marble may serve to hide
Its own dust now, or tell who should have dy'd :
There is no other use for't. And thou, Death,
Vaunt not henceforth, 'tis *with thy leave we breathe!*
Thou'rt vanquish't quite, and this thy mulct shall be,
To write *probatum* to their victory."

After relating the story of her recovery, the narrator proceeds. "Perhaps it may be expected by some (and 'tis pity I can give them no better satisfaction) that I should here relate some fine story (like those of Orpheus or Æneas in the poets) of what visions this maiden saw in the other world ; what celestial music, or hellish howling she heard ; what spirits she conversed with, and what revelations she brought back with her, concerning the present times, or the events of things to come. But for such matters the reader must rest contented, since she was so far from knowing any thing whilst she was dead, that she remembered not what had happened to her even when she was yet alive. Her spirits, at that time being so fixed or benumbed with fear, as not to admit of any new impressions ; or otherwise so turbulent and unquiet, as presently to discompose and obliterate them. As we often see it fares with men that are buzzed in the head with drink, or transported with madness, who, though they seem sensible enough of every present object that moves them, yet after they recover can own but little of what they did or said before." She was asked "concerning her sense and apprehensions during the time she was hanged. To which she answered at first somewhat impertinently, talking

as if she had been to suffer ; and when they spake unto her concerning her miraculous deliverance, she answered, that *she hoped God would give her patience*, and the like. Afterward, when she was better recovered, she affirmed that she *neither remembered how the fetters were knocked off, how she went out of the prison, when she was turned off the ladder, whether any psalm was sung or not, nor was she sensible of any pains that she could remember ; what is most observable is, that she came to herself as if she had awakened out of a sleep*, not recovering the use of her speech by slow degrees, but in a manner altogether, beginning to speak just where she left off on the gallows."—Narrative of what had happened to Anne Green from her execution at Oxford, December 4, 1650, to the time she revived, and (by the care of physicians) perfectly recovered.—Written by an Oxford Scholar, and published by Tho. Robinson, A. D. 1651. The poor girl had been executed for infanticide ; there seems, however, to have been little doubt of her innocence. She lived afterwards to marry and to be a mother,; living and dying in good repute. One such fact against capital punishments is worth all the Laureate's sonnets in their defence.

SALVESTRA,

A Tale of Boccaccio.

—

Canto I.

H

SALVESTRA,

A Tale of Boccaccio.



CANTO I.

I.

IN Spenser's stanza, I would quaintly write
A fine old story from Boccaccio.
Alas! that love so formed for rich delight
Should often be so full of bitter woe—
But from the first it ever has been so!
This "ancient saw" it is I would avow,
But eke the theme would force to undergo
Full many "a modern instance;" and proceed
Men's "business" thus to reach, and make their
"bosom" bleed.

II.

Love is like Death, that all things equal makes,
To the same level brings both high and low ;
Sleeps high enthroned, but stoops when he awakes,
And Wealth or Power to Beauty bids to bow.
—In Florence lived a maiden—fair, I trow,
And a brave youth, who loved, nor loved in vain ;
Her heart to melt availed his music vow,
And not like Neuryg's verse to jolt the brain ;
The knave who wrote his worst to increase his
 chance of gain.

III.

He thought his verses bad enough to sell,
The public taught him soon they were too bad.
—Whoso would snatch at fame, not earn it well,
Let disappointment so his spirit mad !
But make, ye Muses ! patient poets glad—
Those who with faith and hope their souls sustain,
And serve you wisely, through misfortune sad,
Singing a deep and high, though sober strain,
Nor condescend, through craft, to work a meaner
 vein.

IV.

Who knows not Florence, knows not Italy,—
Not Italy, the world. At Rome there dwells,
In statued pride of place, Sublimity :
But Beauty scatters here her glittering spells,
And echoes to the vale the oracles
That reach her from the lofty Appennines ;
And to the city in her bosom tells
Of distant voices, that are hymning shrines
Far up beyond the stars, where light perpetual
shines.

V.

And some among her citizens have heard
The heavenly tones—our own Boccaccio,
The bard of Prose ; and Dante, who conferred
With the departed, nor in realms below
Stayed, but, permitted, visited also
The paradisal orbs,—heroic man !
Religious poet ! and learned there to glow
Even with the love wherein the world began,
Having, with holy dread, beheld our Pelican !

VI.

And Galileo, who, from Fiesoli,
Through optic tube the stars at distance saw,
With Milton for his guest ; and those great Three—
Massaccio, Raphael, Angelo, who law
Gave to great Art, and teach to Genius awe.
O Florence fair ! O vale of Arno ! clad,
On the hill-side and by the forest shaw,
At morn and eve with mist—nor grey nor sad,
But bathing all in gold, still beautiful and glad,

VII.

Our legend is of Love. By *ours*, I mean
Mine and Boccaccio's. "*Ego et Rex meus.*"
In Florence, we have said, doth lie the scene :
We must be born where'er the Fates decree us—
Nay, from their shackles do they ever free us ?
Nor is the choice of parents in our power,
Whose duty 'tis in childhood to o'ersee us,
And deem it such, in some unlucky hour,
To o'erlook our want, our wish—our nature's primal
dower.

VIII.

Ah ! their o'erseeing is too oft o'erlooking :
Our heroine and our hero proved it so.
'Tis time, methinks, their names I should be booking :
Salvestra she,—and he Girolamo,
A princely merchant's son,—a mere boy, who
Played with the girl from veriest infancy,
As brothers with their sisters sometimes do,—
And if none others, instinct tells us why :
For still in Nature lives a wise propriety !

IX.

He was, we've said, a princely merchant's son :
She was a tailor's daughter—fair, of course ;
All tailors' daughters are—a fact well known,
And as well known its philosophic source,
Between the two admitting no divorce.
Even Willis, flippant lozel transatlantic,
Of both the effect and reason can discourse,—
The tailor's sense of beauty makes him frantic,
And operates in a way that's clearly necromantic,

X.

Since thus the father's fancy moulds the mother's !
But there are heresies in physics, worse
Than any published by the prophet Brothers,
Or Zadkiel ; howbeit we may curse
The dupers, who would thus their empty purse
Replenish from the pockets of belief,
Ourselves to Truth devote, and much averse
From error, and Astrology in chief :
Yes, there is many a leech no better than a thief !

XI.

I would describe the lady, but I hate
Description ; and in passion would imply
The beauty that had caused it, soon or late.
Yet thus much I will say ; beneath the sky
There was none lovelier : with arched neck, dark
eye,
And marble shoulders, and a bosom white
As Juno's swans ; unborrowed dignity,
Graces untaught, and manners that delight
Because but natural,—these were hers as by birth-
right.

XII.

Yet all these make not beauty, if there lacks
Expression in the gesture; without that,
You have no woman, but a doll in wax—
Stake Virgil's "Æneid" against Virgil's "Gnat."
Salvestra lacked it not. Expression sat
Throned on her brow, and cradled in her cheek
A mystic, undefined, "you know not what,"
That seems like pictured music,—yet so meek
And gentle, you would cease to breathe to hear her
speak.

XIII.

Nor was Girolamo uncouth or stupid;
Indeed, when on the knee or at the breast,
His mother's flatterers called the infant "Cupid;"
And afterwards when, clad in virile vest,
A full-grown boy, "Adonis." For the rest,
He had a heart, we know, since he could love,
Which the young hunter could not; hence more
blest
Than Mammon's adulators could approve:
Whose hearts are of the flint, no feeling e'er may
move.

XIV.

But to our story. Young Girolamo
Loved fair Salvestra, with a love that grew
Even with his growth; till it became him so,
That but with her himself for nought he knew,
Him to her side such strong attraction drew.
His heart, by some mesmeric agency,
Lodged in her bosom, to his own untrue,
Whence he, by transfer of vitality,
Could live but where she lived,—apart from her
must die.

XV.

'Twas thus he felt, and thought, and always spoke.
His mother listened while he raved, till tired;
Then said, "'Twas far too serious for a joke,—
That Mesmer was a quack,—the patients hired,—
Somnambulism a humbug uninspired;
That Cupid was an urchin, must be whipped
Whenever Mammon's interests required;
And for Girolamo himself, equipped
For foreign travel, he should instantly be shipped!

XVI.

“ I have already with your guardians talked—
 (O ! what would your dear father now have said ?)
We have resolved your passion shall be baulked—
 (A son should show some reverence to the dead—
 Have I not been your father in his stead ?
Father and mother to you, both in one ?
 Talk of your heart ! 'tis but a lump of lead !)
You'll thank us, by and by, for what we've done,
Though now you think it hard. Away—away,
 my son ! ”

XVII.

Of her oration this was but a part,—
 Lady Sighieri had great power of speech :
Like Lady Hester Stanhope, 'twas an art
 She cultivated, and was proud to teach—
 Its deepest mysteries she contrived to reach.
Her husband's patience had been nightly tried ;
 With curtain lecture she was wont to preach,
Whereof, 'tis said, poor Lionardo died :
Hence 'twas, she found no man would after make
 her bride.

XVIII.

'Twere well if here I could insert a stanza
On Mrs. Caudle, penned by witty Jerrold,
To music by Minasi set, or Lanza ;
Yet it misfits thus woman's faults be feruled ;
I would not be the man my wife's to herald !
Pen, ink, and paper in the house, 'twere wonder
If she replied not. Known himself so perilled,
What scribbling husband but would soon knock
under,
And fear to read in type the speech he heard in
thunder ?

XIX.

Well knew Girolamo 'twould be in vain
To stay the current, when 'twas once set in :
Well knew the same his guardians,—and were fain
To let her will have way, and scape the din.
“ This boy of mine,” she would with them begin,
“ But fourteen years of age, to fall in love,
Is strange, provoking, quite a kind of sin !
Precocious passion, monstrous far above
The Megatherium old, yet fond as petted dove.

XX.

“A tailor’s daughter ! Think of that, good sirs,
The daughter of the ninth part of a man !
One sees in that how young affection errs !
We must remove him—quickly as we can ;
Lest he our opposition closely scan,
And wed her privately, to spite us all,
And shorten thus my life’s too narrow span—
O ! should she thus Girolamo enthrall,
Their bridal bed would be my bier of funeral !

XXI.

“ Or—since he’s duteous—if he should refrain,
And sacrifice his wishes to our pride,
He would consume and pine with inward pain,
To see her soon become another’s bride !
What else in such a case can we provide,
But send him hence ? Methinks, it were but wise,
He should in Paris with our factors bide,
That he may learn the ways of merchandize,
And share in other scenes and opportunities.”

XXII.

Eftsoons, the Guardians heartily agreed,
The thing proposed was best, and should be done.
“ Good youth !” said they, “ ’tis time you now should
 heed
Your own affairs, and how they’re carried on—
In self-improvement you shall grow anon
In Paris, while in Florence you regrade ;
Collision with the world shall give *bon ton* ;
Fashion and rank shall lend you willing aid ;
A year may serve the turn, and you’ll be thus re-
 made !”

XXIII.

Girolamo was stunned ; yet, desperate, tried
To reason ; grew the Dame then vehement ;
Now he exclaimed in passion, she replied
With fiercer, stronger, wildly eloquent ;
He became sullen, she more violent :
But when she found him mute, she changed the key,
And wooed him mildly ; like a storm-cloud spent,
Shed tears—a deluge, wherefrom ’scaping, he
Would dare the Arno’s tide, or brave the angry sea.

XXIV.

Aboard! aboard! Adown the Arno gliding,
The argosy sails proudly beautiful;
More treasure now within her bosom hiding,
Than all the wealth that clothes and crowns the
dull—
A Lover's Heart, of dreams and passions full,
Of fancies rich and gorgeous and divine,
Like a great Poet's brain, whose tide to lull,
Star-spheres do sing, and the chaste Moon doth shine,
Reaching the cerebral mass through his admiring
eyne.

XXV.

Bright Arno! Who'd not rest upon thy billow,
Like a rapt bridegroom, if his heart were free
To wed thee, as upon a fluid pillow
That yielded to the pressure pleasingly?
Who'd not an Adriatic make of thee,
And with a ducal ring espouse thy wave,
Even from thy fountains to the Tuscan sea,
Child of the Appennines; whether thou lave
The Hermit-City, or the shores, where sleep the
brave?

XXVI.

But what is there in thee to solace him,
Exile from love, and hurried to that barque,
A spectral barque, and manned with demons grim,
Rigged in eclipse when Sun and Moon were dark,
And Nature, like a corse, with horror stark—
No farewell spoken, no remembrance left,
Token of happy hours, the pledge and mark
Of fond affection, forcibly bereft
From all that still it loved, the heart asunder cleft ?

XXVII.

All this of course had been contrived before,
That furtively, as you may understand,
He might quit Florence, and, being put on shore
At Pisa, thence by Genoa, overland,
Reach France and Paris. By which underhand
Proceeding, poor Salvestra nothing knew
Of his departure, even though from the strand
She watched, with mystic sense, as it withdrew,
The stately barque that held her lover young and true !

XXVIII.

Salvestra looks at the receding sail
With ignorant complacence ; yet, I've hinted,
A mystic sense, like an incipient ail,
Troubles her mind :—So literal misprinted,
Though on the plaguy proofs no pains were stinted,
An Author's, in his work just new from press—
Type of a grief shall be more deeply dinted,
As time wears on and life wears out—distress,
With disappointment soured, embittered bitterness.

XXIX.

There lies, besides, a well of gentle feeling
Within that Maiden's heart :—it now is stirred,
And in the motion seems to seek for healing ;
Like to the winglets of a little bird,
There is a flutter in her bosom—heard
More by the inner sense than by the ear—
A murmur then—a syllable—a word—
And then a linkèd utterance calm and clear
Sighs through her tremulous lips—a simple lyric.
Hear!—

CANZONE.

THE CLAIRVOYANT TO HER HEART.

1.

I think of Ariadne,
While sails that Barque away,
Upon the Arno dancing,
So gallant and so gay !
Why do I think of her now ?
Tell me, my Heart ! O, say !

2.

My Theseus ne'er will leave me—
Then sail, thou Barque ! away—
Yet why should thought thus grieve me,
Upon this sunny day ?
Why do I think of her now ?
Tell me, my Heart ! O, say !

XXX.

“Why should'st thou not?” sudden exclaimed a Voice
Beside her, and she started to her feet—

“—Why should'st thou not? And why would'st
thou rejoice?

Men will prove false, when maids prove indiscreet;
Girolamo for thee was all unmeet!

Far has he gone from Florence—far away!

You'll sport no more together in the street!

He'll ne'er return, or not for many a day,

Nor know thee when he does—his heart with him
will stray!”

XXXI.

Before her towers the scornful majesty

Of dame Sighieri;—whose too-marble brow

Smites chilly down upon the glazing eye

Of terrified Salvestra; changing now

Her blood to ice, that it no more might flow;

Her heart and veins to stone, that they might move
not:—

Which having done, the Lady turns to go—

How wretched they who lovewhere friends approve not!

Yet far more wretched they, who are not loved and
love not!

XXXII.

When that proud angry form had left her thus,
Thought and emotion to Salvestra came ;
At first in indistinct and nebulous
Perplexity ; then through the mist and flame,
Light, and a flood, rushed resonant through her
frame,
And life seemed recreated in her soul,
Strength in her limbs, and feeling of the same ;
Again she conscious was of self-control,
Beheld the sun in heaven, and heard the Arno roll.

XXXIII.

Yet not upon the Arno stood she gazing,
But homeward looked ; and, listlessly as 'twere,
Endured the noon-day heat now downward blazing ;
And, with slow steps,—(as if a wanderer,
Who, though in Florence, had no business there,
And scarcely cared where she might lodge at night ;—
Fugitive as a leaf divorced and sere ;)—
Tow'rs the domestic threshold, went forthright,
By instinct only led, bereft of purpose quite.

XXXIV.

With prouder step, and head more lofty held,
Lady Sighieri sought her palace-home ;
No natural feeling in her heart rebelled
'Gainst the decision whereto she had come.
Of lovers true she had pronounced the doom
Without compunction, deeming it her duty ;
And shared not in the misery and gloom,
Which—like a passing chimney urchin sooty—
She had inflicted thus on Innocence and Beauty.

XXXV.

And like the aspiring sweep she victim was,
Although she knew it not ; a thing for pity
And admonition ;—black, how black, alas !
Though very comely !—Florence ! Merchant City !
By Mammon ridden ! many a soul-deep ditty
Might be sung o'er thee, of such desperation
As would the damnèd number 'mong the witty :
Thus oft at gibbet, block, or engine-station,
The doomed in jest abound, heroic elevation.

XXXVI.

Perhaps, they are martyrs, and “more sinned against
Than sinning;” wronged, and but wrong-doers
thence.

O, artist Blake! compassion still thou deign'st,
In thy most deathless “Songs of Innocence,”
To all such outcasts, whatso their offence,
Pauper or orphan, clod or climbing boy,
Negro or gaol-bird, with a love intense!
To Mammon's slave, though thus she kill young joy,
We'd show like mercy now; reform, but not destroy.

XXXVII.

When as she paced her princely chamber through,
Thus spake the Lady in her pride of soul—
“What is there Wealth has not the power to do?
What mar not? make not? 'stablish and control?
Impossibility? a braying foal,
Impoverished from its birth!—ignored by those
Who wear the crown, ere running for the goal!
Riches dare all things, shielded well from woes,
Severing or joining hearts, with only fools for foes!”

XXXVIII.

Think, Lady! ere thou believest in the creed,
The Wealthiest are the Happiest! Anciently,
Cræsus so thought—and suffered. Take thou heed!
Heaven will resent the odious blasphemy,
And in thy only son may punish thee!—
—Meantime, Salvestra on her humble bed,
Lay herself down, resigned to Heaven's decree;
But, ere she slept, these thoughts ran in her head,
Nor would therefrom be chased, though some of them
were dread.

XXXIX.

“Methinks, he might have said farewell to me;
Methinks, he *should* have said it! 'Twas unkind
To snap all ties so mutely, suddenly!
Why, mere acquaintance they more strictly bind!
Strangers observe more courtesy! . . . O, blind!
'Twas to rebuke Ambition, that would think
That I to him could be at all affined—
I was his schoolfellow?—that is a link!
His playmate too? Another! Wherefore should I
shrink?

XL.

“ I was, at all events, his fellow-creature !

Or, horrid thought ! are rich and poor two races ?
Different in kind, albeit alike in feature ?

Such angels are and men ; though angel faces
Some of the latter boast, and heavenly graces,
Like my Girolamo ! If so, 'twere sin,

Women should love them when in such high places :
Such guilt in former times, they say, hath been,
As by the Mystery shown, performed our chapel in,

XLI.

“ Last Christmas-tide. I recollect it well ;

The Angels and the Women whom they loved ;
And both were drowned within the Flood that fell
For their fault on the world ! If this be proved ;
It may be, by the Tempter I have been moved
To love unlawful, in my strong regard
For dear Girolamo, and it behoved
From further sinning we should be debarr'd—
So best to part at once, though so to part is hard !

XLII.

“I’ve had bright dreams, but dreams must fade at
morn :

Yet these were not of night that I have dreamt ;
And therefore ’tis, they’ve left me more forlorn.
Nor have I been from wicked pride exempt ;
But worn my hair, I fear, too vainly kempt !
O ! towards my friends and neighbours, now I see,
A haughty bearing ’twould too often tempt :
And one good youth who truly loved me,
How many times I’ve scorned—now scorned myself
by thee,

XLIII.

“Girolamo ! But hush ! his name no more !
Henceforth, I will not breathe it ! In my heart,
It shall be buried ; shrined ; for I’ll adore
His memory, but in silence. ’Tis an art
I’ll teach myself, and learn to play the part
I should from childhood until now have played,
Whether at home or school, at church or mart,
Or by the Arno’s side, a humble maid,
By emulous desire had I not been betrayed.

XLIV.

“ I will confess my sin, and, being absolved,
Will walk more humbly both with God and man.
Ah me ! what grief ambition has involved !
My pillow’s wet with tears ! I must—I can—
Suppress this insane passion—will ! The span
Of life that’s left to me—for though I’m young,
I feel there has been spoke on it a ban
That shortens its continuance—would be flung
Away on passion now—the knell of it is rung !

XLV.

“ *Ave Maria* ! I will murmur thus
The pious strain, and, by monotony
Of repetition, influence slumberous
Win to my weary lids, now stiff, and dry,
Exhausted of their moisture !—patiently,
Dispose myself to sleep, and pray to feel
The sense of pardon for my cruelty
To those I have offended—and thus seal
My peace—So may my visions paradise reveal !

XLVI.

“ Yes ! I may dream of Angels who defend
Those whom they love, and love as angels should,
Each less than lover, yet far more than friend ;
Who, being themselves so innocent and good,
Make us not less so in their fondest mood ;
But rather elevate us to their sphere,
Than stoop themselves to that where once we stood.
Methinks, my spirit is already there—
Sleep ! what a heaven art thou to penitence sincere !”

XLVII.

Such were Salvestra's thoughts, when soft repose
Glid to her pillow, and hushed up her sense,
Benignantly. More happy than she knows,
The Maiden, in her shut intelligence,
Dreamed of the Cross, and of its shame intense,
A willing Martyr, suffering its anguish ;
Then rescue came ; Divine Benevolence,
Just as stern resolution 'gan to languish,
Bearing her—crowned—away ; and said, “ The Saints
thus vanquish !”

XLVIII.

And then she dreamed that she was canonized,
And sate in glory with the Virgin Mother,
Gorgeously garmented, and idolized
Even by each wreathèd and angelic brother,
Who, gazing on her, saw not one another,
And tended her their harps to do her honour ;
Singing her praises as they sang no other,
Since of high argument she was the donor :—
For light that she had shed, such light was shed
upon her,

XLIX.

And therefore 'tis that Poets, whose minds are
O'er-influenced by Angelic ministry,
Story Salvestra's wrongs, and near and far
Extend her fame on earth, as in the sky
'Tis sung before the Heaven's consistory.
In act extern she bore no sign of woe,
But hid it all in her heart's secresy,
For she had "that within which passeth show,"
Sorrow and suffering, whereof th' Angels only know.

L.

She slept till Dawn, thus dreaming ; when the shrill

Alarum sounded of brisk Chanticleer.

—Earlier than was her wont, yet with goodwill,

She rose, and saw the Sun first faintly peer,

Gilding the East, ere all the Hemisphere,

As making modest effort, ere, sublime,

He shed at noon his brilliance everywhere.

Thus greatest things commence from small. Even

Time

Grows by degrees ; so Virtue ; and alas ! so Crime !

LI.

Love also at the first is but a germ,

A little seed which, buried in the heart,

Grows into stem and flower, (if no hid worm

Consume the tender bud,) with silent art,

Till, like life's coronal, it shines apart,

Between the sun and earth, a glorious thing,

An anchored vessel, waiting for its chart,

A bird footbound, and of imperfect wing,

A bright peninsula, in mid air fluttering.

LII.

Such with Salvestra had it been ; and, now,
Must be again : a germ so small and fine,
As pity for the suffering, may grow
To love ; and human mercy to divine.
Hence, scornèd suitor ! for that wound of thine,
There's healing in her penitential sighs :—
Take courage, Paolo ! by this verse of mine,
I swear, her heart with thine shall sympathize :—
It doth !—They've met !—What smiles, with tears,
are in her eyes !

LIII.

Nor slow was he, to mark the iris there ;
Nor, haply, ignorant of the cause of change ;
But if she pitied him, he pitied her ;
And soon their conscious souls, no longer strange,
Of mutual being through the scope and range,
Were in each other well and deeply read :
And Love of both had, soon, his sweet revenge ;
Nor Hymen quenched his arrows when they wed,
But, with his nuptial torch, relumined them instead.

END OF CANTO I.

SALVESTR A.

—

Canto III.

SALVESTRA,

A Tale of Boccaccio.



CANTO II.

I.

PARIS! the city of the gay and free!

Fashion's metropolis! and Reason's mart!

The focal lens of contrariety!

Hearts without love, and loves without the heart.—

Where courtesy has grown so much an art,

That manners make the man, not he makes them,

Forming of him the whole, and not a part,

His substance, not the accidents,—that gem

Desert or rank,—the head, and not the diadem.

II.

Manners—not morals—but their substitute,
The grave and frivolous, the false and vain,
Confound in one solution dissolute,
And make a mere alembic of the brain.
Shades of the brave that haunt the banks of Seine !
Once more to your degenerate race appear,
Return ye to the well-remembered plain ;
The ancient frankness, daring, witness here,
Now poorly, dimly, shown, in shrug, grimace, and
sneer.

III.

With too much independence, to be free ;
And, for true valour, too much levity ;
Each son of France pursues his proper glee,
And greets the passing follies as they fly.
To nought but his own mood in slavery,
By that subdued to lust and indolence—
O strongest, though unsceptred tyranny !
The slave of whim, and passion, and pretence,
Not fearing to offend, impatient of offence.

IV.

Well for Girolamo, the simple youth
Was more astonished than delighted by
The scenes he travelled through ; and much, in sooth,
He could not understand :—Thoughts that were high
With Deeds so low, and native of the sty,
Repeated Circe's magic, and made Vice
Seem beautiful at first as Vanity
Would have it look, so delicate, so nice ;
Though doomed to feed on husks, when next were
thrown the dice.

V.

The language soon he learned to speak with ease :
The vocal organs in the young adapt
Themselves with readiness to what they please.
Girolamo found his were but too apt ;
But not the more for that the links were snapt
Which to the "Langue d'Oc" chained his charmèd
sense,
The blithe Provençal poets, who were rapt
To feeling's summit, and the "gay science"
Taught to the heart, as if it needed teaching thence.

VI.

May joy the Troubadour still hover by—
Poet of Love, a blessing on his tongue!
Though the Trouvère, the bard of Chivalry,
With his “Langue d’Oïl,” stilled his softer song;
Convincing by the reason of the strong;
Mailed in cuirass, and weaponed with the sword;
Chanting of battle,—strain both loud and long,
Witty, satiric, lewd,—victorious lord;
Till France his language learned, and spoke it word
for word.

VII.

Girolamo read much; chanson, romance,
Fable, chronique; neglecting not meanwhile
Severer lore, wherever found, perchance
Brunetto’s “*Petit Trésor*,” or Joinville—
(Not he—vain prince!—who threatens Britain’s
Isle
With craft piratic erelong to invade,
And waked with fatuate fondness Europe’s smile,
While his loud boasts unearthly rumbling made—
Like Dr. Kitto’s voice in Burlington Arcade.)—

VIII.

Or Villehardouin, or Froissart—and, at times,
His spirit fed upon the *délicès*
Of Alain Chartier, for whose honey rhymes
A princess kissed him in a royal way,
Sleeping in palace hall, at noon of day.
Such stories to thy heart, Girolamo !
Went with conviction, shed therein a ray
That warmed and kindled a desire to know,
And thy Instructor taxed such learning to outgo.

IX.

This Tutor was a Priest, a well-taught man,
The wittiest man in Paris, and the gayest—
'Twas very well the way that they began ;
But what art thou, O Man ! with Love that
playest ?
The Urchin's gaining strength while thou delayest.
These studies are too virtuous ; or, at best,
But stimulate remembrance :—right, thou sayest ;
Thought on one object suffered thus to rest,
Needs others for the eye to drive it from the breast.

X.

Thus reasoned Pere Lebrun—(so name the Priest)—
And with his Order's cunning 'gan to act ;
Talked with his pupil of the mental feast
That observation brings ; proposed a pact
That they should quit their books, and study fact
Abroad in good society, and see
Whate'er was notable, and gain the tact
Which makes life's intercourse work easily,
Wins ladies' hearts, and gives more freedom to the
free.

XI.

“ You have no notion yet what woman is :”
Thus he pursued.—“ Forget that Florence chit ;
Regard Parisian beauty, and learn bliss
By simply gazing, and, by hearing, wit.
What grace of form ! discourse, how exquisite !
Her shape entrances, how her eyes allure !
What fascination on her brow is writ !
Her motion music, starry, cynosure ;
La Femme toute comme il faut—chef-d'œuvre de la
Nature !

XII.

“ Would you a guardian angel ? She is one !

Whose far-off steps rejoice the listening soul—
She thine Aurora is, and thou the Sun !

A joy that more enchants than Hebe’s bowl !

A dearer prize than crowns the racer’s goal !

Woman, dear woman, whom, when Nature formed

She let her work creative power control,
Ceasing invention, and to worship warmed ;
In wonder and despair, the while old Chaos stormed.

XIII.

“ Time is that I should show the world to thee,

And her who sways it with small pearly hand,
Soft as the cygnet’s down, and such to see,
Subtly contrived, and delicately bland

Of gesture, that it speaks in mute command,
Bowing the wealth of all things to her will ;

Nor pride its simplest wafture may withstand :
The while her tresses, with a special skill,
As in a golden web, take valour captive still.

XIV.

“Let us go forth, and dare her witcheries ;
The enchantress loves to haunt in public places,
The Luxembourg, the Louvre, the Tuilleries,
The Champs Elysées ; all these share her graces :
Nay, even the churches have their pretty faces ;
Old Nôtre Dame, St. Roche, St. Geneviève,
St. Sulpice and St. Eustace, boast rich traces
Of that great beauty which once fell in Eve,
And yet makes sin so fair, as might those saints deceive.

XV.

“But, most of all, there where the Boulevards wind,
The shady avenues our preference court ;
'Mid groves of elms, with various buildings lined,
With art and nature both we may disport :
There sate your needs, or gratify your *forte*—
Café, hotel, and shop, and theatre,
Are yours to choose, and splendid the resort.
What festive groups, and girls of skin so clear
You see the red wine through, that they are quaffing
there !”

XVI.

Thus spake Lebrun, nor waited answer, but
His pupil speeded forth ; from place to place,
Conveyed him, or on foot or chariot,
Till evening came ; then, as a crowning grace,
Would introduce him to a friendly face,
Or two, or three ; nay, would not be denied ;
Street after street he traversed, with swift space,
Well known, it seemed, in each, nor undescried ;
Fair dame from lattice, still, looked, nodded, smiled,
or sighed.—

XVII.

The blushes of the morn their cheeks suffuse,
The bloom of young desire, the purple light ;
The splendour of the sun their eyes abuse,
And with too sudden stroke the senses smite,
And all too much the nerves and pulse excite.
Now paused the priest, and knocking at the door,
Entered within :—both welcomed with delight
A bevy of bright ladies, three or four,
Gay, charming, complaisant :—See Little, or Tom
Moore.

XVIII.

Perplexed sensation made Girolamo
Awkward and stupid at the unwonted scene ;
He felt his blood, too, run, or fast or slow
He knew not which, and asked what it might mean.
Cake, sweetmeat, wine, and talk now intervene,
Each fair to either for his Hebe rushes,
Proffering with grace the glass each pause between :
Till one more free all ceremony crushes,
In the youth's lap plombs down—kissing him till he
blushes.

XIX.

The sudden action seized Girolamo
With wonder, and then shame, yet no disgust :
He'd feasted too that day, and felt a glow
Within his veins—'twas fever and not lust !
He wanted but a period to adjust
His startled sense, and know his situation—
Then seemed to peer upon him, first, the bust,
And then the full length form, for his salvation,
Of her he truly loved—her of his town and nation.

XX.

It was Salvestra! shaped by mind on air—
Her more than wraith, her image in his heart!
'Twas she! he saw her chaste, as well as fair!
And from the meretricious, with a start
Sprang up indignant! He had not the art
Of speechifying, so he nothing said,
But slow, with scorn, made ready to depart,
And left the room, the house; nor turned his head,
Though laughter him pursued,—it had for him
no dread!

XXI.

What of Lebrun? Sin was to him no shame!
He could absolve whate'er was done amiss—
Conscience for him had no reproof or blame.
His scheme had failed: he felt annoyed at this,
But nothing further,—compensating bliss
He found in what remained. What he began,
He finished as of course, nor feared the hiss
Of censure. Why? The office saves the man,
And with him others too, whom he can bless or ban.

XXII.

Adieu to Paris!—Hail, O Florence, hail!

Beautiful on the mountains are the feet
Of faithful Love! Rejoice, O hill and dale!

From a peak of the Appenines, 'tis sweet
To look on Florence! How the heart doth beat
In the touched bosom of Girolamo!

Val d'Arno! never yet did he so greet
Thee, and the city there that sleeps below,
Within thine arms embraced, and coloured in the
glow

XXIII.

Of an Italian sunset. There behold,

Gorgeously tinted, the Duomo loom;
The Campanile, in a mist of gold,
And that "Old Palace Tower," 'twixt gleam and
gloom,

Stand forth, as if to challenge height and room,
Midst palaces and temples, and the crowd

Of dwellings, in distinct and lofty doom,
Braving the elements with gesture proud,
Far glittering in the light, unshadowed with a cloud.

XXIV.

Around there spreads an amphitheatre
Of hills, clad with the olive and the vine ;
And pleasant villas here and there appear,
The recreation of the Florentine,
Of leisure and of wealth the pledge and sign—
But now for these the Youth had small regard,
The city there below contained the shrine
At which his heart adored—that shrine, how marred !
O sure that heart must break, though it as rock were
hard !

XXV.

He has descended now into the town ;—
Shall he straight seek Salvestra ? Well it were,
First from his Mother her resolve were known :
Haply, she has relented ; eased of fear,
More welcome he to her, for whom so dear
He had trod so late upon the Tempter's crest,
And wore a wreath he should be proud to wear—
Their meeting thus would, sure, be doubly blest,
No doubt to cloud his faith, none on her hopes to rest.

XXVI.

Lady Sighieri sat in palace chamber,
Rejoicing in her state : her heart was proud :
The spoiled of fortune, she in thought would clamber
Into Jove's seat, and speak from thunder cloud,
" I will, and it is done !"—while Nature bowed
Obedient to her fiat, and her laws
The slaves of Mammon, with the heart, allowed.
She smiles superior, with a scorn that awes
More than the darkest wrath, and wantons with the
cause.

XXVII.

While musing thus, a step alarmed her ear,
And soon a shape her eye—which, blinding, gazed
Upon Girolamo,—returned,—and there,—
A presence unannounced. Not unamazed,
She looked, I say, on him, till sight was dazed ;
With rigid cataleptic attitude,
Which few ape well,—as if becoming crazed,—
(Of actresses I know of none who could,
Unless the Cushman might—and much I wish she
would.)

XXVIII.

At length, she 'gan to tremble—as her mind
Grew with suggestion;—Some strange horror trained
That sudden apparition : She will find
A word—though he cannot—“Thou!”—He remained
Still silent. “Speak ! By what art thou restrained ?
Thou hast returned, though sudden, not too soon !
Florence is now as Paris ! She who feigned
Affection for thee, to another wed,
Leaves thee to better choice—no more is now to
dread !”

XXIX.

He shrieked not—sank not. He had heard before,
Entering the hall, the tidings, and had come
To front his desolator ;—but once more
To see her, ere for aye he left his home ;
Abroad in the world's wilderness to roam,
A wanderer, without country, without name ;
And misanthropic as an alien gnome,
Whose task is not on earth, but 'neath the same ;—
Loathing the daylight's glare, the grave his only aim !

XXX.

“No more to dread!” Her words repeating so,
He calmly answered. “Dread—for thee, or me?
Perhaps, no more for either! All of wo
That I can suffer I have borne from thee—
Henceforth, from such my soul at once is free.
But this of thine endures for ever there;
A doom—no fugitive calamity—
A curse that clings to me, because thy heir,
The destiny of wealth that dazzles but to sere.

XXXI.

“Has no dream been with thee, thy soul to warn
Of mischief that would make the morning pale?
No vision of the night, that with life’s yarn
Would blend in darkness; and lift up the veil,
That shrouds the future with its bliss and bale?
Or are to thee all oracles but lies,
And thou with impious blindness doomed to sail,
Against fate’s tide, until the billows rise
To whelm the scoffer then, who mocks at phantasies?”

XXXII.

“See’st thou not now the threatening phantoms throng
About thy shrinking form ; sedate and slow,
Pointing their victim, as they come along,
With beckoning gesture, thee encircling so,
Till the weird coil leaves thee no space to go ?
Anon, thou art their prisoner ! Fare thee well !
Thou gavest me life, and thou hast ta’en it now !
I murmur not. Hear’st thou not yet the knell ?
We meet on earth no more—elsewhere, in Heaven,
or Hell !”—

XXXIII.

He vanished—left her to her solitude—
The wealthy mother, thus unsonned. Perchance ?
’Twas but his passion spake so wild and rude,
Though strangely dumb it smote her ! Youth’s
romance—
Give it free way ! ’twill waken from its trance !
The girl was married—all on that side sure ;
The rest was lunacy—a frantic dance,
Of which he soon must tire—and time would cure
Whate’er was else amiss, and to new paths allure.

XXXIV.

Thus reasoned she, recovering thus her joy ;
But she misreckoned ; knew not of the heart :
Nor e'er suspected she had broke the toy,
By her rude handling. Ignorant thou art,
Lady Sighieri ! of Love's course and chart,
And blind as Cupid's self to Love's intents—
Slave of convention ! victim of the mart !
Divested of those generous sentiments,
Native to woman's breast—which lost, she ne'er
repents

XXXV.

Of any wrong she suffers or inflicts.
We follow now Girolamo once more :—
Passion prescribes what custom interdicts—
Shall he quit Florence, native town, before
Adieus are said, where he would still adore ?
He must—will see Salvestra, though so late—
What makes the night-air burn so shivering frore ?
The heart commands, with instinct sure as fate—
What, though she cannot love, she will compassionate.

XXXVI.

Alas ; Girolamo ! there is scarce life
Within thy heart to bear thee to her door—
How trembles he with that internal strife,
As with the cold of winter do the poor—
Florence to him is but a barren moor,
All but that threshold he now standeth by ;
Nor marvel if the latch be insecure,
Not much skill needs that humble lock to try,
Which soon yields to the force, he used he knew not
why.

XXXVII.

Cautiously now he treads the house within,
Nor finds it hard its secrets to discover—
But had it a Dedalian labyrinth been,
What labyrinth is safe against a lover ?
Now, all ye guardian Angels that watch over
The marriage bed of faithful hearts ! watch here ;
Over Salvestra's pillow gently hover !—
For who, with rolling eye and listening ear,
Her bedside watches thus, in frenzy or in fear ?

XXXVIII.

It is Girolamo! He closer creeps—
Stands mutely near the couch, thereon agaze,
Where, by Salvestra's side, her husband sleeps.
Sleeps she? She does but seem. "Hist; hist!"
Amaze
At once aroused her, from half-conscious haze
Of deepening slumber, with a stifled shriek—
"Hush!" softly said the Youth. The tone—the
phrase—
Admonished her—"Salvestra! hear me speak!
I'm he, Girolamo!—your lover!—come to seek

XXXIX.

"Your pardon—not your heart—Paolo's now!"
Salvestra heard, and trembled—but, constrained
By strong emotion, syllabled a low
And broken answer—"Leave me, yet unstained,
In honour! Is it well, that me disdained
You thus should visit now? There was a time
We might have loved—'tis passed—and but re-
mained
This outrage, to complete and crown thy crime,
And make of me a scorn, and theme for ribald rhyme.

XL.

“There was a time we might have loved :—but now,

You see my husband—him I love alone—

He has my heart, and had my hand and vow !

Thank Heaven, he sleeps ! your visit all unknown

At this untimely hour. At once, begone !

Were he to know’t, I should indeed be lost !

What wretchedness were mine ! What have you
done ?

In selfish passion utterly engrost,

Spread mischief unawares, and periled me the most.

XLI.

“And to that sleeping and unconscious man,

You’ve not reflected on your bitter wrong !

You who have brought on my calm life a ban—

He who has blessed it with a faithful, strong,

Zealous, and virtuous love, that all along

No purpose had but me, and, when obtained,

Made me its idol, morn and matin song,

Its wreath and garland, its sole triumph gained,

Queen of his humble heaven, where I alone have
reigned !”

XLII.

She said : After Girolamo had heard
Her to the end, all hope forsook him then—
And, for some time, he could not utter word ;
But sobbed and sighed, ere he might speak agen :
At length, he cried, “ Salvestra ! Think of when
You thought not thus of me—those innocent days,
When, if we thought, within the scope and ken
Of our too simple minds, and narrow ways,
Each other we but knew, of all the sun surveys.

XLIII.

“ To us, I think, there was no world beside—
To me there is none other yet, besure !
To you there is—(O haste to be a bride !)—
A world as fair, and, ah ! far more secure !
How cold is all within me ! By my pure,
And virgin love, my honour and my pride !
I mean no harm to thee ! If this endure,
I cannot live ! Permit me, by thy side
I may repose, till life renew its wonted tide !”

XLIV.

So urgently he pled ; so manifest
His need of kindly warmth ; so wildly had
Passion excited him and her opprest ;
What could she do but yield ? She loved the lad ;
Ay, and her heart for him was very sad,
Although she feigned to have outgrown the feeling—
To hear his madness almost made her mad !
So he lay down beside her, for the healing
Of that strange feverous cold which through his veins
was stealing.

XLV.

“I will not touch thee ! will not speak to thee !”
And he lay quiet, while his troubled brain
Revolved these thoughts : “No hope on earth for
me !
No life but in her love ! There is no vein,
Nor artery, within this corse of pain,
Which, were it but a corse, ’twould feel no more,
But with her love is cherished. Am I Cain,
That thus I am an exile ? Heaven restore
The days that have gone by, or cut off those before !

XLVI.

“I know not when this fatal love began—

It was, I think, born with me ; ’twas with me,
A child, a boy, a youth—why not the man ?

’Tis not to know myself, not to know thee !

To part—O God !—to part, is not to be !
Can one exist with only half a heart ?

In its cleft fountain, can vitality ?
Lest it not forth the blood ? O God ! to part !
What meaneth it but death ? ’Tis best !—O cunning art !

XLVII.

“I have conceived it, in my inward soul ;—

This silence is an oracle, and teaches
What frantic noise omits. That pangless goal,
That way is wisest which the soonest reaches !
There have been erst the violentest breaches
Made in the house of life ; ’gainst which the priest
(O son of craft !) still sagely—rightly—preaches :—
For without force the soul may be releast.—
Why should he breathe who would not ? ’Tis but
to have ceased !”—

XLVIII.

Having thus thought, he made up a strong will,
Ceasing to think, and willing once for ever—
Then clenched his hands, and held his breath, until
Their functions from all organs he might sever :—
And, stifling feeling with the stern endeavour,
Repressed all motions of his conscious frame,
And fixed them in a trance, to waken never ;
Firmly resolved, nor faltering in his aim,
'Till o'er each passive sense a deepening slumber
came.

XLIX.

Meanwhile Salvestra waited with desire,
And anxious mind, some sign of his removing : —
At length, surprised, she ventured to enquire
Why he went not ? In gentle terms reproving
His want of caution, and his too much loving—
“ My husband soon will wake ! 'tis fit you go—
If my dear honour still you are behaving !
Why speak you, stir you not ? Can it be so ?
That sleep has kissed his lids in pity to his wo ? ”

L.

Then stretching forth her hand, she softly touched
And shook him gently. "He is chill, indeed!
It was no feint to say so!" Then she clutched
More freely, firmly—"Sir! awake with speed!"
But finding soon he gave to her no heed,
She became wild with wonder and with dread,
And shook him strongly. "O, is this thy meed
For my compassion? Ah! his hands—his head—
His cheeks are mortal cold! Great Mercy! he is
dead!"

END OF CANTO II.

SALVESTRA.

—

Canto III.

SALVESTRA,

A Tale of Boccaccio.



CANTO III.

I.

THERE are in Love distinctions national ;
For Love the Frenchman seldom dares to die ;
The Italian often : true, the Son of Gaul
Will venture suicide from vanity,
Which he misnames, and with the pageantry
Of circumstance theatric decorates.
A Frenchman die of love ? Bah ! Wilfully,
He will parade his quarrel with the fates,
And join, in social pact, a band of desperates.

II.

Splenetic Egotist ! from vanity,
For a blue riband in his button hole,
He who had sworn he ever would be free,
Surrendered to Napoleon, branch and bole,
His rights, possessions—nay, his heart, his soul,
His children's limbs and lives. If you neglect,
He straight will praise himself ; for 'tis the whole
Of his existence to command respect,
Careless even though for crime ;—no praise will he
reject.

III.

The Englishman in love is most sincere,
But little prone to suicide, though long
Foul scandal has affirmed the lying sneer ;
Ay, and albeit its " Purgatory " song,
In British numbers, bold, sublime, and strong
Has lately issued from an instrument
Of no mean power, sounding as from a gong,
Rude, passionate, abrupt, wild, violent ;
Work of a genuine soul, though much on wrath mis-
spent.

IV.

Something too much of this. Our story claims,
 Serious attention and a sober strain—
As we approach the terminus, our aims
 Grow more decided, ere we leave the train.
All travelling dreams now vanish from the brain,
And the world's actual business 'gins to press
 On the awaked sensorium once again—
Grave duty recommences ; tasks that bless,
Or curse the doër—self-responsibilities !

V.

Return we to Salvestra. When—(the tale
 Proceeds)—she found Girolamo was dead,
Sorrow and terror made her weep and wail,
 With measureless remorse, although the dread
 Of Paolo, asleep on the same bed,
Restrained much of the clamour of her grief,
 And hushed it, ere it got too much a-head,
To quiet, muffling it, as 'twere a thief,
That would her husband wrong, in murmurs low
 and brief.

VI.

Anon, she reasoned with herself; which done,
She then her husband wakened; wondering, he
Drank in her words, like Labour's honest son,
At ear and mouth, though in th' obscurity
Of midnight, none his eager mien might see.
With pardonable cunning, she commenced
Telling the story—(fraudful piety!)
As if it were another's, lest incensed
His wrath might judgment slay—too suddenly condensed.

VII.

When he her prudent parable had tarried,
Honest conviction spake in him agreeing.
“I'd have,” said he, “the corse in private carried,
To the youth's home; and for the woman, seeing
That she was faultless, there should be no being
Permitted to resentment.” “Then,” said she,
“This must be done even now!” and so decreeing,
She laid the hand of Paolo suddenly
On the dead youth, whereat, much fearing, up rose he;

VIII.

His taper lit ;—and, calmly confident,
The cold remains on his broad back disposed ;
Nor felt reluctance, because innocent,
To bear it forth abroad. The gate was closed
Of the Sighieri palace ; there he loosed,
And left the body. Little did it irk
His conscience ; which, when pure, is never pozed—
Like Humboldt's " Cosmos," quite a perfect work ;—
Or Mahomet's religion ; that is, for the Turk.

IX.

Morning in Florence ! O'er the gorgeous city
She doffs her silver veil, to contemplate
The paradise that girds the palace Pitti,
The valley and the hills that, in their state,
Encincture all that is of younger date,
With everlasting grandeur. Proudly shines,
By thee, Italian Athens ! witnessed late
The rising sun above thy Appennines,
Whose lofty crests along Aurora's self reclines ;

X.

While burst the soaring vapours, and dissolve
Upon the pine-clad mountain-sides away,
Until the vision from the cloud evolve,
And thy metropolis salute the day,
From midst the orange groves wherein she lay
Slumbering while-ere. But all is life once more ;
Health in the breeze, and pleasure in the ray,
Music in the deep bell, the hum, the roar
Of voices, and the waves that beat on Arno's shore.

XI.

A sound of weeping in a palace-hall !
Sighieri ! never did I know 'till now,
That thou wert beautiful. Great in thy fall,
Pride may have leave to sit upon thy brow,
As on its native throne ; . . a column, thou,
Of most unquestionable majesty—
A Niobe thy sorrows thee avow ;
More than her children was thy son to thee,
Thy one sole pledge of love, thy widow's legacy !

XII.

Thou now art human, and I recognize
Siddonian bearing in thy gait and mien;
Formed in the mould of woman's goodliest size,
And fitted to become a tragic scene—
Not lightly now of thee I speak, or mean;
For trouble, gendered though of trespass, hath
Crowned thee with glory, that shall grow serene,
When penitence shall meet thee on thy path,
And melt to tenderness thy maniac demon wrath.

XIII.

The sudden apparition of the corse
At her own door might well appal and madden
The humblest mother, with despair, remorse,
And lust of vengeance. O! her heart 'twill gladden,
To know him murdered; but, if not, 'twill sadden,
For want of object to be wreaked upon!
No wound? no bruise? unsmitten! not Abaddon,
When punished for rebellion, lost and lone,
More sure the blow was Heaven's—more ready to
disown!

XIV.

But when she found that he had not been slain,
Then she sate down beside his corse and wept :
Tears, and then words, relieved her spirit's pain :
“ What fond delusion in my brain has slept,
That still a dream of happiness has kept
Alive, when the reality was dead,
Or never had been born, to intercept
The bloom of promise, early witherèd,
And expectation mock with visionary dread ?

XV.

“ Ah ! visionary, look upon my boy !
There the stern truth ! Look there and dream no
more
Of pride, prosperity, or real joy !
Think not the world, experienced from of yore,
Will bow its neck thy haughty step before !
Think not to heap up treasure to enrich
What once upon the heart we dearly bore—
To lift the child beyond the parents' pitch,
That more he may mankind, with wealth and power
bewitch !

XVI.

“ All this is vanity; we may not bribe
The vixen Fortune, and the bravo Death!
Try either, and they answer with a gibe—
As well frown at the stars, or with thy breath
Blow back the tempest! Nothing is beneath,
Nothing are we above. The rich, the poor,
Are in the tomb distinguished by no wreath,
There fade all flowers that garland king or boor
All must put off their pomps who enter at that door!

XVII.

“ My son! my son! Ambition dies with thee!
A throne has sunk beneath me with thy fall!
The sceptre of the wide world's empery
Lies confined with thee at thy funeral!
A monarch's form is covered with thy pall,
The kingliest and the last of all the race,
That held the subject earth in willing thrall!
Ancient dominion totters to its base,
While pauper hospitals our palaces replace!

XVIII.

“ Perhaps, it is Heaven’s will it so should be !
Since thou, the paragon of youths, art dead :
Nature should mourn her lost regality ;
Art’s tallest tower crouch his imperial head,
From midst dim ether thunder-shadowèd,
In fear and trembling ; till the Wrath pass by,
Whereof old prophecy had trumpeted,
As if of doom the sun himself should die,
And Time pass glorified into eternity.”

XIX.

While thus Sighieri raved in queenly wise,
Humble Salvestra, ’mong the mourners came,
Bid by her husband,—veiled and in disguise,
To learn if rumour fixed on either blame ;
While Paolo elsewhere essayed the same :
Whereby they found themselves suspicion-free.
Then in Salvestra’s breast revived the flame
Of old affection : and straight hastened she
Where lay the corse in Church, chief mourner there
to be.

XX.

There, 'neath the sacred roof, upon his bier
Reposed the noble Youth, and, it around,
His Mother, Friends and Relatives wept there ;
Lamenting him, while yet above the ground,
With ceremonial rites, with grief profound,
With solemn state, with pomp processional
Of crucifix and taper, and the sound
Of chaunted psalmody ; while, amidst all,
A Penitential Dirge was sung by great and small.—

THE DIRGE.

1.

Who dare say, God is proud ?
What, then ! Can Pride be human
In Man ? and fair in Woman ?
O, how looks it in a shroud ?
Chap-fallen ! Ah ! why ?
Of the dust, for it is spread,
In the grave, an humble bed—
Where it *must* lie !

2.

Weep ye? O, turn aside
In shame, ye melancholy,
Ye wanton sons of Folly!
Pride! repent thee of thy pride!
Chap-fallen! Ah! why?
Look, where Death's pale mask, a-grin,
Laughs at mortals, while they sin—
There they *must* lie!

XXI.

Thus ran the Dirge. Sighieri felt it drear.
They say, in part, 'twas written by herself:
It might be so. I know not if it were—
At all events, it indicates the shelf
Whereon her hopes were wrecked—as if of delf
Some people might be made, and some of china;
But on this point of Jervis ask—or Jelf—
To whom a soul at Mecca or Medina,
Is quite as good as one that worships Rome's
Regina.

XXII.

But on all mountains men shall worship God ;
In every heart His image traced may be :
All are His offspring who, without a nod,
Created and commands the things we see,
And those we cannot. Let us, then, agree
To love each other, as our flesh and bone ;
Since the same Father, the same Deity,
Has made all nations of one blood alone—
Thus from Sighieri's fault the Church may learn her
own.

XXIII.

O wondrous power of Love ! To see it shown,
We to Salvestra turn ;—who veiled stood,
'Mid that assembly, as if there, alone,
Among the crowd, she was in solitude.
The sound of that strange hymn came on her mood,
To fret, tease, vex, provoke, exasperate,
Excite, inflame, and anger brain and blood ;
But the strong passion she would yet abate,
And still at distance stood, and kept her veiled state.

XXIV.

The strain has ended—that weird strain—and still
Her spirit had its agony repressed ;
But, at its ceasing, with a sudden thrill,
A tide of feeling gushed into her breast.
—She must approach the cradle of his rest ;
His, who was once—still is—so dearly loved !
And, through the pressure, like a swan’s white
crest,
Midst heaving waves, she gently—slowly—moved ;
Seen or unseen, by some ; approved or not approved.

XXV.

She reached the bier, and stood reflectively,
A little while ; but nought essayed to speak ;
Then, from the countenance of the Dead put by
What covered it, and saw *his* face. A shriek !
Like a geir-eagle’s from an eyrie peak,
Shrill, and prolonged, and climbing to the sky,
Where late, ere wounded in the archer’s freak,
Its wing soared upward :—O, how weariedly
That aspiration vain pierces the air on high !

XXVI.

Such was the shriek Salvestra uttered—
And,—having of that terrible cry relieved
Her labouring bosom,—fell upon the dead,
Prostrate ; and yet, as if she little grieved,
But few tears shed ; and none a sob perceived.
That one wild shriek bore all her grief away,
And of her life bereaved the love-bereaved !
So, mute and moveless, on that corse she lay ;
While wondering gazed the crowd—but wist not she
was clay.

XXVII.

Anon the women gathered her around,
(Who she might be, as yet, they had no notion,)—
To comfort her, and raise her from the ground ;
Admiring much her personal devotion,
Misdeeming she had swooned of strange emotion :
“ Lady ! whoe’er thou art, arise ! ” they said.
—She stirred not—spake not—shrunk not from
the erosion
Of sound or touch :—the dying on the dead
Fell when she fell—her heart its death shriek uttered !

XXVIII.

She stirs not—speaks not—breathes not! Give her air—
Her veil removed, they recognize her face—
It is Salvestra's!—pale, yet passing fair;
Calmer than when in life, with more of grace.
The Sculptor's now, alone, there finds a place;
That serene beauty which one master only
Gives to his works, and which in all we trace,
Though, scorned by him, they broken round his
throne lye;
Severest of severe—sceptred, and crowned, and lonely!

XXIX.

A double pity now inspired the soul
Of all beholders, who, with louder sorrow,
Lamented the departed; both the goal
Of happiness had won:—to-day, to-morrow,
From other's will they no permission borrow,
How they shall bless, or how they shall be blessed—
Henceforth unswayed, with love entire and thoro',
Through fields of peace they wander or they rest,
No tyranny to awe, no terrors to molest.

XXX.

Meanwhile, was Paolo not unaware

Of what had happened : anguish smote his breast ;
By which surprised, he, without craft or care,
The facts of the preceding night confessed.

Sighieri heard . . . impatient and unblessed,
She raved, unmindful of the sacred walls :—

Suspicion seemed confirmed ; a murdered guest
Her son had been, victim of jealous thralls,
And there the homicide . . . the sight that most
appals.

XXXI.

“ At length, thou’rt come—the Avenger’s sacrifice !

I see thee then, at length—may look on thee !
By such as thou—more mean than Avarice—
Are princely hopes foreshortened ? Answer me,
Mother of God ! if thou hast sympathy
For the unchilded ; let thine oracle

Make clear his certain guilt, that all may see
The same as I do, and for vengeance swell
The loud and common cry, more and more terrible—

XXXII.

“ Till he, convinced, even welcome punishment,
To rid him of worse horror! Down each aisle,
Stalks my son’s spectre; every monument
Glares with the grave fire, all the sacred pile,
From column, niche and statue,—to beguile
The heart of prudence, and make madness do
The work of tardy, blinded Justice; while
The roof resounds with discords, and the hue
Of every brow turns pale, to hear the hellish crew,

XXXIII.

“ That here seek refuge, if yon murderer may,
Nor will be exorcised, if he be not!
But, like destroying angels, will even slay
The hypocrites that desecrate the spot,
Though kneeling at the altar; . . each a blot,
Religion hates far more than sacrilege!
Away with him! or share his cursed lot!
For Heaven will not be mocked, and let the edge
Of Justice’ sword fall hurtless, as if life were
sedge—

XXXIV.

“ A worthless grass to be mowed down by any
Who will—a scrannel pipe that may be fretted,
Played idly on, and broken, by a zany !
And not Heaven’s image most beloved and petted,
Upon the tapestry of his temple, netted
By Wisdom’s hands, which whoso rends insults
His Maker, hath the holy mountain letted,
With Titan arbalists, and far catapults,
That would through man wound God—while Death
alone exults !”

XXXV.

Thus raved Sighieri. Paolo before
Her stood, resenting not, but with deep ruth,
Pitying her woe ; and merely said once more,
“ I’m innocent, and I have told the truth !
As I have said, so chanced it all, in sooth—
Touching my life, even take it, if you list,
Blighted is now the promise of my youth—
Salvestra dead, I shall be soon, I wist—
I have no wish to live—I fain would be dismiss !”

XXXVI.

So meekly Paolo his sorrow bore,
That all believed his words—each syllable :
Moreover, the Physicians, who before
Girolamo's body had examined well,
Witnessed anew how that no force befell
The noble youth, but of a broken heart
That he had died. Whereat, as by a spell,
Sighieri was confounded, and, apart,
Stood, desperate of soul, and cherishing its smart.

XXXVII.

“ Is none but Heaven to strike at? Marble Heaven,—
Severe as this Cathedral roof by sound
Unpierced ; my baffled voice is downward driven
To echo amidst columns, from the ground,
And from the caverned sides ; dull as profound ;
Reverberation, not intelligence—
In vain should I blaspheme—and the rebound
But hurts the speaker with its vehemence ;
The malison returns to stun the wrathful sense.

XXXVIII.

“ Since I am cursed, may I not curse agen ?
Domestic despotism, parental wrong !
May I not curse these evils ? What ! if then,
I curse myself ? Have they not grown so strong,
That round the roots of social life they throng,
Clustering and strangling the majestic tree ?
'Tis our own hearts the fatal coil prolong,
By living crushed beneath it ! Set them free—
Even though they break themselves in breaking
tyranny !

XXXIX.

“ Fountain of wrong and wrath—of grief and death,
Of poisons that enmadden, ere they slay !
Be thou sealed up for ever ! O thou sheath
Of venom'd arrows ! be thou put away,
Nor found again till the dread judgment-day ;
So that no bow may send abroad your malice !
Burned be the bow on Love's own hearth, I say !
Meanwhile, accursed who dwell in cot or palace,
That make their children drink of Power's unquestioned chalice !

XL.

“ Now know I Mammon an usurper is,
And hath no throne on earth by lawful right,
The lord of misery, and not of bliss,
Reigning by force and fraud, and not true might ;
Blind spawn of Chaos, loving not the light,
And making darkness in high places, where
His airy power resides, 'midst clouds of night ;
Crushing high feelings, hopes, affections there,
Thoughts and all pure desires, in folly and base fear !

XLI.

“ Now wooes my changèd spirit great thoughts back,
And drinks with rapture the returning tide ;
Now the wide world, erst clad in solemn black,
Wears light's own vestments, darkened late by
Pride,
That perished when the wronged and loving died.
Approve, dear Saints ! my penitence approve ;
Where ye by your own love are deified.
Then, having suffered, stoop ye from above,
Taking me to your spheres, owning no God but
Love ! ”

XLII.

Thus having said, Sighieri knelt before
The altar rails, fell prostrate then, nor stirred ;
Attended forthwith by her confessor,
Who saw her grief, but answered not a word.
Meanwhile, the mourners, after they had heard
Salvestra's story, placed her on the bier
Beside Girolamo, to be interred
Together in one grave ; that their sincere
Affection, crossed in life, might yet in death appear.

XLIII.

Thus, on one bed reposing as they lay,
They took them up, to bear them to the grave,
The priests and clergy singing all the way ;
One leading with the Cross, whose sufferings save
The sinking sinner from the mundane wave,
By might of Him who walked upon the sea,
And through his spirit makes the weakest brave ;
Others, with lights and tapers, solemnly
Rejoicing, as for those who'd gained a victory.

XLIV.

A triumph mixed with sorrow. After all,
Come weepings, lamentations, sighs, and tears ;
Nature will mourn at every funeral,
Though rapt devotion hymn of starry spheres,
And lift our spirit to the height of theirs,
Who, perfect made, hymn God before the throne :
Though music make a heaven to our ears,
Still will the heart fall earthward, sad, and prone
To love what is beneath. Thus stoops Love, to
atone.

XLV.

Yet, in the midst of all, are holy prayers,
That, like the lark, soar upward from the ground,
And make friends of the angels unawares,
Singing as they ascend, as if, with sound,
Entrance to win beyond the golden round,
That arches in the space where planets are :
And, at the end, when grief would most abound,
The organ with the requiem peals afar,
A song of such repose as star might sing to star.

The Requiem.

1.

Who are the dead ? Not they
Who rest in paradise ;
Who live in endless day,
The sabbath of the skies—
Not they ! not they !

2.

Each ordered orb, in heaven,
Some crownèd saint controls :
O Planetary Seven !
Sweet homes of happy souls——
In heaven ! in heaven !

3.

Like them, O may we live !
Though now we're dead in sin ;
If thou, O Lord ! forgive,
Death shall our life begin.
We live ! we live !

XLVI.

The mass is said : the solemn rites are over :

Sleep that fond pair whom life had wronged—
now righted.

Death now unites mistress and the lover,

And none shall sever whom he hath united !

Such are the tales in which our youth delighted :

Nay, even in age such tales delight us still ;

For not, as yet, is Love in us so blighted,
But of its Hippocrene we drink our fill,
Reposing at the foot of Aon's haunted hill !

NOTES TO SALVESTRA.

NOTES TO SALVESTRA.

CANTO I.

“*Our Pelican.*”—St. 5.

OUR Saviour is thus tenderly denominated by Dante in the XXV. Canto of the *Paradiso*. He describes St. John, the beloved disciple, as reposing on his bosom ; and at the close of the poem, he informs us that (we quote from Mr. Wright's excellent analysis) “by the intercession of St. Bernard with the Virgin Mary, he was endued with grace to look upon the brightness of Jehovah ; and offered up a prayer, that he might be enabled to show forth to unborn nations some traces of the glory revealed to him. In the profundity of the Divine light, he beheld all the universe contains—his power of vision gaining force as he prolonged the contemplation—till, absorbed in the overwhelming glory of the sight, he found it impossible to turn away. The Trinity he attempted to describe by comparing its appearance to three circles of different hues, but of like dimensions. He then asserted the impossibility of relating all he beheld ; and closes his work by informing us, that having reached the height of his desire, his will became wholly swayed by the influence of Divine love.”

“*Like Lady Hester Stanhope.*”—St. 17.

See Dr. M——’s *Memoirs of Lady Hester Stanhope* on this head.

“*The Megatherium old.*”—St. 19.

There are allusions in previous stanzas to mesmerism and Mrs. Caudle—the former promoting and the latter preventing sleep; but things so notorious need no note, just in the same way that an uxorious husband has no motive to bigamy. The present allusion, on the contrary, seems to require explanation, as it is not so generally understood that the Lady Sighieri was the Old Woman who lately corresponded with “*The Times*,” under the signature of “*Anti-Megatherium*.”

“*The aspiring sweep.*”—St. 35.

I recollect a police case, where a boy insisted on being apprenticed to a sweep: his alleged motive was the idea he had formed of the superiority implied in the professional privilege of looking down on every body else from the elevation of the chimney pot.

“*O, artist Blake! compassion still thou deign’st,
In thy most deathless ‘Songs of Innocence.’*”

St. 36.

See the celebrated William Blake’s “*Songs of Innocence and Experience*, showing the two contrary States of the Human Soul:” poems unequalled for their touching simplicity and brilliant word-tinting. Nothing can be more pathetic than his “*Little Black Boy*,” “*School Boy*,” “*Chimney Sweeper*,” “*The Clod and the Pebble*,” “*London*,” “*Little*

Boy and Girl Lost and Found," &c. The most finished poet might learn something from these unelaborate effusions, were it not that the production of such pieces at all is little short of miraculous. It is not art, but inspiration.

"Anciently,
Cræsus so thought, and suffered."—St. 38.

See Herodotus, I. c. 26.

"Nor Hymen quenched his arrows, when they wed,
But, with his nuptial torch, relumined them instead."—St. 53.

These lines cannot fail to suggest to the recollection of the connoisseur, Mr. George Patten's fine picture of "Hymen burning the Arrows of Love," a work painted with a classical breadth of style, of which, unhappily, no other modern artist has, as yet, set a like example.

CANTO II.

"Like Dr. Kitto's voice in Burlington Arcade."—St. 7.

The particulars referred to will be found related, by Dr. Kitto himself, in his work on "The Lost Senses, Series I.—Deafness," published in Knight's "Weekly Volume." As the Doctor himself can afford to laugh at his infirmity, he will be the last to censure a humorous allusion to it, particularly for the national purpose asserted in the text.

"La Femme toute comme il faut."—St. 11.

M. H. de Balzac has given, in a popular essay, a witty account of the modern Parisian lady, as the "*Femme comme*

il faut," who has in France taken the place of the "Great Lady" of former times. "The *Great Lady*," exclaims Balzac, "is dead, she has expired with the gorgeous solemnities of the last century, her powder, patches, high-heeled shoes, and well-stiffened stays, all bedizened with bows. A duchess goes now through all doors without having any one of them enlarged for the passage of her hoop; in short, the Empire saw the last of the *long-trained gowns*. I have yet to learn why the sovereign, who chose to see his Court swept by satins and velvets, did not establish, by some irrevocable law, the right of primogeniture for, at least, certain families. Napoleon did not foresee the application of the code he so gloried in; in creating duchesses, he gave birth only to our *femmes comme il faut*;—they resulted from his legislation, and may be called its mediate product." "All things in France have conspired to give influence to our *femme comme il faut*. The aristocracy assented to her government by retiring to their distant seats, where they hide themselves to die. The women who might have moulded the manners of Europe—commanded opinion and fitted it as their glove—ruled the world by governing its rulers: the men of resource—of thought—they have committed the error of abandoning the field, because ashamed of having to contend with the middle classes, who, intoxicated with power, have thrown themselves into the arena to be torn in pieces, perhaps, by the brute multitude that is following rapidly in their steps. Thus, when the citizen goes to look at a princess, he perceives only a young person *comme il faut*." "The knell of high society is sounding! Do you hear it? The first stroke is the modern phrase of *La femme comme il faut*; this woman, proceeding from the ranks of nobility, or put forward by the Bourgeoisie, coming indifferently from all parts, capital or province, is the type of the

actual time,—a last image of good taste, talent, grace, and distinction united, but all lessened and degenerated.”—
 “Formerly, a woman might have the voice of a fish-seller, the stride of a grenadier, the brow of the boldest courtesan, a thick and heavy hand, and the foot of an elephant, she was none the less a *Great Lady*: but now, were she a Montmorency, (if the daughter of a Montmorency could be so degenerate), she would be no longer *une femme comme il faut*.” But stop! Are not these, and other such allusions in this poem, gross anachronisms in relation to Boccaccio’s story? Of course they are! But, kind and courteous lector! see you not a reason for it—a purpose—an end? Of course you do! I am glad you are satisfied.

“*In the youth’s lap plombs down—kissing him till he blushes.*”—St. 18.

No libel. The reflective author of “The Tiara and the Turban” describes the incident as happening to himself at Rome; the Pandar being his tutor, a Roman Catholic priest, esteemed for learning and wit, and not otherwise for licentiousness. Moreover, “The Decameron” itself is full of similar instances.

CANTO III.

“*He will parade his quarrel with the fates,
 And join, in social pact, a band of desperates.*”—St. 1.

There was some short time since, and probably still is, a society in Paris, expressly for the “mutual encouragement of suicide,” all the members of which, on joining it, swore to

terminate their existence by their own hands, when life became insupportable. As to the other statements in the text, I have the authority of M. Esquirol for saying, that "Frenchmen seldom go mad from love. A Frenchman often kills himself in a sally of passion and feeling, but is seldom in love long enough to go mad about it."

"*Its purgatory song.*"—St. 3.

"The Purgatory of Suicides," a poem, by Thomas Cooper, the Chartist.

"*Like Humboldt's Cosmos—
Or Mahomet's religion.*"—St. 8.

Alike in this, that they are both human, yet both aiming at *divine* results; the one a spiritual, the other a physical creation.

"*Of Jervis ask—or Jelf.*"—St. 21.

See "Five Discourses on Subjects contained in the Book of Genesis," by the Rev. J. Jervis; the learned author of which contends for the legitimacy of Mahomet's mission. As to Dr. Jelf, I wish, in common with all who know him, that he may soon be made a bishop!

"*Yet, in the midst of all, are holy prayers,
That, like the lark, soar upward from the ground.*"

St. 45.

These lines cannot fail to remind the reader of the following beautiful passage in the works of the divinely eloquent

Dr. Jeremy Taylor :—" Anger is a perfect alienation of the mind from prayer, and therefore is contrary to that attention which presents our prayers in a right line to God. For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds ; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest, than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings ; till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned musick and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministeries here below. So is the prayer of a good man ; when his affairs have required business, and his business was matter of discipline, and his discipline was to pass upon a sinning person, or had a design of charity, his duty met with infirmities of a man, and anger was its instrument, and the instrument became stronger than the prime agent, and raised a tempest and overruled the man ; and then his prayer was broken, and his thoughts were troubled, and his words went up towards a cloud, and his thoughts pulled them back again, and made them without intention ; and the good man sighs for his infirmity, but must be content to lose the prayer, and he must recover it, when his anger is removed, and his spirit is becalmed, made even as the brow of JESUS, and smooth like the heart of God ; and then it ascends to heaven upon the wings of the holy dove, and dwells with God, till it returns like the useful bee, laden with a blessing and the dew of heaven."

*"Each ordered orb, in heaven,
Some crowned saint controls."*—*Requiem*, v. 2.

This notion is peculiarly Florentine, being that adopted by Dante as the theory of the third part of his *Divina Commedia*. He places paradise—where? In the Planets—the Moon—Mercury—Venus—the Sun—Mars—Jupiter and Saturn—also in the constellation, Gemini, &c. But, alas! he forgot his maternal planet, Earth. Would it not have been possible to have planted some realm of paradise—some kingdom of heaven—there, also? Ah! Dante!

THE FRANCISCAN ASS.

A TALE FROM COLOMBE.

THE FRANCISCAN ASS.

A Tale from Colombe.



I.

THERE dwelt near Pisa, seven miles from the town,
A worthy farmer : Gilbert was his name,—
A better one than Tomkins, Jones, or Brown,
Or even Smith of universal fame.
But I begin to see my readers frown,
And as I wish for once to 'scape all blame,
I here invoke the Muses' special curse on all
Who condescend in poems to be personal.

II.

I humbly beg t'apologize, therefore,
To Tomkins, Brown, and also Jones and Smith ;
And promise I will never name them more,
But treat them as a kind of "human myth,"
(As Heraud calls the solemn fools of yore) ;
So I will now unfold my story's pith,
And tell my readers every thing I know—
Which isn't very much, as time will show !

III.

But ere I venture on my story's path,
I must unload my over-burthened soul ;
And therefore let me first disgorge the wrath,
Which like to clouds all swoln and sulphurous
roll !
But will the world care for your "dagger of lath ?"
They'll care no more than revellers round the bowl,
Who in warm room for jovial converse meet,
Heed the starved singer in the noisy street.

IV.

Some sing aloud the matin-song of life,
And carol gladly their full-hearted mirth ;
Others are born amid a storm of strife,
And never rest till confined in the earth :
For this vast world with sorrow is so rife,
There is, alas ! no greater curse than birth !
Slaves from the cradle, to the tomb we crawl,
The hate, jest, pity, or the scorn of all !

V.

Eight years ago I trod a breezy heath,
And heard the bells ring out a merry peal ;
I also gave to those glad sounds my breath,—
For Queen Victoria ruled the commonweal !
On that bright morn the nation's sacred wreath
Circled her brow ; the mailed warriors kneel
And swear allegiance, while all around
Told my cheered soul that gentleness was crowned.

VI.

Fondly I deemed my mirth of heart a sign
That Time would henceforth wear a gentler form,
Since she, the blossom of a princely line,
Smiled on us like a morning after storm,
Which through the coming hours would brighter
shine,
Till all should bless a day so clear and warm :
I trod in thought upon a brighter earth,
With beings of a loftier, gentler birth.

VII.

Vain vision ! fading like a cloud of gold
When the sun drops into the western wave,
And gives the world to midnight dark and cold.
Woman and child in gloomy mine still slave
Beneath the oppressor's lash ; the poor grow old,
Groping tear-blinded to a wretched grave :
And should some phrenzied spirit speak his wrongs,
He's scourged to death with the accursèd thongs !

VIII.

Dear readers, I feel somewhat better now :

This little ebullition has much calmed

“ My fevered spirit and my tortured brow.”

In Northcote’s Life of Nolleken’s embalmed
A story I am sure you’ll like to know ;

When once the sculptor’s wife with rage was
warmed,

She stood and bit her lips in silent woe,—

While he exclaimed, “ *Swear, love ! ’twill ease you
so !* ”

IX.

The wife of Gilbert was a comely lass,

Somewhat too fond of her unlearned spouse ;

(But we must let that little foible pass,

Since ’tis a rarity, the world allows.)

Sometimes, when Gilbert sat upon the grass,

His wife would fan him with the dewy boughs,

And sing, with his tired head upon her lap,

A little song,—then wake him with a tap.

X.

And browsing near them in the garden stood

An ass, which long had helped our farmer bring
The faggots he had gathered from the wood :

This donkey was a "good for nothing" thing,
And did his work to show how donkeys could :

He was as obstinate as any king,
And would not move a step without a knock ; you
see

He was, in fact, of donkey aristocracy !

XI.

Now Gilbert was a simple-minded man,

So credulous he swallowed every word
That from the mouth of priest or woman ran,—

In fact, he seemed to doat on the absurd.

Had he lived now, he would have followed Dan

O'Connell, and believed each lie he heard :

He was the sort of fool—oh, have your laugh !—

Who'd leave Peel's "corn," to gulp D'Israeli's

chaff !

XII.

One day he tied his donkey to a tree,
And went into the wood a mile or two ;
When of Franciscan friars there passed by three.
Good Father Tony was the first to view
The beast ; the next was Father Timothy,
Who in a minute saw what he would do :
He was, forsooth, a fellow of much wit,
And fond, I grieve to say, of showing it.

XIII.

So, turning to his fellows with a smile,
“ This ass,” said he, “ will carry well our load :
I cannot walk myself another mile,
I shall fall down and die upon the road ;
We’d therefore better borrow for a while
This beast, and take him to our own abode.”
So as the friars were really very faint,
They took it as a present from their saint !

XIV.

When it was loaded, Father Timothy
Took off the halter from the ass's head,
And tied himself up to the very tree,
Putting himself into the donkey's stead :
He then turned round to Father Anthony
And t'other friar, and very gravely said,—
(They standing by in wonder and amazement,
Not making out precisely what his ways meant,)

XV.

“ Hence, brothers, with all speed, and take the beast
Straight to the abbey. Tell our brethren there,
That I've remained to share a farmer's feast,
And that he gave the donkey to your care.
I shall remain a day or so at least,—
I think I want a little change of air;
I'll have some sport : so, brothers, quickly run
Ere the man comes, or you'll spoil all my fun.”

XVI.

“ Well, since you make us leave you, we’ll submit,
And tell the friars what you’ve said : we pray
That you have not for once outstripped your wit.”

“ Begone!” said Father Timothy : “ I say
This halter is a most uncommon fit!”

Finding he would not really let them stay,
Of course they left him to the consequences
Of this strange joke, thinking he’d lost his senses.

XVII.

Now Gilbert, having gathered up his wood,
Came from the shade to place them on his ass :
When, seeing with astonishment who stood

In the beast’s place, he cried out, “ Oh, alas !
The saints defend me ! Oh, by all that’s good,

It is the devil !” Then upon the grass
He fell down flat ; thinking, of course, old Nick
Was playing off a most outrageous trick.

XVIII.

When Father Timothy observed his fright,
He scarce could speak for laughing ; but at last
He said, " My friend, you seem astonished quite."
Cheered somewhat by his voice, poor Gilbert cast
His eyes upon him, staring then outright.
" I do not marvel that you look aghast,"
Resumed the friar, " at what your eyes behold ;
But you'll look more so, when my story's told.

XIX.

" Admire in me the powerful hand of Heaven !
My friend, your full belief it was, no doubt,
That to this wood by you an ass was driven :
Now listen, as I let the wonder out.
I'm a Franciscan friar, to whom was given
A donkey's form to toil the world about,
Till I had purged away the deadly sin
That I committed in a human skin."

XX.

“ Can you be serious, Father ? ” Gilbert cried.

“ Do you suspect Franciscan friars tell lies ? ”

Good Father Timothy in wrath replied.

“ But listen to me, sirrah ! and be wise :
Implore of Heaven that you may never hide ”
(And hereupon the friar turned up his eyes)
“ The human spirit in the brutish frame,
But learn to keep your passions very tame. ”

XXI.

The farmer, when he recollected all

The beatings he'd bestowed upon the beast,
Was filled with sorrow, and began to call

Loudly for mercy. But the worthy priest
Begged that he would not let the thought appal

His just-awakened conscience in the least,
For he had gained his blest emancipation
Entirely through that wholesome castigation.

XXII.

“ The cudgel also I shall love, I say,
That worked my freedom from that brutish state ;
And when reseated in my cell, I’ll pray
The saints above to recompense you straight,
And for the ass you’ve lost in me, repay
You and your family. May blessings wait
Upon your path ! You’d better take your load
Of faggots, now, unto your own abode.”

XXIII.

But Gilbert begged the friar would go with him,
And tarry with them for a day or so ;
“ You see the daylight now is growing dim,
You’d better, therefore, to our cottage go,
And rest for this one night each weary limb,—
Nay, I should also like my wife to know
From your own mouth the wonders I have heard,
For from my lips she won’t believe a word.”

XXIV.

“ Well said, my son,” replied the friar ; “ but what
Will be my painful feeling when I see,
As I shall do again, the very spot
Where I have lived in so much misery !
But as we ne’er can throw aside our lot,
I’ll e’en submit in all humility :
So lead the way, and I will follow you,
And once again my scene of penance view.”

XXV.

Now when they reached the cottage, Timothy
Accosted Gilbert’s wife as though she were
An old acquaintance,—looking very sly,
For, as I’ve said, the dame was young and fair,
And found some favour in the Father’s eye :
He also added most familiarly,
That he was much astonished, he confest,
At her not recollecting their old guest !

XXVI.

Gilbert assured his wife the friar spoke true ;

And after having kept her in suspense

A little while, told every thing he knew.

Her wonder, you may guess, was most intense,
While now a thought of sadness pierced her through,

To think they ne'er could fully recompense
The holy donkey for the surplus beating
Bestowed by them, as well as scanty eating.

XXVII.

They consequently strove their very best

To speedily obliterate the past,

And forthwith cooked two pullets for their guest,—

Uncorked a flask of wine, (it was their last !)

While hunger lent them all that precious zest,

Which we can only purchase by a fast.

Now as the wine around the table went,

The Father made them roar with merriment ;

XXVIII.

Yet in the midst of a facetious story,
He introduced some moral dissertation ;
Then tried his hand at a short allegory,
And made, in fact, a very nice oration,—
Throwing out, now and then, an amatory
Glance at the farmer's wife, who had her station
Just opposite the friar ; and I must say,
The wife herself was getting rather gay !

XXIX.

The watchful husband saw the growing evil,
And thus addressed the somewhat startled friar :
“ Good Father, I can see how soon the devil
Puts into you a little of his fire.
I trust that you will take my words as civil,
But prayer and flagellation you require ;
Else, 'tis my firm opinion you will pass
Once more into the body of an ass !

XXX.

“ Let me advise you, therefore, to return
At break of day to your religious cell.
You priests may sometimes of a layman learn,
Although you think yourselves infallible;
So, lest you should in hell eternal burn,
Pray bastinado your frail carcase well.
Don't spare the flesh, but beat it black and blue,
Or, if you like, I'll operate for *you*.”

XXXI.

Next morning, ere the lark had ceased her song,
The friar was on his journey home again;
He briefly told his story to the throng,
And forged a cunning message in his brain,—
Which was, I blush to say it, very wrong,
And gives to me, a pious Papist, pain.
He swore the farmer bid him (lying wretch!)
Sell the poor ass for whatsoe'er 'twould fetch !

XXXII.

He therefore sent it to a neighbouring fair,
And as it happened, on that self-same noon
The worthy farmer had some business there.
He spied our friend the donkey very soon ;
He knew him by his shaggy coat of hair,
And by his braying somewhat out of tune,—
But if you wish a perfect bray to hear,
Go to the House of Lords when Tories cheer !

XXXIII.

Gilbert was very sorry ; so he went
Close to the ass's ear, and whispered soft,
“ Alackaday, good Father ! not content
With one escape, you'll play this game too oft !
I was afraid you were on mischief bent,
And urged you to exalt your heart aloft.”
The ass, who felt the breathing, shook his head,
As though denying what the farmer said.

XXXIV.

“Deny it not,” said Gilbert. “I know well
Thou art the selfsame friend,—deny it not!
Lying’s a sin. Alas! ’tis terrible
To know thy soul has such a wretched spot!
Sin penetrates the palace and the cell,
Nay, sometimes even to the infant’s cot!”
The people hearing Gilbert talk away
To a poor donkey, thought his wits astray,

XXXV.

And gathering round him, they began to jeer.
So Gilbert told to them the tale, and swore
(What made them all laugh heartily to hear)
It was no donkey, but a friar,—and more,
That he would undertake, within a year,
By vigorous flagellations to restore
The poor Franciscan to his shape again,
Although he feared at last ’twas all in vain!

XXXVI.

'Tis needless to describe the roars of fun
That from the crowd came forth incessantly;
Where'er he moved the ragged urchins run,
And said that he the ass had better buy,
And speedily adopt it as his son,
As being very like the family !
In short, they pestered Gilbert so, at last
He bought the ass, and to his village passed.

XXXVII.

His wife was much astonished when she saw
The luckless friar in such a plight again,
And boldly owned 'twas hard that flesh and law
Should cause a human creature so much pain !
Yet even abbots sometimes have a flaw
In morals, which they lay upon the brain ;
For whensoever a wealthy canon bent is
On some queer crime, they say " Non compos
mentis ! "

XXXVIII.

But to return. The farmer and his wife
Gave a true welcome to the ass, who led
A very idle royal kind of life.
Like royal ones, too, he was over fed,
While on his back was never laid a stripe :
He had the freshest hay to form his bed,
Which very seldom he till noon forsook,—
At length he got as vicious as a duke!

XXXIX.

He bit the women, kicked the men, and brayed
So loudly in the silence of the night,
That all the village people woke dismayed,
And called upon the saints in their affright.
Indeed it so alarmed one virtuous maid,
(My black ink really blushes as I write,)
That she was found, with all her virgin charms,
Sleeping next morning in another's arms!

XL.

This was of course the donkey's fault, and vexed
Poor Gilbert and his wife beyond expression ;
In sooth, they knew not what might happen next,
But dreaded every day some new transgression.
Yet how to mend this they were sore perplexed,
For,—I must really make this true confession,
They had a friendship for the ass, because
They thought his very brays were “ pious saws.”

XLI.

Which is not very wonderful, when we
Consider how old dowagers admire
The preaching of some “ gowned hypocrisy ;”
And finer braying we can ne'er desire
To hear. I say this in all charity,
And merely wish to prove,—pray do not tire,
Dear friends,—that friendship is not quite so
fabulous :
Think of that 'twixt the horse and Heliogabalus !

XLII.

I mean Caligula. Yet it does not matter,
The inference is still the same I draw ;
He fed the horse from out a golden platter,
And with new gilded oats supplied the jaw
Of that ungrateful beast. I will not flatter
Either the emperor or the horse, whose maw
Was fed with such extraordinary tit-bits ;
One had no *heart*,—the other had no *wits* !

XLIII.

Adversity of friendship is the death ;
Friends come to eat your dinners, drink your
wines,—
Seeming to live upon your very breath !
But when your prosperous sun no longer shines,
And Macduff treads the heels of poor Macbeth,
Mark how the fawning of the cur declines,
And dogs, who gambolled round you with delight,
Now snarl and bark. Pause, mongrels, ere ye
bite !

XLIV.

Away, ye miserable hounds, away,
And crouch in your dishonourable graves !
The insulted earth will shudder at the clay
Which cased the spirits of such wretched slaves,
And spurn it from her to the birds of prey !
Nor hold it till that morn when, like to waves,
The tombs shall heave, and throw the dead before
God's throne, with every heart split to its core !

XLV.

For my own part, were I to die to-morrow,
I must confess I seldom had a friend
Who did not in his time contrive to borrow:
(Oh! what a fool I was, ye gods, to lend !)
Prudence, forsooth, had spared me no small sorrow,
And some fierce stanzas that my rage has penned ;
For as one set of leeches crawled away,
A batch of fresh ones made me still their prey !

XLVI.

But that is over ! I will bear their malice,
And smile in answer to their cold disdain,
Like one who, sipping from a bitter chalice,
Declares he likes it better than champagne,
And utters over it some pleasant sallies,—
Nay, to oblige them, will e'en drink again,
Growing at last so humble in affliction ;
As to thank God for the deserved infliction !

XLVII.

Life is not worth the struggle : all that gave
Its colour to existence is no more,
And long ere now I should have filled my grave,
Nor waited till the mob began to roar.
Well, let the treacherous mongrels rage and rave ;
I shall soon rest upon that silent shore,
Where baffled malice can no longer tear
Its mangled victim,—but itself die there,

XLVIII.

Where neither foes, nor any of the nest
Of viperous friends, can torture us ; for they,
Knowing the tenderest spot, can aim the best,
And for a moment triumph o'er the clay,
By driving the barbed arrow to the breast !
And I have suffered this within my day ;
For being of a race where impulse shines,
I have made sport for those vile Philistines !

XLIX.

But I must end my story with all speed,
And tell my readers what the ass befell.
By Gilbert and his wife it was agreed,
That nothing could the beast's misdeeds excel :
They therefore thought 'twould be a virtuous deed,
Were they to castigate its carcase well,
Saying, 'twas better that he should endure
Affliction here, and make his heaven secure !

L.

He therefore gave him cudgel and hard work :

But gentle treatment had destroyed, perhaps,
A frame of body strong once as a Turk.

One day he died from some unlucky raps
The farmer gave him, as he tried to jerk

Some children down, who gave him a few taps
To urge his speed ; but since he's dead, we'll pray
For priests and donkeys to our dying day.

THE LEAF OF SAGE.

A TALE FROM BOCCACCIO.



In Two Parts.



THE LEAF OF SAGE.

Part the First.

I.

IN the brief words in which old tales are told,
Lie meanings deep, and large, and manifold.
—Love herds not only with the nobly born,
The humble and the poor he will not scorn :
Scorn sits, in sooth, not ever on his lip :
There is such magic in his finger-tip,
The hand he clasps, made equal with his own,
Thrills at its touch, and answers to its tone,—
Flesh of its flesh become, bone of its bone.

This truth to teach were ancient fables wrought
Within the woof of feeling and of thought,—
For this sweet sentiment in florid rhyme
Spun itself out, a web to outlast time ;
Warmer than day and finer than a dream :
Love's omnipresence still the excelling theme.
Thus Song had birth, and many a melody,
Designed for earth, strayed upward to the sky,
And angels wondered as the spirit stirred
Their harps with strains themselves had never heard.
“ Whence is such music ? ” seraphs asked above.
“ The heart of man and woman when they love ! ”
So Love responded, while they downward bent,
To catch the verse, and guess at what it meant.

II.

Italia ! oh, Italia ! land of Song !
Music and Love, atone they not for wrong ?
What else but Love thus set ye singing so,
Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio ?

There lived at Florence once, but long ago,
A pair of lovers,—prime in beauty she,
Young, fond, susceptible, and faithful he :
Her name Simona, mean of rank and poor,
Pasquino his,—the same, yet not a boor.
Both earned with their own hands their daily bread,
Their labour clothed them, and their labour fed.
Love came to cheer their labour,—Love, himself
A labourer, who labours not for pelf,
But all for love ; for which this world to lose
'Twere well, since thus a better we may choose.
Both Song and Love by right to Work pertain :
The world by work subsists,—both land and main ;—
Both church and state, the soldier and the priest,
Subsist by those who toil,—the greatest and the
least ;
And lordly man, were labour not, were worse than
bird and beast.
Then recompensed by love and song for ever
Be labour's children, scorned by poets never !
Young Eros and the Muses still combine
To make them happy,—like this lay of mine !

III.

The dignity of work is said and sung
By men of many a creed, in many a tongue.
Work must be done by body or by mind :
The workman is the noblest of his kind ;—
'Tis he alone is honest ; all the rest
Are never blessing, though they may be blest.
Though they receive, they give not : selfish still,
Idly content, ungenerous of will,
Themselves scarce living, and of life in dread ;
Spiritless pensioners upon the dead ;
The foes of progress, burthens on the land,
Yokes on the mind, and fetters on the hand,
Beneath whose sway poor earth too long has groaned,
How long, O Lord ! shall such remain enthroned ?
How long shall Genius, like a candle set
Beneath a bushel, shine in darkness, yet
Uncomprehended, powerless, oppressed,
And Goodness seek in vain its sabbath rest ?
While Merit, like an alien vilified,
Flees the mad rout of Vanity and Pride ?

IV.

But to our tale. Simona, mean and poor,
Was lovely as a weed upon a moor;
More lovely from the barrenness around,
Lone as a star in a dark sky profound.
—Her station, safe from pride, her beauty guarded,
And with the grace of modesty rewarded,
Which made her still more beautiful by far
Than haughty damsels in gay dresses are,—
Grace ill-exchanged for aught in the bazaar.
Free were her thoughts, and chaste her dreams had
 been ;
At dawn she rose—herself like it serene,
Her spinning-wheel to turn from morn to night,
Till in its murmur she grew erudite,
Its moods, its passions, could interpret well,
And sometimes, even, 'twas an oracle ;
As still with hourly diligence it rolled,
It told her fortune,—was, too, what it told.

Her task—her hope—it spake in senses many,
But juggled not, but paltered not, in any.
Spake, said I? Nay, it sang,—and this its song,
From dawn to twilight singing all day long.

Song of the Spinning-Wheel.

1.

SPIN, spin all day, from day to day !
You make me now begin again,
You make me giddy, yet are gay :
How you bewilder my poor brain !
I am mad, or else inspired
With the whirling,—whirl, whirl, whirl !
Think you I am never tired ?
Sure you are a wicked girl,
To use a fellow-creature so !
Round, and round, and round I go,
Never stopping ! Pray, now—come,
Be merciful ! Oh ! hum—um—um.

2.

I hope we're going fast enough ;
I hope you think I earn my bread !
'Tis well for you the pulls are tough !
You use your foot with little dread,
And the work you get from me
Pays you for my keep, I think.
If it do not, shame there be,
Should light somewhere,—deeply sink !
Some use their fellow-creatures ill,
If, when done our utmost skill,
Little good should of it come ;
Be merciful ! Oh ! hum—um—um.

3.

When will you let me rest once more ?
Ah ! sure we've done our duty now !
We slack the speed we held before ;
You're giddy now yourself, I trow.

Why, your very hand itself
Is giddy as my head while-ere !
Mickle toil for little pelf,
I both pity and revere !
Why use a fellow-creature so,
People who to riches grow
By the toil of others ? Come,
Be merciful ! Oh ! hum—um—um.

v.

Thus cheered by song, thus soothed and thus
 consoled,
She sat and span,—a maiden never bold.
Pasquino entered, by his master sent,
And thus to be employed too well content,
Bringing from time to time, more oft than need,
The wool she was to spin with courteous heed,
As were the piece she wrought of special price,
And much required his personal advice.
Thus would the Clothier say, and smile well pleased,
Then pleased the best when most the youth he teased,

Of his own love-days thinking, with a sigh,
When on his errands he went leisurely,
And knew not how time sped while, a like sinner,
He loitered, chatting to some fair young spinner.

Mysterious sin ! To love ? to fall ? No less !
To fall in love—in debt—and in distress !
The first transgression, so Van Helmont saith,
A usurpation well deserving death,
Whereby the human to divine would rise,
And man, the earth-born, emulate the skies !
First ; woman loves, and, teaching man the way,
Wooes him to woo, even though he should betray.
He, thus attracted, yields, though for the bliss
He pay that immortality of his.
Ah, daring prodigal ! while o'er him yearns
A father's heart,—which, as away he turns,
Forgives already the pre-doomed offence,
And makes Redemption better Innocence !

VI.

Curious to note how, and by what degrees,
Love learns to know itself,—fine sympathies
That spring from nothing, yet are found to start
And blossom forth, and bourgeon round the heart.
—Oft as he came and went, and went and came,
Simona's heart seemed for awhile the same,
Then gradual warmth conceived, and nursed it to
a flame.

His converse seemed to please her more and more,
His manners still were gentler than before;
And when he left her, still of him she thought,
Who for her wheel supplied the wool it wrought,—
Sighed as it turned, then mused and sighed again,
And wondered much what caused her secret pain.
At first Pasquino wondered too, for he
Was bashful then as love would have him be;
At length he gained more courage,—so did she;
At least her fear grew less and less, for so
Her case is put by kind Boccaccio.

—Nor was it long before each other's mood,
Though unconfessed, they fully understood ;
Yet unconfessed, her father's presence still
Putting restraint upon Love's proper will.
But Love is cunning : watched the youth his time,
And whispered—something sweeter far than rhyme :
And she replied, "I will ; be sure I will !"
Yes, and resolved her promise to fulfil.
With lighter step the youth that threshold crost,
And found again the heart that he had lost.

END OF PART I.

THE LEAF OF SAGE.



Part the Second.

I.

REST, spinning-wheel! complain of toil no more!
But six days shalt thou labour,—these are o'er.
The seventh has come, earth's holiest holiday,
By some devote to prayer, and some to play.
Which did Simona? Were not love religion,
She were, I ween, no better than a pigeon,
And her sire, what she made him, a poor widgeon.
But pious frauds the schoolmen grant to both,—
She merely meant to keep her secret troth.

Subtle she was, but still most innocent ;
No harm, no fraud, in what she did or meant.
Love is an art—'twas but an art of love,
Ovid and Nature both alike approve ;
A trick that daughters put on fathers oft,
Of heart too ardent and of head too soft ;
The former that, the latter this,—and so
The heart an easy conquest gains, we know.

The incident is simple,—'twere amiss
Much to prolong suspense : it was but this.
—Greeting her father with a Sunday kiss,
('Twas after dinner, though, when he no doubt
Was sleepy,) she requested to . . . “ go out.”
“ Where ? ”—“ Only to St. Gallo's,” pious she,
“ For an indulgence.”—“ Go, my child,” said he :
(Thus sin was pardoned then in Italy !)
“ Go you alone ? ”—“ No, father dear ! My friend
Lagina's steps on the same errand bend :
We go together.”—“ Well, 'tis fit ye should.
Oh, both of you, so guileless and so good,
Easy your shrift ! ” He nodded his assent,
And thus permitted, on their way they went.

What! to St. Gallo's? Idiot, no! Where then?
The trysting-place which he, the man of men—
Pasquino, had appointed for their meeting:
She had pledged her word,—there could be no
retreating.

II.

Florence is full of gardens,—all are fair.
In one of these Pasquino takes the air,
But not alone; a friend of his, Puccino,
By some called Stramba, walks there with Pas-
quino.
These lovers' hearts, both hers and his, had room
Each for a friend,—a palace, not a tomb!
Rich natures both, and free as air or light,
Friendship and love most potent to unite.
Benevolent sympathies, how exquisite!
Beautiful souls! that mingle but to bless
Each other more than in their singleness;
Though each, being beautiful, alone were blest
Beyond conception of the sordid breast!

III.

New love, of friendship born, to Stramba's heart
Struck for Lagina ; so they walked apart :
They at one end o' the garden ; at the other,
Pasquino with Simona. Mary-mother !
Wert thou offended with this man and maid
For so much loving ? Much am I afraid
They have offended thee, their deitess ;—
Or thou lackest power supernal, as I guess.
Howe'er this be, I must relate the truth ;
All that befel the virgin and the youth.

IV.

It was a shady arbour where they sat,
Hard by a Bush of Sage, in pleasant chat.
Pasquino ne'er was happier in his life ;
And his free tongue, with endless projects rife,
Talked of a feast, which, in that garden, they
Would have, Heaven willing, the next holiday,—

Then jested on the thought. "Clean teeth are good
To kiss with, dearest! they are spoiled with food!
We'll kiss, then, ere we feast; and, ne'ertheless,
We will kiss after—such expediences
True love is rich in,—for even see what's here?—
Sage in abundance. Be then of good cheer!
A leaf of this rubbed on the teeth and gums,
Will purify them both of scraps and crumbs.
Them, after eating, nothing better cleanses,
And for the rest, the lips are their defences.
I'll prove it now!" The youth was gay of mood,
Nor she his pastime innocent withstood:
He plucked the leaf of sage, and sudden chafed
The ivory and the coral while he laughed,
And "Now no peril of the banquet!" said;
"Love and the feast, like lovers' selves, may wed!"

v.

What ails Pasquino? Is he rapt in trance,
That thus at once he changes countenance?
At once grown silent, sightless, wanting breath!—
Say, what is this? Simona, it is death!

Then rose the wail of terror. Stramba heard,
And hasted to the spot. What then inferred ?
Here lay his friend, a bloated, blackened corse ;
There stood Simona, mute—as with remorse :
Here signs of poison, there perhaps of guilt.
“ Why hast thou poisoned him ? O dupe ! O jilt ! ”
Thus Stramba cried, and called upon the crowd
T’ avenge the crimes thus charged, nor disavowed.
—Anon was seized the weeping, wondering maid,
And straight before the magistrate conveyed.

VI.

The judge heard all, but no solution found.
“ Let us remove,” said he, “ and view the ground
Where this so strange has happened.” So they
went :
There lies Pasquino dead, whom all lament.
“ Show,” said the judge to fair Simona then,
“ How chanced the ill ? ” She, answering him, agen
Plucked of the sage as he the youth had done,
And chafed the pearls that cleansing wanted none,

So white were they before. Whereat the crowd,
On the supposed pretence, exclaimed aloud ;
But while they clamoured,—like her lover,—she
Grew mute and blind ; and fell dead, suddenly.

VII.

Now wonder all perplexed. The judge, more
wise,
Began the sage was venom'd to surmise ;
And bade the gardener to uproot, and burn
The fatal plant. Which done, they soon discern
The cause of this mischance : there, hid beneath,
A monstrous Toad infected it with death !
Their vengeance on the paddock soon to wreak,
Though dreading to approach the same, they seek.
Creature uncouth ! they circle him about
With flaming stubble, stand themselves without,
And see him with the leaf and root consume :
Then wait upon the lovers to the tomb.

VIII.

O happy souls ! whose loves and lives together
On earth have end, ere stress of stormy weather !
O happier yet, if both so good and true
In the same paradise their joys pursue :
Happiest, if there they love as they loved here,
With little to repent and nought to fear !
But thou of all, Simona ! happiest ;
Whose innocence, suspected and distrest,
Beyond the reach of slander was approved
By Death, that thee rejoined to thy Beloved !

IX.

Simona ! O for thee thy father's grief
Was deep but silent,—was intense but brief :
Ere long, with thee he found the peace he sought.
—Pasquino's sire was one who lived on thought ;
The Muses, too, his soul with song had gifted,
And thus the burthen from his heart uplifted :
'Tis written here, and well may close this story,—
The verse that turned his suffering into glory.

The Monody.

1.

THAT thou shouldst die, and reptiles live;
That, in the bloom of youth,
Genius and Virtue fugitive
Should quit the earth, like Truth,
Like Justice in old times uncouth;
That so it should have been,
That so it should be now;
That they whose slime but soils the green
Remain to crawl below;
And they whose wings can soar on high
Seek all too soon the starry sky :—
This is the grief—the mystery !

2.

That Earth—that might an Eden be,
If spirits, so redeemed from sin,
From youth to age abode therein
To right her wrongs and set her free,—

To sordid minds should still be left,
Her mother-bosom pierced and cleft
By sons who wound the parent soil,
Not for their nurture, but their spoil,—
As if, were she the Paradise
She might be rendered by the wise,
The Heavens themselves would envy her :—

Such thoughts with wild impatience sting
The soul into rebellion,—stir

Its depths to tempests, wakening
Stern passion with indignant dread,—
That these should live, and thou be dead !
O wherefore mortal are the good ?

O wherefore are the evil strong ?
Enigma never understood,

Which still to solve in vain we long !
Till Doubt exclaims, mid smile and sigh,
This is the grief—the mystery !

3.

Enough,—thou hast departed ! Now
My laurel owns the fatal blight :

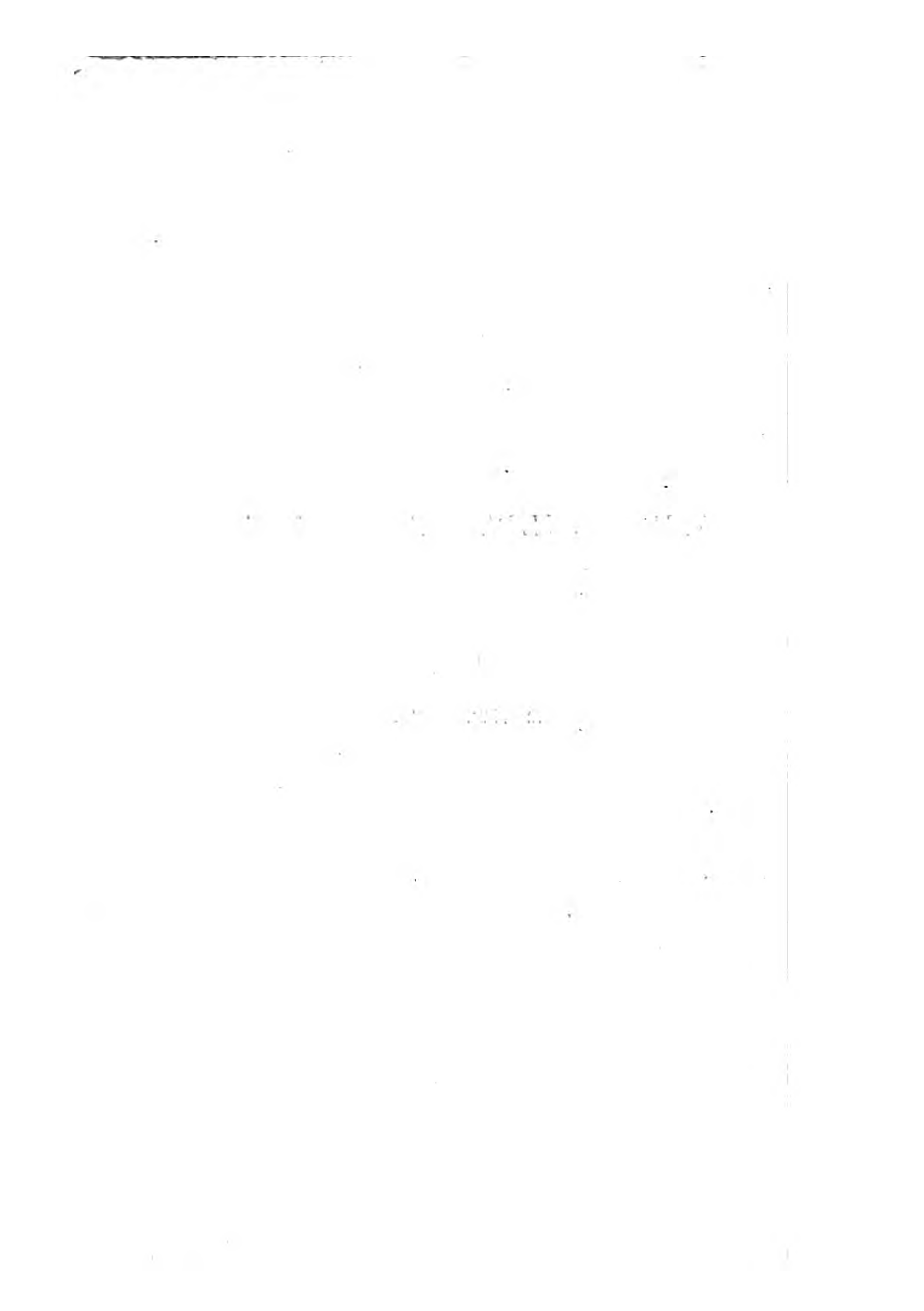
The cypress wreathes thy father's brow ;
My hope, my pride, are withered quite !
'Tis darkness now where once was light !
The planets coldly shine,—
How strangely mute are they !
Share they, O Earth ! this pang of thine,
Those peopled orbs of clay,
Waiting the doom decreed on high,
When they shall perish from the sky ?
This is the grief—the mystery !

THE SCULPTOR'S DREAM.

A FLORENTINE LEGEND.

—

In Three Cantos.



THE SCULPTOR'S DREAM.

A Florentine Legend.

CANTO I.

A SCULPTOR o'er his marble wrought,
Working out his darling thought,
Every day fresh grace it caught.

By fine degrees the stone became
A lovely woman's perfect frame,—
Beautiful beyond all fame.

Many an hour the artist stood
Before it in admiring mood,
Till, at length, his spirit woo'd

This miracle of grace, which grew
Lovelier every gaze he threw
Upon its calm and pallid hue!

In this one marble figure lies
His verdant earth, his starry skies,
His ecstasy of ecstasies.

Oft, steeped in love's delicious trance,
He gazed upon the countenance,
Which seemed to give him back his glance.

It gained upon him, till one night
His admiration grew delight,
In all its wild and feverish might;

And, falling on his knees, he prayed
That gracious Heaven would lend its aid,
And give life to the marble maid !

Whate'er the price, his soul should pay,
" Life, only life, to that dead clay !"
Sometimes how wickedly we pray !

He rose, and as the sunset threw
Upon the shape its purple hue,
A strange delight the sculptor knew ;

While o'er his soul a rapture fell,
So fine, yet so perceptible,
Like dew from heaven on star-lit dell.

The marble maiden's pallid cheek
Grew flushed with life's warm roseate streak ;
Her lips—they seem about to speak !

Throughout her frame he saw the rush
Of quick sensation, like a flush
Of tender thought which brings the blush.

One deep-drawn sigh unloosed the thrall,
She steps from her cold pedestal;
Her footsteps like soft music fall

Upon the sculptor's ear; his eyes
Grow dizzy with the wild surprise,—
To make his heart beat less he tries.

She sees him not, but treads with care
The studio, strewed with marbles rare—
But nothing as herself so fair!

With starting eyes and claspèd hands,
As one just burst from phrensy's bands,
Speechless—entranced the sculptor stands!

She steps as though she had her sight;
He gazes, panting with delight,—
Oh, blissful moment, exquisite!

He treads behind each step she takes,
His frame with trembling rapture shakes :
A sigh from him the silence breaks.

She turns around ; his eye grows dim,
All things in mazy distance swim :
She pauses—looks—and smiles on him,

Then moves towards him ; he not stirs,
But, rooted 'neath that glance of hers,
Stands happiest of worshippers.

Great Heaven ! what thoughts were his that day !
Language has not the might to say :
Bliss almost shivered life from clay !

At times his face grew silver white ;
Then it would flush with his delight !
Thus passed the hours till starry night.

Hand clasp'd in hand, heart now to heart,—
Ah! what makes happy Guido start?
Sure joy has in that look no part!

He feels no pulse in that dear side,
Where her sweet throbbing heart should bide,—
No beating of life's crimson tide!

As thus he ponders deep in thought,
The midnight tolls!—what has it wrought?
Has sleep or death the maiden caught?

END OF CANTO I.

THE SCULPTOR'S DREAM.

A Florentine Legend.



CANTO II.

OPPRESSED with sorrow Guido sate,
Bewildered with the sudden fate
Of her, who was his bliss so late.

Gazing upon the pallid stone;
He felt in all its dreary tone
The bitterness to be alone !

Was it a madness ? or a dream ?
Thus sat he till the noonday beam
Did through his eastern casement stream.

Rapture to Guido ! for that hour
Brought life, in all its wildering shower,
To the cold statue,—wondrous dower !

Once more she sits at Guido's side :
Again he felt his marble bride
To him in love's sweet world allied !

For his fond ears she had no speech,
But eyes will to the soul's deep reach,
And more than any language teach !

Another day of bliss was past,—
It was too full of joy to last.
The midnight comes : oh, Time aghast !

Life leaves her, as the purple flies
From golden cloud in western skies,
When sunset with its glory dies.

Woe to the sculptor ! She lies there,
A monument of his despair,
And yet than Helen's self more fair !

But when the clocks in every tower
Told Florence the meridian hour,
Life was again the statue's dower.

Days rolled : from noon to midnight he
Tasted of wild felicity ;
Yet not from haunting sadness free.

Meantime the Grand Duke heard the name
Of Guido, and one morning came
To look on works of such high fame.

The sculptor showed his Prince around
His spacious studio, where he found
Those statues by the world renowned :

Here Hercules, of giant limb,
There Mercury, elastic, slim,
Or nun, deep rapt in vesper hymn :

And Jupiter, upon whose brow
The everlasting ages grow,
With not a trace of years to show !

Here Venus, in the majesty
Of her sweet nakedness, as she
Rose blandly smiling from the sea ;

Here Phœbus, when about to dart
His arrow through the monster's heart,—
So perfect 'twas, it seemed to start !

And weeping on the sea-shore drear
Stood Niobe,—that human tear !
Pure sorrow even the bad revere !

But chiefest of the sculpture group
Was one whose spirit would not stoop,
But dared God to the battle proof;

Stern Satan, girt with hell's grim crown,
Gazing unawed on God's dread frown,—
Immortal! terrible renown!

He sat: no fiend nor seraph near,
Alone,—majestically drear,
Hell's king, without a hope or fear!

—But his chief marvel Guido wheeled
Into a close recess, concealed
By purple drapery. Vain shield!

For as the Grand Duke turned to tell
The sculptor he must say "Farewell!"
The noon of day proclaimed the bell.

Straight from the purple-veiled recess
She stept,—oh, marble loveliness!
Surprised, the Duke stands motionless;

And gazing on her perfect charms,
His princely heart with passion warms:—
He longs to clasp her in his arms.

Another glance: the Duke retires,
The hopeless slave of his desires,—
All night her form his fancy fires.

Next day he for the sculptor sends,
And much his wondrous skill commends,
Which every other man's transcends.

Then asks with hurried, careless tongue,
(As words at random idly flung)
“ Who is that maid, so fair and young ?

“ Your wife ? ” — “ No, sire,” the sculptor cries.

“ Your mistress, then ? ” the Duke replies.

“ No, sire,” says he, with downcast eyes.

“ Your sister ? ah ! ” — “ Yes, sire.” Then said
The Duke, “ I will that damsel wed,
And place a crown upon her head ! ”

Then round the sculptor's neck he flung
A golden chain, to which was hung
His portrait, glittering gems among ;

And straight commands he should repair,
Saying, “ The Duke will soon be there.”
Poor Guido went, dumb with despair.

THE SCULPTOR'S DREAM.

A Florentine Legend.

CANTO III.

NEXT day at early dawn the Duke
His solitary couch forsook,
And, with a gallant escort, took

His way to Guido's : he found there
The sculptor, sitting sad with care.
“ Where is your sister, Guido, where ? ”

“ I know not, sire,” he faltering said ;
“ When I returned I found her fled.
My gracious Prince, would I were dead ! ”

The rooms were searched both far and wide,
When suddenly the Duke espied
The marble figure of his bride ;

Then bursting into tears, he said,
“ How like the beauteous girl that's fled !
This must console me in her stead.”

Then straight commands his guards should bear
The statue to his palace, where
It should his own apartment share.

Never like this did Angelo,
Or Phidias, make the marble glow :
Never before was life mocked so.

The marble form is borne away,
They all depart : the sculptor lay
An instant more like senseless clay.

Within the Duke's own cabinet,
By his command the statue's set ;
Then stood he gazing long on it !

Then forth to council to dispel
The weight of grief that on him fell,—
Yet went to gaze ere midnight's bell.

He enters,—starts as though with pain ;
The statue's gone ! He turns again
To call his palace chamberlain :

When,—can it be the vision's whim ?
He sees the figure walk to him ;
He staggers with unsteady limb.

“ What sorcery is here ! ” he cries.
She answers with beseeching eyes,
Then to the next apartment flies.

He follows her. The midnight bell
Clangs through the palace at the knell :
The usual change to her befell.

The damsel into marble grown,
The wondering Duke was left alone
Once more with that cold shape of stone ;

Then fell to earth with sudden cry.
The courtiers hear the noise, draw nigh,
And marvel at the mystery.

Slowly the Duke revives. Amaze
Comes to them all at what he says ;
They deem his fevered fancy strays.

'Twas swiftly through all Florence spread,
The Duke was seized with madness dread :
And then 'twas whispered what he said.

The sculptor heard the tale, and flew
To the Duke's palace : he walks through
To where he can the image view.

He seized a ponderous battle-axe,
The shape with phrensied rage attacks,
And shivers it like fragile wax !

The effort woke him : 'twas a dream !
The morning's wonted glories beam
On Florence and her Arno's stream ;

And in his studio, strewed around,
In fragments is that statue found,
For which his fame was so renowned.

But in a vision that same night,
The statue came, a creature bright,
And spoke this comfort infinite.

“ Sculptor, rejoice! Thy Saint hath saved
Thy soul from being aye enslaved
By forms which thine own hand hath graved !

“ For what thy dreaming fancy thought,
Thou wouldst with waking powers have sought,
And thus thine own damnation wrought ! ”

FIORANTE.

• **A FLORENTINE LEGEND.**



FIORANTE;
OR, THE BRIDAL EVE.

IN Florence, that sweet gem of Italy,
Dwelt a young maiden past description fair;
Her figure tall and graceful, and her eye
Was bright and azure as the skies are there :
In short, her beauty was so wondrous rare,
She was a marvel to all passers by !

Her name was Fiorante,—rich and good :
The Count Rigondi was her lover ; he
(So it was rumoured in the neighbourhood)
Was on the brink of his felicity.
He truly loved her,—to idolatry,
And her fond ear to early marriage woo'd.

“Hast thou e’er loved, my Fiorante dear?”

“Am I not thine (said she) by every vow?”

“Hast thou e’er loved another?” and a fear

Stole on her as she answer’d,—“Not till now.”

He pressed his lips upon her blushing brow,
And clasped her to his heart more fond and near!

“I made a vow in early youth,” he said,

“And knit myself by every solemn oath,

That I would scorn to wed the fairest maid,

Had she been ever bound by lover’s troth;

And this resolve has strengthened with my growth.

Right blest am I that all my fear has fled!”

And then he kissed her fair and gem-wreathed brow,

Bidding adieu with many a lingering word.

The Lady Fiorante ne’er till now

Those accents sweet with so much sadness heard:

Those tones, whose music she to all preferred,

Fell on her ear like to a broken vow!

For though no passion in her heart had dwelt,
Yet she *had* listened to a lover's suit :
Long at her feet and lowly had he knelt,
Pleading with crafty looks and words astute ;
Now warmly loud—now eloquently mute,
Nor vainly—though no love the maiden felt.

And she had promised to become a bride,
And yielded up her troth—though not her heart :
And now Regondi just had left her side,
She felt 'twas wrong to let him thus depart,
Nor to his loving ear the truth impart.
But he was gone, and evil must betide !

There sat she in her sadness desolate,
Tearless, like one who cannot weep, although
One tear would loosen the whole burning weight
Which rests upon the heart a mountain woe !
At last the heaven-sent gift began to flow,
And as she wept, her agonies abate.

“ Oh ! would,” wept Fiorante, “ I had told
The Marquis Vianelli’s suit when I
Was but a child, scarce fifteen summers old !”
Just at this moment Guenda’s step was nigh :
“ Oh ! what,” said she, “ has made my lady cry ?”
For down the lady’s cheeks the tears still rolled.

“ Oh, Guenda ! I am lost, and past all grace.
I have done that which poisons every thought,
And makes me even in mine own eyes base !
Deliberate falsehood has this sorrow wrought.
Alas, how soon are shame and anguish brought !
Ah, woe is me to shame my noble race !”

Falsehood will drag a spirit from on high,
And plunge it lower than the meanest thing
That crawls on earth in sluggish apathy :
The loathsome toad,—the bat with filthy wing,—
The reptile with its sharp and venomous sting,
Is nobler than false man,—that scorner of the sky !

We live not, if we live not in the truth :

It is the light by which we look on heaven,—

It is the human soul's immortal youth,—

It is the breath of life by Jesus given,—

The deathless spell by which the fiend is driven
From human hearts to hell's own depths uncouth !

Some men outlive their glory, as a star

Outlives its light, which ever after strays

Blindly through heav'n, from its own orbit far,—

Giving no light, nor feeling other rays :

And thus the Marquis took to godless ways ;

Since had he been with all sweet thoughts at war.

High bred and desperate,—careless of all ties,—

A reckless liver on from hour to hour,—

Looking on life with irreligious eyes,

And prizing nothing but the wanton's bower !

To mend his waste he sought a wealthy dower,

And to the sire of Fiorante hies ;

And told the aged Count his feigning tale
Of fervent passion for his daughter dear :
How that his wasting cheek grew wan and pale,
And that his dying day was surely near,
If Fiorante scorned his suit to hear,—
A lying snare to work a maiden's bale!

The guileless father, waxing weak with years,
Believed the flattery of the glozing man,
And promised him support, while silly tears
Adown his aged cheeks in folly ran ;
Then to his daughter went, and straight began
To tell her all : she listens with sad ears !

For she had heard vague tales of his excess,
And that he little cared for holy men.
In sooth, his name did never widow bless,
He let no captive loose from gaoler's den ;
No gentle deed from him had origin,—
In short, he was more vile than I express.

But on his knees he swore amended life,
And bade her save him from his soul's despair.
"O lady dear!" quoth he, "wert thou my wife,
I should be virtuous, as thou art fair:
Thy gentle ways alone would be my care,
No longer with myself and all at strife.

"Therefore, if thou wouldst save a soul from sin,
And to sweet Virtue's path a heart restore,
Affect my suit, and henceforth I begin
A pious life, to wander never more:
And thou shalt be the Saint I will adore,
If thou from riot's grasp my soul will win!"

His earnest pleading touched her tender breast,
(For she was aye to tenderness inclined,)
Though to the Marquis boldly she confest,
"He was not altogether to her mind."
Still to her sire's command the maid resigned
Her better judgment, trusting to the best!

At this the Marquis fell before her feet
And kissed her hand, which timidly she gave;
While in a voice melodiously sweet
He swore to be her ever faithful slave,
From that sweet moment till he reached his grave,
Which 'neath her smile he would with rapture greet!

He was in truth a mighty hypocrite,
So perfect, that he oft himself perplexed;
And peradventure deemed his actions right,
E'en when to foulest error most annexed:
In short, his evil living had so vexed
His mind, he scarce distinguished black from white!

The lady Fiorante had a maid,
Who from her earliest childhood had been reared
Her living playmate in the sun and shade:
Her merry smile her gentle mistress cheered,
And now they both had nineteen summers neared,
Yet neither's lips ungentle words had said.

The simple Guenda fell beneath the art
Of Vianelli, and to virtue died.
The lordly scoundrel deemed her spotless heart
A wanton plaything for his lustful pride;
Her sweets once rifled, she was thrown aside,
Like a scorned weed within some crowded mart!

After a time, the lady's father died;
Whereon she told the Marquis, "He no more
Must think to gain her for his wedded bride,
But bade him to some loftier maiden soar."
He read his cold dismissal o'er and o'er,
And vowed to make her feel his injured pride.

Soon after this the Count Rigondi saw
Sweet Fiorante, and he straightway felt
That love was now his being's only law,
And at the lady's feet a suitor knelt;
While she, moved by his tale, began to melt.
True love from maiden heart will ever true love draw.

The ruined Marquis, reckless in despair,
Grew mad for gold to help his sore distress :
It was to him as needful as the air,
For he was driven by his wild excess
To the last ducat—mighty wretchedness !
To fill his purse was now his only care.

The drowner catches at a floating straw,
And so the Marquis : when poor Guenda told
Rigondi's whim, at once the villain saw
Opening before his eyes a mine of gold.
Little poor Guenda thought that she had sold
Her gentle mistress to a vampire's law !

The Marquis bade forthwith his victim hie
To Fiorante with these words :—" I can
Wrestle no longer with adversity ;
I am a ruined and a desperate man !
Therefore you must not every action scan
With the keen glance of cold propriety.

“ I must have gold. Lady, your purse is deep :

A thousand ducats scarce can make it less.

Send them to me before these eyelids sleep,

Else you shall share my soul's dark loneliness.

I will at once my secret power express,—

Rigondi knows not of our love : now weep.”

Upon her knees the simple maiden fell,

And begged her cold seducer spare this task.

“ Guenda,” said he, “ I'm girt around with hell,

Else, think you, I had deigned this boon to ask ?

I, who have drained the very costliest flask,

And stood on Fortune's giddiest pinnacle ?

“ Pause, and I tell your lady all your shame,

Traitress to honour !” With a sigh she rose,

And to her gentle mistress told the same.

As one who staggers at onrushing woes,

The lady to her purse in silence goes,

And sends the ducats. Ah, bewildered dame !

'Tis sad to tell how oft he came again,
Until the lady had no more to send.
Now when he found, at last, his threats all vain,
And that its golden treasure neared its end,
To other ways his wit began to bend,
And this became the counsel of his brain :

The Count Rigondi, ere his bridal day,
To his affianced gave a glittering band
Of diamonds, flashing like a star's bright ray.
This precious gift did the base wretch demand ;
But upon this the lady took her stand,
And, like a hunted creature, turned at bay.

The Marquis sought Rigondi,—seized his hand,
And with dire malice of the Count inquired
If he in Matrimony's holy band
Sought Fiorante? The young lover fired
At this demand, and speedily desired
That he would speak what he could understand.

“ Doubtless she told you I have earlier claims
Upon her hand. But I will these resign,
If you prefer her to all other dames ;
Only I'd have you know she has been mine.
When young you've heard I did to love incline,
And she was one of my deserted flames !

“ I thought it nothing but a friendly deed
To let you know I might perchance renew
My suit to her, when from some troubles freed
Which press upon me now. So now adieu,
Dear Count ! what I have told you is quite true,
For slander is a stranger to my creed !”

The Count in anger drew his sword, and cried
“ Unmeasur'd liar ! ” — “ Nay,” the Marquis said,
“ I wear a sword, too, hanging at my side,
And therefore be the blood upon your head !
What ! thank me thus ? I'd better seen you led
A doting husband by a guilty bride !

“ I have no object, save a lofty scorn
Of woman's deep deceit. Nay, sir, prepare :
We all must die, since we have all been born,
And I am not the man for death to care.
I cannot fight for one I think more fair :
She was my rose, I would spare you the thorn !

“ Methinks it had been wiser on your part
To make inquiry. What I say is truth !
Now, Count, guard well the passes to your heart :
I feel your worth ; you are a valiant youth,
And have been made her victim. In good sooth,
You're not the first to feel young Cupid's dart !

“ You're young ; so listen to an older man,—
Perchance a wiser. I mean you no ill ;
But the thought somewhat in my fancy ran,
That you had shaped out in your youthful will
Never to wed, not e'en the fairest, till
You'd met a heart whose love with you began.

“ So let us have a quiet wager laid.

I undertake this virtuous one will meet,
Even without the escort of her maid,
Me at lone midnight in the common street.

I pledge a thousand ducats on this feat !
You pause, I see ! Ah, well : you are afraid ! ”

“ Nay,” cried Rigondi, “ I will peril all !

Mark me ! But I refrain from angry breath ;
I am prepared by this to stand or fall,—
You’ll answer for this to the very death !
The sky to-night,” the fiery lover saith,
“ O’er one of us shall spread its solemn pall ! ”

Forth from Rigondi, Vianelli sent

His page to summon Guenda to his aid.
She came, and he most gentle blandishment
And artful tale of feigned concern displayed.
“ No more shall Fiorante me upbraid,”
Said he ; “ I go to utter banishment !

“ For I am tired and weary of my life,
And have resolved to wander far away
From these old scenes of happiness and strife.
But ere I go, I have some words to say
To one whom I have loved in happier day,
And whom I fondly hoped to call my wife.

“ But that is past,—the idle dream is o’er !
I have her miniature : some letters, too :
To her own hand I will restore
These sweet memorials of my passion true.
For these, her willing gifts, I crave in lieu
Two hundred ducats,—neither less nor more.

“ Bid her then meet me, when the bell tolls eight,
Beneath the shadow of San Marco’s pile.
If she refuse me, let her dread my hate,
And bid adieu to her Rigondi’s smile ;
For I will then expose her lying guile,
And to his ears our former loves relate :

“ The portrait and the letters will confirm
My tale, and render her denial vain.
Then he will hate her as a poisonous worm,
Casting her from him as a blight and stain
Upon his honour. Let her not disdain
The words I send,—else of her woe the germ !

“ But if she come, I quit this town for ever.
No fear of me shall dim her future years,
And none Rigondi from her side shall sever ;
While I, an outcast and a thing of tears,
For her sake undergo taunts, scorns, and jeers,
And leave my native Italy for ever !

“ She need not even thank me !—she may be
Haughty and silent ; but I deeply swore,
In the first day of my adversity,
That to her hand alone would I restore
The gifts of one that I shall see no more,
Save in my dreams of midnight phantasy.”

'Twere vain to tell the sorrow and dismay
Of Fiorante when this message came,—
Upon the eve, too, of her bridal day.

First pride and anger fired the woman's frame,
And roused within her eye th' indignant flame :
Then fear arose, and scared her rage away.

Musing she stood, while Guenda counselled so :—

“ Gain but the portrait and the letters, then
You can defy the malice of your foe,
And scorn the very wickedest of men.
The Count Rigondi cometh not till ten,
And in your favour doth the current flow.

“ Wrapt in my cloak, no human eye can see
Your meeting. You regain your gifts, return
To a long life of pure felicity :
For you the torch of Hymen then will burn.
Dear lady, do not in your anger spurn
The counsel of your maid's fidelity !”

Then Fiorante, bursting from the cloud
Of her thick doubt, said with a fluttering breath,
“ Oh ! would that I were lying in my shroud,
A pallid dweller in the arms of death !
O happier far than now, with bridal wreath
Bound on my brow with gladsome music loud ! ”

Then sitting down, she said, “ She would not trust
The heartless Vianelli ; she would dare
The very worst, and be to honour just.
She had at last a refuge in despair,
And if the worst should come, the grave she'd dare,
Rather than do what he had said she must. ”

We leave the lady to her gloomy thought,
And to Rigondi and his tempter go.
True to the moment, Vianelli sought
The Count ; and when the golden sun was low,
And the bright moon began with light to glow,
The doubting lover to the spot was brought.

Beneath the shadow of San Marco's pile
Rigondi stood, with fallen heart and cold ;
The Marquis paced beneath the moon's bright smile,
Reckless through hate, and in despair made bold.
Upon their ears the eight-hour bell now tolled,
The traitor humming gaily all the while.

Was that a footstep? No ! An anxious pause.
"She will not come," the Count in rapture thought,
And half his glist'ning weapon he undraws ;
When, lo ! his ear a distant echo caught,
Which o'er his limbs an icy anguish brought :
A veiled figure comes!—Oh, fallen ! fallen cause !

'Twas she!—the Lady Fiorante ! There
She stood some moments ere her speech she found.
"Here are two hundred ducats !" In despair
The Count stood rooted to the silent ground,
Drinking like poison every fatal sound,
Which seemed to give grim horror to the air.

“ The portrait and the letters here behold,”
Said Vianelli, in a quiet tone ;
“ But ere I give them, I must make me bold
To have a kiss : we here are quite alone.”
His arm around her panting waist is thrown :
“ Hence,” she exclaims, “ thou fiend in human
mould ! ”

Forth rushed the Count, his weapon flashing bright :
“ A trick ! a trick !—I see the villain’s plan ! ”
While Fiorante, speechless through affright,
Retired in haste behind the perjured man,
At whom Rigondi madly, fiercely ran,
And both stood full revealed in the moon’s light !

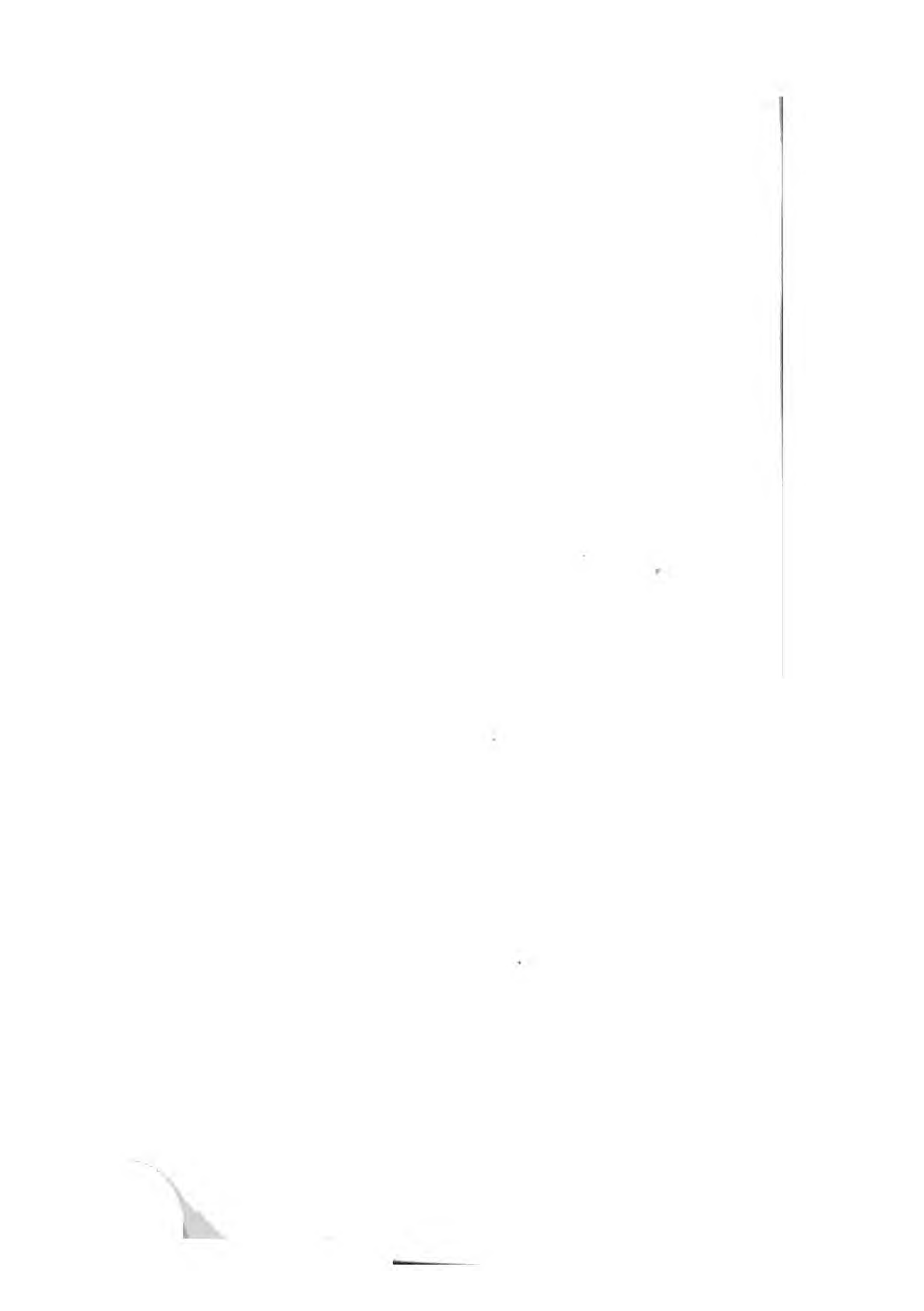
Rigondi struck the Marquis with his sword,
Saying, “ Here, villain ! one of us must die ! ”
The other drew his blade without a word,
And measuring his opponent with his eye,
Took up his ground with great complacency :
And now the weapon’s clash alone was heard.

As one new waking from a dream, she grasped
The arm of Vianelli. “ Turn on me
Thy murderous sword ! ” Fiorante wildly gasped.
“ Woman, away—you’ll bear me down ! ” cried he :
Then, gathering up his energy, he unclasped
Her hand, and threw her from him heavily.

Rigondi, starting backward, slipped and went
Upon his knee : the Marquis closer prest,
And sweeping round his sword, as down he bent
To strike Rigondi’s unprotected crest,
The lady rushed between, and in her breast
Received the point,—murmuring, “ I die content !

At the same instant Vianelli fell,
Pierced by Rigondi to the heart. He cries,
“ May darkness drag the woman’s soul to hell ! ”
And with this curse upon his lips he dies.
Dead in the moonlight the slain villain lies,
The warm blood oozing from its broken cell !

Rigondi knelt at Fiorante's side,
Who told him all her story word by word ;
With her last breath the Saints are glorified,
That she had saved her lover from the sword
Of the base traitor, whom her soul abhorred :
And pressing the Count's hand, fair Fiorante died.



THE PRAYER OF EDITH;

OR,

THE STUDENT OF PADUA.



THE PRAYER OF EDITH.



I.

IN her prayers one eventide,
Edith prayed to be a bride.

“ ’Tis sad,” said she, “ to waste away
Beneath the shadow of decay :

“ To reach the heights of womanhood
In a cheerless solitude,

“ And descend mid gathering gloom
To the unregarded tomb :

“ Oh! ’tis holier far to share
Life’s mystery of joy and care.”

Yet to Edith knights of fame
With their vows of fealty came.

But she looked with careless eye
On their suit and courtesy ;

Gently bade them all depart,
Nor disturb her quiet heart.

II.

'Twas just before the gorgeous night
Fed her new-born throngs with light,

As Edith in her leafy bower
Mused away the twilight hour ;

When, issuing from a wood close by,
A youthful stranger met her eye.

As he drew towards her, she
Marked his matchless symmetry.

His years seemed twenty, more or less,
He wore a student's peaceful dress ;

His eyes were blue, with gentle shine,
His features almost feminine ;

Yet there beamed a steady mind,—
The heights of force and grace combined.

He nearer drew, and when he spoke,
At once her heart its silence broke ;

Yet mutely answered, for it seemed
That she had found the thing she dreamed.

Within her, at each silver word,
The chords of all her spirit stirred,

As though a hand without intent
Had touched a tuneful instrument.

As a monarch fills a throne,
He filled Edith's heart alone.

Never till that time had she
Felt a pure felicity.

III.

Sooth to say, the youth became
A favourite with her sire and dame:

Their old eyes with pleasure swim,
When they see her walk with him.

Soon he claims her as his bride:
They bestow consent with pride.

Words are vain to tell the height
And the depth of their delight:

Ne'er was home so blest as theirs,
So full of raptures, full of prayers.

In course of time, at one glad birth,
Two sweet infants smile on earth,

Little children, very bright,
Full of unrevealed delight !

Fast they grew in bloom and grace,
Meek in nature, fair in face.

Sometimes Edith sighs with joy,
Gazing on her girl and boy ;

Then, as with a sudden start,
Folds them closer to her heart.

IV.

What a life is Edith's now !
Joy in heart, and joy on brow ;

Happier far than maid or bride,
With the loved ones by her side.

When the golden day was born,
Forth they rose to greet the morn ;

First they bent the knee to God,
Then the breezy fields they trod ;

While the starry lark on high,
(Near and nearer to the sky,)
Carolled most triumphantly.

And when weary, they would rest
Their limbs upon the green earth's breast,

'Neath a leafy canopy,
Which shades the sun, yet shows the sky :

For through the foliage they could see
Heaven, with its vast tranquillity.

v.

How soon the sands of life are run !
Edith's happy life is done !

Time, the sure, the stern, must bring
An end to every happy thing.

O'er her children five short years
Fleet with all their smiles and tears,

When they watch her dying head,
Both on this side of the bed ;

While upon the other stands
One who clasps his wife's pale hands :

She looks on them through a tear,
Which heralds in a brighter sphere.

Then said those gentle lips, (o'er whom
Hovered the angel of the tomb,)

" Bow down and kiss me, darlings three."
They bowed and kissed her tenderly.

Her face was lit up, as though heaven
In one delicious thought was given.

Then sinking, like the light that lies
Couched in evening clouds, she dies !

VI.

When the breezy morning came,
Edith lay a cold pale frame ;

With the calm and marble lips,
Eyes deep set in death's eclipse ;

And that face, so deathly fair,
Earth's last, and heaven's first, smile doth wear.

But no husband there was found,
No sweet children weeping round :

The attendants, in despair,
Search th' apartment every where.

Search was vain :—they sat around,
And in tears a solace found :

All their wonderment confest,—
They, at length, lie down to rest.

VII.

Clara, Edith's maiden mild,
Who had loved her from a child,

Could not sleep, but rose to pray
Long before the dawn of day.

"Mary!" said this maiden mild,
"Holy Virgin, Holy child!

"Holy Jesu! I shall die
'Neath this cloud of mystery."

Longer had the maiden prayed,
But her pious words were stayed

By a music low and dim,
Like a distant funeral hymn,

Which, ere you can turn and say
"Listen now," has died away :

She, in wonder and dismay,
Crossed herself and ceased to pray.

Then the music came again
In a louder, clearer strain,

As when a door is opened wide,
The music comes in fuller tide.

To herself then Clara said,
“ 'Tis from the chamber of the dead ! ”

VIII.

Solemnly the maiden rose ;
Louder now the music grows.

Gently she unhasped the door,—
Gently paced the corridor,—
Till, at length, she stood before

The chamber where the lady lay,
'Neath the shadow of decay.

Softly speak and lightly tread,
“ ’Tis the chamber of the dead ! ”

The portal’s past ! What sees she there ?
Four bright angels very fair :

All familiar faces wear,
Freed from earth’s bedimming care.

A rapture inexpressible
On the faithful Clara fell.

Rapt she gaz’d as in a trance,
Till, from one bright countenance,

Thoughts there came, not heard, yet read,
And the angels’ looking said,—

“ Jesu Christ, who dwells above,
Is the only God of love ;

“ And through seraph-songs he hears
The voice of prayer, and sound of tears.

“ Therefore, when fair Edith prayed
For a lover, Jesu said

“ To one of his seraphic band,
That around him ever stand,

“ ‘ Take a mortal shape, and bless
That maiden with thy tenderness.’

“ Straight he took the scholar’s guise,
And stood before fair Edith’s eyes ;

“ Her babes, also, were angels sent,
To fulfil her soul’s content ;

“ And just as Edith died, were seen
By her in their angelic mien.

“ Then she knew, at one full thought,
Who her happy life had wrought,

“ And felt she was an angel’s bride,—
With that glimpse of heaven she died.”

IX.

Sleep, like dew, on Clara fell :
Through the night she slumbered well,

And morning with its glory broke
Upon the world ere she awoke.

She rose, and saw her lady's face
Garbed with death's angelic grace ;

Sweetly fell the fresh-born day
On the calmness of that clay :

Looking on it, one might deem
She was smiling in a dream.

Clara paused an instant there,
Gazing on that brow so fair ;

Crossed herself, and sighing said,
(As she turned aside her head,)

“ Little can we tell who share
Our household hearth of joy and care !

“ Therefore with grave tenderness
Should we strive to cheer and bless

“ All who live this little life,—
Husband, children, sire, or wife,

“ Lest we wrong some seraph here,
Who has left the starry sphere,

“ Exiled from the heavens above,
To fulfil a mortal love.”

Clara, with no sigh, departed
From that chamber saintly hearted.

JOVINIAN THE PROUD.

A LEGEND OF ROME.

JOVINIAN THE PROUD.

A Legend of Rome.



I.

WHEN great imperial Rome in days of yore
Ruled all the world, Jovinian the Proud
Was of that sov'reign state the Emperor.
The poets and the sages sang aloud
His wisdom, and the vassal nations bowed :
In his vain heart he felt himself to be
With more than mortal intellect endowed ;
Till by degrees from fear of sorrow free,
He said within himself, "I am a Deity !"

II.

One morning, in his arrogance of mood,
He straight commands his choicest chivalry
To hunt the deer within a neighbouring wood.
The chase was long, the burning sun was high,
And not a cloud hung in the azure sky.
Wearied and faint, the Emperor espied
A crystal stream of quiet privacy ;
He therefore cast his purple robes aside,
And gaily plunged into the river's pleasant tide.

III.

But while he bathed in this refreshing place,
A person, unperceived by him, drew nigh
So like the Emperor in form and face,
He might have well deceived the keenest eye.
Clothing himself in robes of royalty,
He leapt upon Jovinian's horse, and rode
To meet the courtiers, who stood close by
Beneath some trees, near which the river flowed :
Then all spur onward to the Emperor's abode.

IV.

At length Jovinian from the river sprang,
And looked around for horse and robes in vain;
With his loud cries the echoing forests rang,
Till he grew nearly mad with rage and pain!
And then he paused, and now he called again.
After a time, the Emperor groaning cried,
(His bosom raging with his fierce disdain,)
“How dare such wretchedness to me betide!
Oh, whither shall I fly my nakedness to hide!

V.

“Who will receive me in this wretched plight?
Ah, I remember! Not far hence there dwells
One I’ve advanced to wealth, a faithful knight:
So I will seek him, and my heart foretells
He will rejoice to aid me.” Thus he quells
His present rage, resolving before long
To wreak his vengeance, while his proud heart
 swells
When pondering on the insult and the wrong
He had sustained that morn: this made the mo-
narch strong!

VI.

Naked,—ashamed, Jovinian sought the gate
Of the knight's castle, and knocked loudly there:
The idle porter made the Emperor wait,
And then called out with listless, lazy air,
“What dost thou seek? I marvel that you dare
Batter so loudly!”—“Open, sirrah!” cried
The angry monarch, almost in despair.
“Who art thou, fellow?” carelessly replied
The man, and then he deigned to look at him outside.

VII.

“Go, fellow, tell your master,” fiercely said
Jovinian, “that his Emperor is here.
Bid him command that straightway there be led
A horse, and robes to wear: for bathing near,
Some villain stole mine,—let the felon fear!”
“Rascal!” rejoined the porter, “thou art mad,
Or else a robber! But you will pay dear
For insolence like this: we'll have you clad
In heavy chains, or stripes, if any can be had.”

VIII.

Enraged the warden went, and told the knight
A naked fellow stood without his gate,
Saying he was the Emperor. Outright
Laughed his proud lord, and bade his servant
straight
Drag the poor wretch before him, there to wait
His pleasure. Soon the Emperor was brought
Before his vassal ; who, in wrath elate,
Demanded why he had such folly wrought ?
“ Doubtless the man’s a knave, or else with woe
distraught !

IX.

“ Give him a tattered cloak.” With rage and scorn
Jovinian cries, “ Thy Emperor am I,—
Thy benefactor ; but another morn
Shall not arise to gild the eastern sky,
Ere I will see thee, treacherous vassal, die,—
Thee and thy household !”—“ Wretch !” the knight
replied,
“ Now I will punish thy deep villany.
Guards ! flog this fellow to the river side ;
Give him a tattered cloak, but do not spare his hide !”

X.

E'en as the knight commanded, it was done.

Exhausted with the scourging, he fell down
Half dead beneath the bright day's scorching sun.

Little cared he for sceptre or for crown :

He would have given for ease his richest town !
Then cried he loudly, in his soul's despair,

“ Oh, God of heaven ! is my bounty thrown
Away on such an ingrate ? But I swear
That hungry beasts of prey his wretched limbs shall
tear !

XI.

“ Come ; let me seek the Duke, my counsellor .

He will receive and know his sovereign.”

So with these thoughts the wearied Emperor

Slowly arose, and, groaning with his pain,

Dragged his weak footsteps o'er the sultry plain.

At length before the Duke's abode he stood ;

And when the porter came, he said again,—

“ I am Jovinian. Bathing in the wood,
Some villain stole my robes : haste, bring me clothes
and food !

XII.

“ And tell your Duke the Emperor is here.”

When the Duke heard the message, he replied,

“ The man is a poor maniac, I fear :

But bring him in ; I will his wants provide.”

The man returned,—the Emperor at his side :

The Duke looked at him, but he knew him not.

When in an angry voice Jovinian cried,

“ What ! I, thy sovereign, so soon forgot !”

“ Poor fellow !” quoth the Duke, “ he’s very mad,
I wot.”

XIII.

“ I have this instant from the palace come,

And left the Emperor in his cabinet.”

Bewildered sore, Jovinian stood dumb.

“ Poor madman !” said the Duke. “ Go, varlet, set

Water and bread before him : ’tis a debt

We owe the poor and wretched. Also see

That no unnecessary violence fret

The silly fellow : he will doubtless be

To-morrow somewhat better. Poor man ! I pity
thee.”

XIV.

They fed Jovinian on his humble fare,
And next day let him wander on his road.
'Twas morning, and the heavens were clear and bare,
And with a golden light the blue skies glowed,
Bright in their freshness the broad rivers flowed ;
The birds sang out in all their mirthful glee,
And bright-faced Nature smiled a blest abode :
But little did the wretched Emperor see
The day's glad face, for he was steeped in misery.

XV.

Then moaned he in his bitterness of soul,
"Alas ! what shall I do, and whither go ?
(While down his cheeks the bitter tears fast roll).
Was ever mortal man so full of woe ?
I will e'en seek the Empress ; she will know
Her lord, if all deny me !" Then he went
Upon his path, till soon his turrets glow
In the moon's light : his heart resumed content,
"For surely here," he cried, "my happy days were
spent !"

XVI.

“ Who art thou ? ” said his warden. “ Who am I ?

Thou ought’st to know me,” said Jovinian,

“ For fifteen years you’ve been my servant ! ”

“ Why,”

Returned the porter, “ you are dreaming, man,

Else drunk, or mad ! I’ll teach you, if I can,

Some manners, ere you leave the palace gate.”

At these rude insults, the tears quickly ran

Adown the Emperor’s face. “ O wretched fate !

What have I done, ye gods ! to be thus desolate ? ”

XVII.

Then, in a softened voice, he said again

To the rude menial, “ Seek the Empress, friend,

And, by her snowy breast and its moles twain,

Tell her forthwith a royal robe to send.

I am the Emperor ! ” — “ The gods defend

Thee for a fool ! ” the fellow rudely joined.

But I will do thy bidding, and then mend

Thy manners afterwards ; for you will find

A scourging, doubtless, give a sounder mind.”

XVIII.

Now when the Empress heard the message, she
Looked sore dismayed. Then to her husband
turned,
And said, " My lord, a fellow biddeth me,
By secret signs by only you discerned,
And which I know not how he can have learned,
Send him the royal robes to clothe each limb ;
And also more, (and here her bosom burned
With rage,) that I as King should welcome him !
Is it an insult, sire, or else a madman's whim ? "

XIX.

When the fictitious Emperor heard this,
He bade his guards bring in the man who dared
Assume the royal name,—so justly his.
Changed was Jovinian, so that she who shared
His heart and throne, with whom he had been
paired
In his life's manhood, when the soul is young,
Knew not her husband ! The proud nobles stared,
And the great wolf-hound at his master sprung,
Growling and snarling with white foaming tongue.

XX.

“Nobles and friends,” the false one cried aloud,
“Now hear me what I’ll ask of this poor man:
Who art thou, and thy business?” The proud
Soul of the Emperor Jovinian,
Through all his veins in furious vengeance ran;
But curbing for a moment his disdain,
After a struggling effort he began:
“I am thy Emperor,—returned again
To re-assume the power and glory of my reign!”

XXI.

“Our nobles shall that weighty point decide.
Which is your Emperor,—this man or I?”
The nobles round him with one voice replied,
“Surely thou triflest with thy royalty.
Thou art our Emperor we plainly see.”
Then to the Empress the usurper said,
“On thy true faith, my honoured wife, reply:
Which of us twain was to thy body wed?
And which of us, sweet queen, has shared thy regal
bed?”

XXII.

Then spake the Empress : “ Oh ! my honoured
lord,

Have not full thirty years of pleasure past,
Since in God’s sight I pledged to thee my word ?
I would to Heaven this happy life could last !
But ah, the years of pleasure fly so fast !
Why try your faithful wife with such a test ?
And yet, I own, I felt my heart aghast,
To think a common vagabond confest
Should know a secret sign sacred to thy breast.”

XXIII.

Then fiercely turned the proud usurper round
To sad Jovinian, and rebuked his pride ;
Adding,—“ What, sirrah ! can no name be found
Than the Imperial one thy rags to hide ?
“ But, impostor, I’ll not be thus defied !”
And so he ordered that four horses should
Drag him about the city till he died.
The wretched Emperor in his anguish stood,
And bless’d the tyrant thus to shed his blood !

XXIV.

But privately the false one sent command,
That they should scourge the prisoner, and then
Turn him half-naked on the barren land
Without a meal,—the wretchedest of men !
With prudent caution, that if found again
Assuming dignities bestowed by God,
All intercession would be made in vain ;
For he should die beneath the lictor's rod,
And his maimed corpse sleep 'neath the felon's sod.

XXV.

Then loudly prayed Jovinian for death.
“ Why should I live ? ” cried he, with tears and
sighs,
“ Since friends who thriv'd upon my bounty's breath,
Nay e'en my wife, her faithful lord denies !
Ye gods ! who pity sorrow, close mine eyes,
Or my own hand my wretchedness shall end !
But ere I fall beneath my miseries,
I will at once to the good Father wend,
The holy anchorite, and to God my soul commend.”

XXVI.

Amid the quiet of a forest dim,
In a small cell this pious priest he found ;
Far off he heard him sing his vesper hymn,
Which till that hour he thought did never sound
So full of ghostly solace. To the ground
The humbled monarch fell, and on his knees
The many sorrows of his heart unbound.
While praying thus, his many sins he sees :
Oh, prayer ! thou holiest—sweetest of all mys-
teries !

XXVII.

Is it that we in holy thought ascend
To the Great Presence, where all hearts are bare ?
Or does some angel from God's throne descend,
And bring heaven to us in the soul's true prayer ?
So that in such high mood our spirits share
The Light Effulgent, bending to that shrine
Whose glory the Archangels do not dare
To look on ; but with eyes that low decline,
Shaded by their bright wings, adore the wondrous
Trine !

XXVIII.

Like him of old who bathed in Jordan's flood,
After fierce struggles with his pagan pride,
But who at last upon the stream's bank stood,
Cleansed by the virtue of that sacred tide;
So rose the haughty monarch, purified
From the foul leprosy of proud conceit
Of heart, which almost had his God defied !
Now with a chastened soul and trembling feet
He went, and humbly knocked at the good priest's
retreat.

XXIX.

"Who art thou, son?" inquired the holy man,
"That com'st at this unseasonable hour?"
The Emperor said, "I am Jovinian,
Scorned now by all who once adored my power!"
At this the worthy priest unhasped his door;
But when he gazed upon the wretched king,
Clothed in old rags,—the meanest of the poor,
"What! thou our monarch?" cried he, shuddering.
"Thou'rt the foul fiend himself. Depart, thou
cursed thing!"

XXX.

Jovinian said, " Good Father, do not turn
Away from me,—a contrite sinner now :
For, taught by gracious Heaven, I can discern
How poor the crown that decks the monarch's
brow,
If 'neath the purple a proud spirit glow.
Changed am I from that vain imperious man,
Who ruled the world regardless of its woe !
(And while the tears adown his visage ran)
No Emperor now am I,—the sinner Jovinian !"

XXXI.

Then suddenly he recognised the sound
Of his lord's voice, and knew his face again ;
And forthwith kneeling to him on the ground,—
" Why in this tattered garb, dread sovereign ? "
" Father, good Father, pity my soul's pain,
And hear me all my grievous sins confess.
I, who erewhile held all men in disdain,
Now deeply feel my own unworthiness ;
And I, who have been blest, now only live to bless."

XXXII.

And when Jovinian told the priest his tale,
They went forthwith unto the palace gate.
The menial, when he saw his lord, turned pale,
Opened the palace portal, and fell straight
Upon his knee, the royal will to wait.
The monarch, passing through, then sought the hall,
Where many of his chiefest nobles sate ;
At once before their honoured king they fall,
And said, “ Oh, welcome home, thou sov'reign lord
of all ! ”

XXXIII.

High on his throne, bright starred with many a gem,
Sat the usurper with the Empress there,—
Upon each brow a glittering diadem !
The lady's face, so beautifully fair,
Grew clouded over with a sudden care,
When she beheld who stood before her throne :
But the usurper, with imperious air,
Cried to the nobles round in angry tone,
“ Ye nobles, judge us now ! Which of us do ye
own ? ”

XXXIV.

The Empress cried aloud, "Let me, as bound
By wedded faith, speak first. I cannot say,
So much do your twin likenesses confound
My judgment, which of ye I should obey!"
And all the nobles answer in like way.
Then rose the feigned Jovinian, and said,
"He is your Emperor: that man obey!"
And taking the bright crown from off his head,
He to them all this wholesome lesson read:

XXXV.

"Nobles! behold how God hath punished pride
In your own Emperor's person. He began
In his vain heart to be self-glorified,
Forgetting that he was a sinful man.
Thus proudly on his regal course he ran,
Not caring for the poor, for whom Christ died!
But in God's eye, the king Jovinian
Stands by the wretched beggar, side by side,
For neither robes nor rags your wickedness can
hide.

XXXVI.

“ Therefore, ye merchants, swoln with pride and
gold,

Which ye prefer to gifts of heart and brain,
Mourn your extortions, great and manifold !
And high-born nobles, arrogant and vain,
Repent ye also, lest in their disdain

The nations rise, and bring ye to the dust,—

E’en as God humbled your proud sovereign !
For he, weak worm, in riches put his trust,
And woke the wrath of God, the gentle, yet the just.

XXXVII.

“ But, verily, he hath been punished now :

Indignity, calamity, and scorn
Have been his portion ; his imperial brow

The pressure of that iron crown hath borne,
Which has so oft the gentle hearted torn,
Till they have perished in their soul’s despair ;

Forgetting that the God of heaven hath worn
That diadem of sorrow,—privilege rare,
That what Christ bore for us, we for his sake should
bear.

XXXVIII.

“ Receive Jovinian, therefore, as your lord.

He hath repented : the dark cloud of wrong,
In which the tempest of God's vengeance roared,
Has past away, and he again is strong !

He hath made satisfaction, and ere long
He will rejoice in this great chastisement ;

For, as ye all can read in sacred song,
The prosperous have no leisure to repent ;
But whom God loves, are oft by shame and suffering
bent !”

XXXIX.

While thus he spake his brow became divine,
And wore a circle of celestial light ;

The royal robes, on which the diamonds shine,
Fall from him, and he stands in raiment white,
Confessed to all an angel pure and bright.

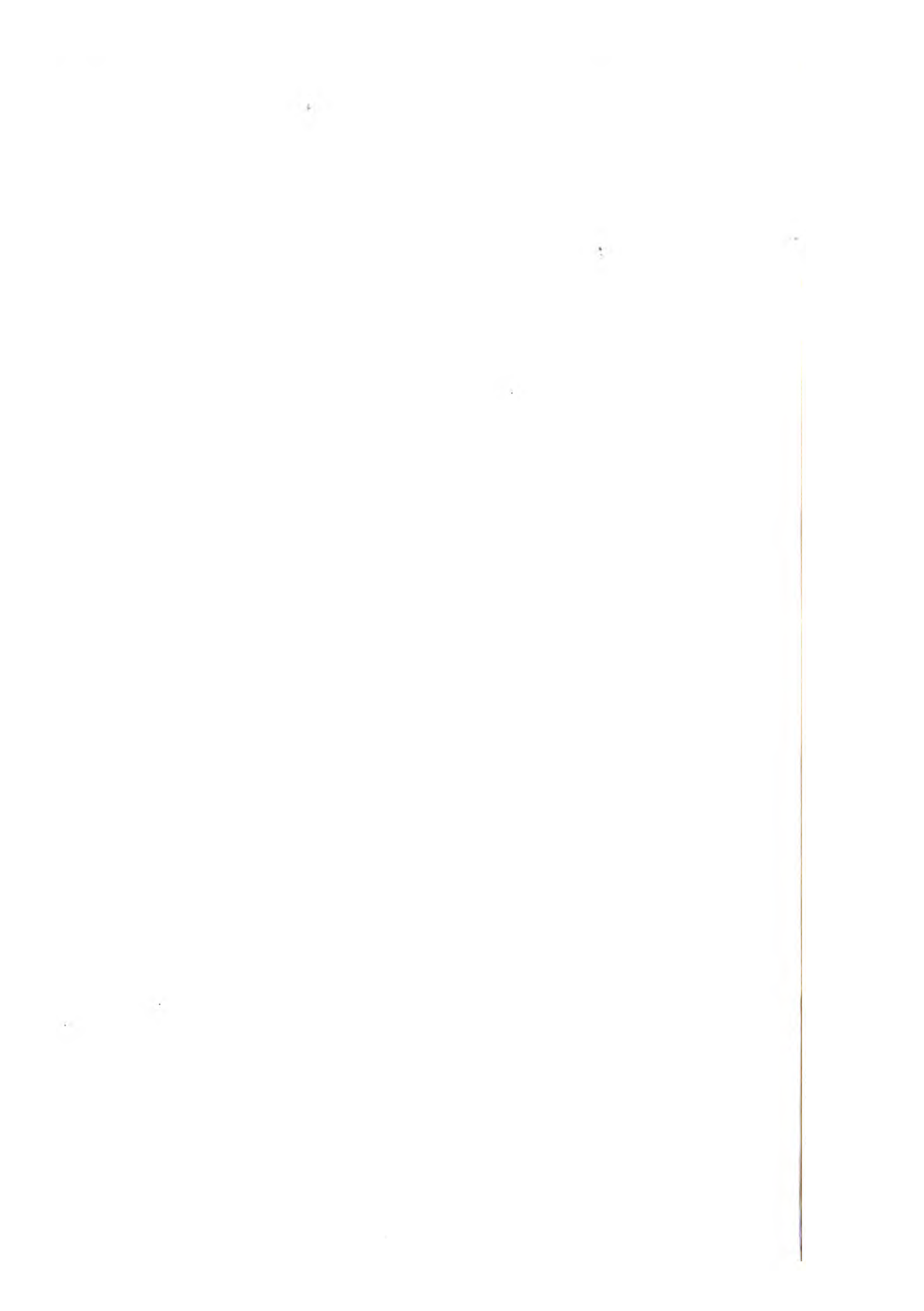
And as they bow their heads in reverent guise,
He bless'd them all, and vanish'd from their sight,
While from invisible harps there slowly rise
The sound of seraph choirs, which into silence dies !

XL.

Need I say more ? The humbled monarch reigned
With so much mercy, that his people blest
The change, and ever afterwards remained
In peace with all. And when the hour of rest
(The grave's great calm!) came sweetly to his
breast,
He heard the flutter of an angel's wing,
And saw before him stand that shape confest,
Whose lips a gentle hymn of comfort sing,—
He smiling died, and all his people mourned their
king !

THE END.

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